

Shared Focus Co-Parenting: Client Handout and FAQ

Separation and divorce can change the way an entire family functions. Parents may be managing conflict, communicating across households, supporting children through transitions, and adjusting to a new parenting relationship at the same time. Shared Focus provides a structured therapeutic space to help families navigate these changes with greater clarity, stability, and support.

Shared Focus Co-Parenting - A Therapeutic Family Support Program for Separated Families

Shared Focus Co-Parenting is designed for parents who are separated, divorced, in the process of separating, or otherwise co-parenting from separate households, as well as children and family members affected by the transition or ongoing co-parenting relationship.

The goal is not to repair the former couple's relationship or require parents to agree on everything. Shared Focus Co-Parenting helps parents develop a healthier parenting relationship, reduce the impact of adult conflict on children, strengthen parent-child and family relationships, and build practical ways of functioning across households.

What Shared Focus Co-Parenting Helps With:

- Reduce children's exposure to parental conflict and protect them from being placed in the middle
- Build child-focused communication, healthy boundaries, emotional regulation, and problem-solving skills
- Support family adjustment and greater predictability across households without requiring identical parenting
- Strengthen parent-child and family relationships where therapeutic support is needed
- Develop practical strategies, resources, and supports that make co-parenting and family transitions more manageable

Successful co-parenting does not require parents to become friends, reconcile, or parent identically. The focus is on creating a more functional, child-focused parenting relationship in which differences can be managed without allowing conflict to control family life.

Our Therapeutic Approach:

Shared Focus Co-Parenting is an evidence-informed program. Therapists do not apply one model to every family; interventions are selected according to the family's needs, goals, safety considerations, and developmental context. Therapy may draw from:

- **Family Systems, Attachment & Child Development:** Understanding how family roles, relationships, attachment needs, and children's developmental needs interact within the family system.
- **Separation Adjustment, Emotion Regulation & Trauma-Informed Support:** Helping parents, children, and youth manage stress, loss, triggers, strong emotions, and changes associated with separation and conflict.

- **Communication, Conflict Management & Reflective Practice:** Building child-focused communication, boundaries, listening, perspective-taking, problem-solving, and more intentional responses to disagreement.
- **Solution-Focused & Skills-Based Interventions:** Using practical goals, modelling, rehearsal, role-play, between-session strategies, and support navigation to translate therapy into everyday change.

Shared Focus Treatment Goals:

Shared Focus Co-Parenting is guided by co-parenting-focused treatment goals that may be addressed when clinically relevant. These goals are not a prescribed curriculum and not every family will require intervention in every area. Your therapist will determine which goals are most relevant to your family and how they are addressed based on assessment, professional clinical judgement, presenting concerns, safety, readiness, and progress.

- **Child-Focused Co-Parenting & Conflict Containment:** Reduce children's exposure to adult conflict, protect children from being placed in the middle, and support emotional security across households.
- **Co-Parent Communication, Boundaries & Problem-Solving:** Develop communication and boundary strategies that fit the family's circumstances and support more effective management of parenting disagreements without unnecessary escalation.
- **Parent Regulation & Separation Adjustment:** Strengthen awareness of triggers and emotional responses so unresolved former-partner conflict is less likely to drive co-parenting interactions.
- **Parenting & Family Functioning Across Households:** Support parent-child relationships, developmentally appropriate parenting, transitions, routines, and workable consistency across homes without requiring identical parenting.
- **Applying & Maintaining Change:** Practise and reinforce strategies that help families carry therapeutic progress into everyday co-parenting and prepare for future challenges.

Your Shared Focus Co-Parenting Therapeutic Pathway

Every separated family has different needs. The following are potential avenues of support, not mandatory stages, and they do not necessarily occur in this order. Your therapist will recommend the combination of interventions that best fits the family's goals, readiness, safety, consent requirements, and clinical needs:

1. **Understanding Your Family & Establishing Goals:** Individual meetings may explore the family structure, history of separation, current co-parenting concerns, conflict patterns, children's needs, strengths, safety considerations, and goals for therapy. This helps the therapist understand what is happening before recommending joint or family work and keeps treatment focused on meaningful change.

2. **Parent-Focused Therapeutic Support:** Individual parent sessions may address adjustment to separation, grief, anger, stress, triggers, emotional regulation, and the difference between the former-partner relationship and the continuing parenting relationship. This can help reduce the extent to which unresolved adult conflict drives co-parenting interactions.
3. **Co-Parent Communication & Conflict Reduction:** Parents may work on conflict cycles, communication boundaries, listening, perspective-taking, problem-solving, and practising difficult conversations in a structured therapeutic setting. The goal is not complete agreement; it is learning how to manage differences without allowing them to dominate family life.
4. **Parenting Across Two Homes:** Therapy may address transitions between households, routines, expectations, school and extracurricular communication, parenting differences, and strategies that prevent children from becoming messengers or intermediaries. Children do not need two identical homes; they benefit when parents can manage differences without placing them in the middle.
5. **Parent-Child & Family Relationship Support:** Parent-child or family sessions may be used to improve communication, strengthen connection, address strain created by family conflict, support changing family roles, and help parents respond to children's emotions and questions. These sessions are therapeutic and are not used to monitor parenting time.
6. **Child & Youth Therapeutic Support:** Children or youth may participate individually when there is a clear therapeutic purpose and consent requirements are met. Sessions may support emotional expression, coping, adjustment, worries about transitions, and communication with caregivers. Children are not asked to choose between parents, provide evidence about either parent, or decide parenting arrangements.
7. **Co-Parent Support Navigation:** Practical support may include identifying communication systems, transition strategies, parenting resources, community services, referrals, and other tools that reduce day-to-day barriers. Navigation supports the therapeutic plan but does not include mediation, parenting coordination, legal advice, or decision-making on behalf of parents.
8. **Progress Review & Moving Forward:** The therapist periodically reviews goals, identifies changes that are helping, addresses remaining concerns, and strengthens strategies the family can continue using. When specialized co-parent support is no longer needed, the family may transition out of Shared Focus Co-Parenting, continue with another form of counselling, or be connected with additional resources where appropriate.

How Shared Focus Co-Parenting Works

Inquiry & Fit Review:

Families may self-refer, and referrals may also be made by a professional or agency. The inquiry/referral form gathers information about who may participate, the family's current separation and co-parenting concerns, children's needs, previous interventions, relevant consent or parenting documents, and safety considerations. Our team reviews the information to determine whether Shared Focus Co-Parenting is an appropriate therapeutic service.

Individualized Program Format:

Shared Focus Co-Parenting does not follow a fixed sequence, schedule, or predetermined number of sessions. Based on assessment, clinical need, treatment goals, participant readiness, safety

considerations, and progress, the therapist determines the recommended type, sequence, frequency, and cadence of sessions.

Therapy may include individual parent sessions, joint co-parent sessions, child/youth sessions, parent-child sessions, family sessions, and Co-Parent Support Navigation. Not every family will participate in every type of session. The therapist will review the therapeutic plan with participants and may adjust the frequency, participants, sequence, or format of sessions as clinical needs evolve.

Participation in Joint Co-Parent Sessions:

Joint co-parent sessions require the participation and appropriate consent of both parents. When joint work is not possible or clinically appropriate, the therapist may discuss whether individual parent, parent-child, or other family therapeutic support is available. If only one parent participates, the therapist will not assess or form legal opinions about the non-participating parent.

Safety & Appropriateness:

Joint sessions are not automatically required. If significant conflict, family violence, coercive control, safety concerns, or other circumstances make joint work unsafe or clinically inappropriate, the therapist may modify the treatment format, pause joint work, or recommend another service.

Starting Shared Focus Co-Parenting:

To inquire about Shared Focus Co-Parenting, contact our Client Services team at **403-668-7561** or info@yourcounselling.ca to request the program inquiry/referral form. Once the referral is reviewed and accepted, participants are guided into the appropriate intake process and an individualized therapeutic pathway is developed.

If Shared Focus Co-Parenting is not the right service for the family's needs, we may recommend individual or family therapy, a community resource, legal or mediation services, parenting coordination, supervised parenting services, specialized assessment, or another appropriate referral.

Informed Consent & Active Participation

Participation in Shared Focus Co-Parenting requires appropriate informed consent. Before beginning, participants should understand the purpose of the service, the therapist's role, potential treatment formats, program boundaries, confidentiality considerations, fees, and expectations for participation. Informed consent is ongoing and may be revisited when the treatment format, participants involved, family circumstances, or relevant clinical or legal needs change.

Consent to participate does not mean that parents must agree with one another, accept the other parent's perspective, or agree with every therapeutic recommendation. Meaningful participation involves engaging in good faith, respecting therapeutic boundaries, working toward agreed treatment goals, communicating concerns that may affect treatment, and making reasonable efforts to apply therapeutic strategies outside of sessions when appropriate.

Participation & Communication Expectations:

The effectiveness of Shared Focus Co-Parenting depends on meaningful participation, appropriate boundaries, and a willingness to keep the therapeutic process focused on the family's well-being. Parents and caregivers participating in the program agree to:

- Attend scheduled sessions and participate in good faith
- Keep the focus on the child's and family's well-being rather than using therapy to prove fault or build a legal case
- Support the therapeutic process outside sessions and practise agreed strategies where appropriate
- Avoid negative, critical, or undermining communication about the other parent in the presence of the child
- Avoid using the child as a messenger, intermediary, information source, or source of evidence between parents
- Refrain from questioning children about private therapy sessions or involving them in adult legal disputes
- Direct administrative matters to the administrative team and bring clinical concerns into scheduled sessions
- Avoid using the therapist as a messenger, copying the therapist into parental arguments, or requesting that the therapist take sides
- Respect the child's emotional pace and the therapist's clinical recommendations regarding the structure of sessions

If behaviour creates an emotionally unsafe environment, repeatedly places a child in the middle, interferes with treatment, or falls outside the therapist's role, the therapist may modify, pause, or terminate services.

Program Boundaries: What Shared Focus Co-Parenting Is - and Is Not

Shared Focus Co-Parenting is a therapeutic co-parenting and family support service for separated families. It is not intended to replace legal, forensic, assessment, decision-making, or supervised parenting services.

Not a Parenting Capacity or Custody Assessment:

Shared Focus Co-Parenting does not evaluate which parent is more capable, provide custody evaluations, or make recommendations about parenting time or decision-making responsibility.

Not Mediation or Parenting Coordination:

The therapist may support communication and problem-solving therapeutically but does not arbitrate disputes, make binding decisions, create legal parenting plans, or act as a parenting coordinator or mediator.

Not a Supervised Parenting Visit Service:

Therapist-facilitated parent-child or family sessions are therapeutic interventions and are not monitored or supervised court-ordered parenting time.

Not a Court-Witness or Forensic Service:

Shared Focus Co-Parenting is not designed to provide expert evidence, forensic opinions, or testimony about parenting arrangements. Any subpoena or legal demand will be addressed according to applicable law, professional obligations, and Your Counselling Ltd. policy.

No Legal Advice:

The therapist does not provide legal advice, interpret court orders for the parties, or tell parents what legal position to take.

Court Orders, Consent & Therapeutic Documentation:

If a court order, parenting agreement, guardianship arrangement, or other legal document affects consent to treatment or participation, Your Counselling Ltd. may request documentation or legal clarification before services begin or continue. This review is limited to confirming authority to provide therapy. Attendance confirmations and, where appropriate, therapeutic summaries may be provided with required consent or when legally required; documentation does not include custody recommendations, parenting capacity opinions, or forensic conclusions.

Fees & Policies

Shared Focus Co-Parenting services are billed according to the professional services provided:

Service	Fee
Administrative Fee Applied once a referral has been accepted to support administrative processing, coordination, and file management.	N/A
Counselling Sessions Standard session length is 50 minutes; sessions exceeding this length are billed in 15-minute increments.	\$200.00
Professional Consultation / Navigation Case consultation, clinical coordination, meetings with professionals, Co-Parent Support Navigation, or coordination with other service providers.	\$200.00
Documentation / Report Writing Therapeutic summaries, detailed letters, or other documentation beyond standard attendance confirmation. Does not include parenting capacity, custody, or forensic assessment reports.	\$200.00
Attendance Confirmation Basic attendance records including session dates, type of session, and participants.	\$40.00

Privacy & Confidentiality:

Records are managed in compliance with applicable privacy legislation. Information will not be shared with lawyers, courts, schools, or other external professionals without appropriate consent unless required by law.

Duty to Report:

Therapists are legally required to report concerns related to the safety or protection of a child to the appropriate authorities in accordance with applicable provincial child protection legislation.

Cancellations:

Appointments cancelled with less than 24 business hours' notice are subject to the full session fee. This policy applies to both in-person and virtual appointments.

Termination of Services:

Shared Focus Co-Parenting may be suspended, modified, or terminated when consent changes, safety concerns arise, participation is not consistent or collaborative, a child is repeatedly drawn into adult conflict, professional boundaries are not maintained, the current treatment format is no longer clinically appropriate, legal requirements conflict with the therapist's clinical role, or financial agreements are not maintained. Where appropriate, referrals to alternative services may be provided.

Shared Focus Co-Parenting FAQ

Who is Shared Focus Co-Parenting for, and how is it different from regular family therapy?

Shared Focus Co-Parenting is specifically designed for families navigating separation, divorce, or ongoing co-parenting across separate households. Unlike general family therapy, it is organized around the family system after separation, including the parenting relationship, conflict between households, children's adjustment, communication, boundaries, and practical co-parenting challenges. Families do not need to be involved with the courts to participate.

Do both parents have to participate?

Both parents must participate and provide appropriate consent for joint co-parent sessions. When only one parent participates, individual parent, parent-child, or other family therapeutic support may still be available when clinically appropriate.

Is this couples counselling?

No. Shared Focus Co-Parenting is not intended to reconcile the former couple relationship. Work between parents focuses on their continuing parenting relationship and the functioning of the family after separation.

What if joint sessions become too conflictual or unsafe?

Joint sessions are not automatically required. The therapist may use individual preparation, a more structured format, another type of family session, or pause joint work. If joint therapy is not clinically appropriate, another service may be recommended.

Will my child be involved in therapy?

Possibly. Children or youth are involved only when there is a therapeutic purpose, the child's participation is appropriate, and consent requirements are met. Their role is therapeutic support, not choosing between parents or providing evidence about either parent.

How long does Shared Focus Co-Parenting take?

There is no fixed timeline. The length and frequency of services depend on the family's goals, level of conflict, participation, children's needs, and progress. The therapeutic pathway is reviewed and adjusted as treatment progresses.

What does Shared Focus Co-Parenting cost?

There is no program retainer or administrative fees. Counselling sessions, professional consultation/navigation, and documentation/report writing are each billed at \$200.00 as applicable. Basic attendance confirmation is provided at a \$40.00 charge.