

Counseling with Teens & Youth

What to Expect in Counseling

The purpose of meeting with a counselor is to help you become more successful in life, whether in relationships with your friends, family, or at school. Counseling can also be a place to discover who you are, who you want to be, and how to get there. You may be here because *you* wanted to talk to a counselor or because your parent(s), guardian(s), doctor, or teacher had concerns about you. When we meet, we will discuss things that you want to talk about and things others might want us to talk about. Sometimes I will ask questions, sometimes I will listen to you. We might brainstorm ideas about how you can be more successful. It is important that you feel comfortable talking to me about the issues that are bothering you.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Privacy, also called confidentiality, is an important and necessary part of good counseling. As a general rule, I will keep most of the information you share with me in our sessions confidential; however, it is common practice for me to talk with your parent(s)/guardian(s) for periodic updates about our time together, as well as to get information from them. Most specific details you share with me do not need to be told to your parent(s)/guardian(s). I will discuss with you what I intend to tell them.

Communicating with your Parent(s) / Guardian(s)

Except for situations such as those mentioned below, I will **not** tell your parent(s) or guardian(s) specific things you share with me in our private counseling sessions. This includes activities and behavior that your parent(s)/guardian(s) would not approve of — or would be upset by — but that do not put you at risk of serious and immediate harm. However, if your risk-taking behavior becomes more serious, then I will need to use my professional judgment to decide whether you are in serious and immediate danger of being harmed. If I feel that you are in such danger, I will communicate this information to your parent(s) or guardian(s). Usually, I will tell you that I feel I must communicate with your parent(s)/guardian(s), and often, we may work together to tell them something important.

Examples:

- If you tell me that you have tried alcohol at a few parties, I **would** keep this information confidential.
- If you tell me that you are drinking and driving or that you are a passenger in a car with a driver who is drunk, I **would not** keep this information confidential from your parent(s)/guardian(s).

- If you tell me, or if I believe based on things you've told me, that you are addicted to alcohol, I **would not** keep this information from your parent(s)/guardian(s).
- If you tell me that you are having protected sex with a boyfriend or girlfriend, I **would** keep this information confidential.
- If you tell me that, on several occasions, you have engaged in unprotected sex with people you do not know or in unsafe situations, I **would not** keep this information confidential.

You can always ask me questions about the types of information I would disclose. You can ask in the form of "hypothetical situations," in other words: "If someone told you that they were doing _____, would you have to tell..."

Even if I have agreed to keep information confidential – to not tell your parent(s) or guardian(s) – I may believe that it is important for them to know what is going on in your life. In these situations, I will encourage you to tell your parent(s)/guardian(s) and will help you find the best way to tell them. Also, when meeting with your caregivers, I may sometimes describe problems in general terms, without using specifics, in order to help them know how to be more helpful to you.

You should also know that, by law in Kansas, your parent(s)/guardian(s) has the right to see any written records I keep about our sessions. It is rare that parent(s)/guardian(s) request to view records. I ask them not to do so as part of the consent to treatment, but by law, I would be required to provide records should they ask for them.

Communicating with Other Adults

School:

I will not share any information with your school unless I have your permission and permission from your parent(s) or guardian(s). Sometimes I may request to speak to someone at your school to find out how things are going for you. Also, it may be helpful in some situations for me to give suggestions to your teacher or counselor at school. If I want to contact your school, or if someone at your school wants to contact me, I will discuss it with you and ask for your permission. A very unlikely situation might come up in which I do not have your permission but both I and your parent(s) or guardian(s) believe that it is very important for me to be able to share certain information with someone at your school. In this situation, I will use my professional judgment to decide whether to share any information.

Doctors:

Sometimes your doctor and I may need to work together; for example, if you need to take medication in addition to seeing a therapist. I will get your written permission and permission from your parent(s)/guardian(s) in advance to share information with your doctor. The only time I will share information with your doctor without your permission is if you are doing something that puts you at risk for serious and immediate physical/medical harm.

Other Exceptions to Confidentiality and Privacy

There are other, less common, but important exceptions to privacy. In some situations, I might be required by law or by the rules of my profession to disclose certain information, whether or not I have your permission. I will list some examples below.

- You tell me you plan to cause serious harm to yourself and I believe you have the intent to carry out this threat in the very near future. I must take steps to inform your parent(s) or guardian(s) of what you have told me and how serious I believe this threat to be. I must make sure that you are protected from harming yourself.
- You tell me you plan to cause serious harm to someone else and I believe you have the intent to carry out this threat in the very near future. In this situation, I must inform your parent(s) or guardian(s). I also might inform the person who you intend to harm.
- You are doing things that could cause serious harm to you or someone else, even if you do not intend to harm or others. In these situations, I will need to use my professional judgment to decide whether your parent(s) or guardian(s) should be informed.
- You tell me you are being abused -- physically, sexually or emotionally -- or that you have been abused in the past. In this situation, I am required by law to report this. If the abuse has been reported in the past, I may be required to confirm this.
- You tell me that another child in your family or another child that you know is being abused -- physically, sexually or emotionally -- or that child has been abused in the past. In this situation, I am required by law to report this. If the abuse has been reported in the past, I may be required to confirm this.
- You are involved in a court case and a request is made for information about your counseling sessions. If this happens, I will not disclose information without your written agreement unless the court requires me to. I will do all I can within the law to protect your confidentiality, and if I am required to disclose information to the court. I will inform you that this will happen.