

How to talk about counseling

If your child has experienced a traumatic event, they may benefit from counseling or therapy.



Entering a new environment to talk about big feelings might be intimidating for your child. Here are a few ways you can explain the process and purpose of counseling to help your child feel comfortable talking to a mental health professional.

AGES 2-5

For young children and toddlers, it's important to use developmentally appropriate language. You might tell your child that they're going to talk about their feelings with a nice grown-up. Depending on the kind of counselor they're going to see, you can also tell your child that this person might ask them questions about how they're feeling or play games with them. Reassure young children that going to counseling is not a punishment, but a way to help them feel better when they feel sad.

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

"Sometimes when we get hurt, we need to go to a doctor. Our feelings can get owies, too, and sometimes it's helpful to see someone who can help us heal our feelings."

"Talking to someone who listens and helps you feel better can be like putting a Band-Aid on your feelings. That's what counseling is like! It's a special place where you can talk to a helper called a counselor. They are really good at listening to you talk about your feelings, especially if you're feeling sad or hurt. It's okay to talk about your feelings, and it can help you feel better."

AGES 6-8

When you talk to elementary school-age children about counseling, it can be helpful to compare the experience to talking to a guidance counselor at their school. Even if your child doesn't meet with their school counselor, they're probably aware of this person and know they help kids talk about their feelings. At therapy, counselors might introduce children to tools to regulate their emotions that they can use at home, too. As with younger children, remind school-age kids that going to counseling or therapy is not a punishment. Emphasize the fact that their feelings matter and that talking about feelings is important.

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

"You know how sometimes when you're feeling sad, mad or worried, it can be hard to make those feelings go away? Well, there are people called counselors whose job it is to help us think about where those feelings come from. They can also help us cheer ourselves up or calm ourselves down."

"Going to counseling is kind of like going to a place with lots of toys and games, and you get to talk to someone who's super good at listening to whatever you want to talk about."

"You might learn some new things at counseling, like taking deep breaths to help calm down or using different words to express your feelings."

"It's okay to have big feelings, and it's important to ask for help when we need it."

AGES 9-10

As children approach their pre-teen years, they'll develop a better understanding of their environment. These children may have heard of therapy from adults, peers or the media. Children at this age may feel some stigma around therapy, so it's important to remind them that therapy is a powerful tool and that it's important to discuss feelings.

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

"I know therapy might feel different or weird at first, but it's actually pretty cool."

"Remember that you're in charge at therapy. You can go at your own pace and decide what feels right for you."

"Think of it like having a really good listener who helps you understand your feelings and talk about stuff going on in your life."

"Therapy isn't about changing who you are. It's about giving you tools to help overcome challenges that come up in life. And if you ever feel unsure, you can always speak up and tell me or your therapist. Your therapist and I are here to support you every step of the way."

"You can talk about anything you want, and it's all kept private. The only reason your therapist will ever share something you tell him/her is if he/she is worried about your safety"