

# Child/Adolescent Counseling Pathway FAQs

## 1. What questions should I ask when choosing a counselor for my child/adolescent?

A good counselor should welcome thoughtful questions. If they become defensive or dismissive, that may be a concern.

Parents might ask:

### About qualifications

- What licenses or certifications do you hold?
- What percentage of your practice is with children or adolescents?
- What experience do you have with trauma, anxiety, depression, grief, attachment, or behavioral concerns (as applicable)?
- Do you use evidence-based treatments? Which ones?
- How do you determine whether counseling is working?

### About missionary families

- Have you worked with missionary or cross-cultural families?
- How do you understand Third Culture Kids (TCKs)?
- How do you address repeated transitions, grief, cultural adjustment, and identity development?

A counselor doesn't have to specialize in missionary families, but they should be curious, humble, and willing to learn about the family's context.

### About gender and sexual orientation matters

- How do you handle it when a child or adolescent broaches LGBTQ issues?

A skilled counselor, even a Christian one, will clarify that the counseling room is a place where children and adolescents can express the full range of feelings, thoughts, and beliefs without being shamed for them. This does not mean affirming every conclusion a child reaches; it means acknowledging their experience and helping them process it in healthy ways. It would be a red flag if the counselor indicated they practice LGBTQ+ Affirmative Therapy. In this therapeutic approach, the clinician actively supports, validates, and accepts a client's sexual orientation and gender identity as natural and healthy expressions of who they are.

### About parent involvement

- How often do you meet with parents?
- What information do you routinely share?
- What remains confidential?
- How do you involve parents in treatment?
- Under what circumstances would you break confidentiality?

A healthy answer should communicate both respect for the child's privacy and meaningful parental involvement.

## **2. Should parents be in the room?**

It depends on the child's age and the reason for counseling.

### **Young children (roughly ages 3-7):**

Parents may participate in all or part of sessions, especially in parent-child counseling or play therapy.

### **Elementary-aged children:**

Many counselors begin with the parent, spend time alone with the child, then finish with everyone together.

### **Adolescents:**

They generally need some private time with the counselor to develop trust.

Parents should not expect to remain in every session. At the same time, counselors should not exclude parents entirely unless there is a compelling clinical reason.

A healthy pattern is:

- Parent check-in
- Individual session
- Brief parent debrief

Different counselors may have different ways of involving parents. Talk this through with the counselor, letting them know your preferences and hearing out the reasons why they involve parents the way that they do.

## **3. What information should parents receive from counselors?**

Parents are entitled to understand the overall treatment process.

They should generally receive information such as:

- Therapy goals
- Skills being taught
- Progress toward goals
- General emotional themes
- Recommendations for home
- Whether risk concerns exist

Parents should **not** expect a transcript of every conversation. Children and adolescents often need confidence that every statement won't immediately be reported. Otherwise, they will not

trust the counselor or engage deeply in the therapy process.

#### **4. Should the therapy door stay open or closed?**

Generally, closed. A closed door provides privacy, reduced distractions, and a greater sense of safety. However:

- Offices should have windows in the door or observation windows where appropriate.
- Clinics should have clear safeguarding policies.
- Parents should know where the session is taking place.
- Staff should be nearby.

A counselor who insists on complete secrecy or isolated settings outside normal professional safeguards would warrant further questions.

#### **5. How much should parents ask afterwards?**

Many parents unintentionally make counseling feel like an interrogation. Instead of asking, "What did you talk about?" try to communicate "You don't have to tell me everything. Counseling is your time and your space. But I'd always love to hear anything you'd like to share." That communicates trust while keeping the door open.

#### **Three helpful follow-up questions:**

Instead of focusing on content, focus on the experience. For example:

- "How did you feel during your session today?"
- "Did anything your counselor said or did help you this week?"
- "Is there anything you'd like me to understand or do differently after today's session?"

These questions encourage reflection without requiring the child to reveal private details.

#### **6. Is it OK for the child to feel uncomfortable in counseling?**

Yes. Healthy counseling often involves some discomfort because children may be:

- Talking about painful experiences
- Learning new ways of thinking
- Facing fears gradually
- Practicing difficult conversations

Growth rarely happens with no discomfort at all.

#### **Healthy discomfort**

A child might say:

- "That was hard,"
- "I cried."

- "I didn't really want to talk about it."
- "I'm nervous to go next week."

### **Concerning discomfort**

Parents should pay closer attention if a child consistently says things like:

- "I don't feel safe."
- "My counselor doesn't listen."
- "I feel judged."
- "I leave feeling hopeless every time."
- "I'm afraid to tell my counselor something."
- "They make fun of my faith."
- "They tell me to keep secrets from you."

Persistent dread, fear, or a sense of being demeaned deserves exploration.

### **7. How do parents know if the counselor is a good fit?**

Rather than expecting immediate improvement, consider these questions after several sessions:

#### **Does the child...**

- Seem increasingly comfortable?
- Feel respected?
- Believe the counselor listens?
- Willingly return most weeks?

#### **Does the counselor...**

- Communicate professionally?
- Include parents appropriately?
- Explain goals?
- Welcome questions?
- Respect the family's values?
- Show competence?

#### **Is there gradual progress?**

Progress may look like:

- Fewer emotional outbursts
- Better emotional vocabulary
- Improved coping
- Healthier relationships
- Greater resilience
- Increased hope

Sometimes progress isn't immediately visible because difficult emotions surface before things improve. The counselor should help parents understand this process.