

What to Expect from Family Therapy

A Guide for Families

Family therapy is a collaborative process focused on understanding and improving relationships within the family. Sessions provide a respectful, neutral, and non-judgmental space where family members can explore concerns, strengthen communication, and work toward shared goals.

Every family is different. The therapist will tailor the structure, therapeutic approach, session frequency, and treatment plan to the family's needs, goals, relationships, and circumstances.

Family-Focused Therapy and Separate Check-Ins

Family therapy focuses on the family system rather than one person in isolation or assigning blame. Most sessions involve the family members identified in the treatment plan. Based on clinical judgment and necessity, the therapist may occasionally meet separately with one or more family members to gather information, clarify concerns, assess safety, or support case planning.

These meetings remain part of family therapy and are not separate, ongoing individual therapy. The therapist will explain the purpose of any separate meeting and how information will be managed within the family work.

The Family Therapy Process

1. Initial Family Assessment

Family therapy usually begins with the family members identified for the initial assessment. The therapist will learn about the family's strengths, current concerns, important relationships, history, recurring patterns, and the changes family members hope to make. The goal is to develop a balanced understanding of the family and identify the most appropriate direction for therapy.

The initial assessment may explore:

- the concerns that led the family to seek counselling
- communication, conflict, and problem-solving patterns
- family strengths, supports, roles, and areas of connection
- major life changes, separation, grief, health concerns, or other stressors
- behavioural, emotional, or mental-health concerns affecting the family
- each family member's goals, expectations, and readiness for the process

2. Shared Goals and Treatment Plan

After the assessment, the therapist will help the family identify shared priorities and establish a treatment plan. Goals may include improving communication, reducing conflict, strengthening connection, supporting a family transition, improving cooperation, or responding more effectively to a specific concern.

The therapist will also discuss the proposed approach, who should attend different appointments, the suggested frequency of sessions, and any activities or practice that may be completed between sessions.

3. Ongoing Family Sessions

Most appointments involve the family members identified in the treatment plan. The therapist may use guided conversations, structured exercises, observation, reflection, and evidence-informed strategies to help family members understand their interactions and practise healthier ways of responding to one another.

Family sessions may focus on:

- expressing needs, concerns, and emotions more effectively
- listening with greater empathy and understanding
- recognizing and changing unhelpful family interaction patterns
- developing conflict-resolution and problem-solving skills
- navigating parenting, behavioural, health, or life-transition concerns
- strengthening trust, connection, cooperation, and family support

4. Separate Check-ins when Clinically Necessary

The therapist may occasionally meet separately with one or more family members when this is clinically necessary. A separate check-in may be used to gather additional information, clarify a perspective, assess needs or safety, support case planning, or prepare for a future family conversation.

These meetings remain connected to the family treatment plan and are not the same as ongoing individual therapy. The therapist will clarify the purpose, who will attend, and the expectations for confidentiality and information-sharing before the meeting.

5. Practice Skills Between Sessions

Family therapy often includes practical strategies to practise outside the therapy room. This may involve communication exercises, planned conversations, routines, reflection questions, parenting strategies, or other activities connected to the family's goals. Consistent practice helps new skills become part of everyday family life.

6. Reviewing Progress and Ongoing Support

The therapist and family will review progress throughout therapy and adjust goals, strategies, participants, or appointment frequency when needed. Sessions may be scheduled weekly, every two weeks, or at another interval based on the family's needs, availability, progress, and treatment plan.



Booking, Insurance and Receipts

Primary Booking Name

Family therapy is booked under one primary name. Because family sessions may involve adults, children, or different combinations of family members, the Client Services Team will confirm the appropriate booking name based on who is receiving the service, who will attend, and whose insurance plan is being billed.

Insurance Information and Direct Billing

An insurance information form will be provided when benefits are being used. Coverage and direct-billing requirements vary between plans. Families are encouraged to confirm eligibility and coverage directly with their insurance provider. The Client Services Team can answer questions about the form and the clinic's direct-billing process.

Who is Listed for a Family Session

The clinical record and receipt reflect who attended and received the service. When several family members attend, the participating family members will be identified. The primary booking name does not change who was present for the family session.

Separate Check-In Appointments

When the therapist schedules a separate check-in with one family member, the appointment and receipt will be recorded under the name of the person who attends. This remains part of the family therapy process unless a separate individual therapy service has been arranged.

Changes in Attendance

Please advise the therapist or Client Services Team in advance when possible if different family members will attend an upcoming appointment. Changes in participation may affect consent, clinical planning, booking details, and receipt information.

Additional Considerations When Accessing Family Therapy

Confidentiality Within Family Work

The therapist will explain confidentiality, its limits, and how information is managed within family therapy. Information shared during a separate check-in may still be relevant to the family treatment plan. Family members should not assume that a separate meeting will be treated as confidential from everyone else in the family. Questions about privacy and information-sharing should be discussed before the meeting begins.

Who Participates in Sessions

Not every family member must attend every appointment. The therapist will recommend who should participate based on the family's goals, the stage of treatment, clinical needs, consent requirements, and the purpose of the session.

Children, Youth, and Consent

When children or youth are involved, the therapist will consider their age, development, comfort, and role within the family. Parents or legal guardians are responsible for providing the consent and decision-making information required for services. When parents or guardians are separated, the clinic requires the section of a parenting order or separation agreement that addresses healthcare or counselling decisions.

A Collaborative, Non-Blaming Process

Family therapy is intended to help family members understand patterns, strengthen relationships, and work toward constructive change. The therapist does not attend to decide who is right or wrong or to take sides. Progress usually requires respectful participation, honesty, practice, and consistency from those involved.

Therapeutic Approach and Session Structure

Therapists may use different evidence-informed approaches and may structure family therapy differently. The number of participants, session format, activities, and pacing may change over time. The therapist will make recommendations based on the family's needs and explain the proposed structure.

Family Therapy May Support

- communication breakdowns and recurring family conflict

- parenting, behavioural, or relationship concerns
- separation, divorce, blended-family changes, or other transitions
- mental or physical health concerns affecting the family
- grief, loss, trauma, or significant life changes
- stronger connection, empathy, cooperation, and shared problem-solving

Creating a Collaborative and Safe Environment

Families can support the therapy process by:

- attending appointments consistently and arriving prepared to participate
- sharing concerns and goals as openly and respectfully as possible
- asking questions about the process, confidentiality, or treatment plan
- practising agreed-upon strategies between sessions
- informing the therapist of significant changes that may affect the work
- allowing time for new skills and family patterns to develop

At Your Counselling Ltd., we are here to support you throughout the family therapy process. For administrative questions, contact us at info@yourcounselling.ca or **1-833-989-7561**.

Frequently Asked Questions

Does the whole family attend every appointment?

Not necessarily. The therapist will recommend who should attend based on the family's goals, clinical needs, consent requirements, and the purpose of each session.

Why might the therapist meet with a family member separately?

A separate check-in may help the therapist gather information, clarify a perspective, assess needs or safety, support case planning, or prepare for a future family conversation. It is generally an occasional part of the family therapy process.

Is a separate check-in confidential from the rest of the family?

The therapist will explain confidentiality and information-sharing expectations before the meeting. Because the check-in remains part of family therapy, clients should not assume that it is handled in the same way as separate individual therapy.

Is a separate check-in the same as individual therapy?

No. A separate check-in is connected to the family treatment plan. A family member seeking ongoing individual therapy should contact the Client Services Team, so they can be matched with the most suitable therapist that meets their individual needs and concerns. A separate clinician may be recommended to protect the integrity of the family work.

What if a family member is hesitant or does not want to attend?

Family members may begin with different levels of comfort or readiness. Concerns can be discussed during the assessment so the therapist can determine whether family therapy is appropriate and how participation should be structured.

Can children and youth participate in family therapy?

Yes. Children and youth may participate when appropriate. The therapist will consider age, development, comfort, consent, and the family's goals when deciding how they should be involved.

Whose name is the appointment booked under?

Family therapy is booked under one primary name. The Client Services Team will confirm the appropriate setup based on who is receiving the service, who is attending, and whose insurance benefits are being used.

The receipt shows who attended and received the service. When multiple family members attend, the participating family members are identified. A separate check-in is recorded under the name of the person who attended.

What documents may be required when parents or guardians are separated?

When a child or youth is participating, the clinic may request the section of a parenting order or separation agreement that identifies who has authority to make healthcare or counselling decisions. The full document is not usually required unless additional information is necessary.