

What does a typical CFT treatment plan include?

Stage One: Intake Assessment (before court order for services)

The parents will each meet with the CFT therapist for one intake session. The therapist will also contact the GAL or Amicus and any individual therapists already involved in the case to determine if the case is appropriate for CFT.

Stage Two: Court Order/Retainer Paid

If the case is accepted¹ by the CFT Therapist, the attorneys will ask the court to order² the therapy service and the parents will be required to pay the retainer fee to the CFT Therapist.

Stage Three: Begin Conjoint Family Therapy The first official session is with the child(ren) (without any parents). If the child does not already have an individual therapist, the CFT Therapist will make recommendations so that the child has his or her own advocate to manage anxiety. The CFT Therapist may find it necessary to meet individually with the child(ren) several times to assess and acclimate the child to the process. The CFT therapist will also meet with the parents, individually again, and if applicable, any other family members involved.

Stage Four: Begin joint sessions (Child and parents)

These sessions are rarely a traditional therapy session, but instead a form of gradual exposure therapy. Therefore it is not uncommon for there to be a series of sessions that are brief, and at a neutral location (park, playground, ice cream shop) where the resisted child and parent and CFT therapist are just in the same space together. No serious matters are discussed. This is a critical stage of the CFT because a large amount of resistance in children in these situations is

¹ If the case is deemed not appropriate, the CFT Therapist will alert the court and make alternate recommendations

² A sample Conjoint Therapy Court Order is available upon request

simply anxiety about the awkwardness and potential reactivity of seeing a parent they have rejected. Once we can establish the safety of those interactions and expose the child to the parents' stable and validating presence, we can move forward.

Concurrently, the CFT will be contacting or meeting with the preferred parent as well, to gauge their experience and guide them on supporting the progress. It may even be necessary for a session with children and preferred parent so that the child officially hears that warming up to their other parent is not a betrayal of their preferred parent.

Stage Five: More Formal Sessions

When deemed appropriate by the CFT therapist, sessions that include the resisted parent and child in the therapy office might begin, where the CFT therapist will use age-appropriate modalities to have the parents hear and validate the child(ren)'s feelings and experience without defensiveness or justification. There will also be discussions of wishes for better times ahead and how to communicate with one another better moving forward.

Stage Six: Unsupervised Visits (if not already happening)

If the child has not been unsupervised with the resisted parent, this next step will be an opportunity for the child to spend time with that parent outside of the therapeutic process. This would usually be a couple hours on a weekend day. The therapist can be a point of contact for all during the visit.

Stage Seven: Trial Overnight Visit

At this stage, the child will spend a weekend with the resisted parent that will consist of two full days and one overnight at the home of the resisted parent familiar to the resisted child.

Stage Eight: Gradual Resumption of Parenting Plan Time

This should be the time the parenting plan can be restored and the child can resume spending time at both parents' homes. The CFT will periodically meet with all parties to check to see how it is going.

Stage Nine: Conclusion and Graduation

Once it appears to the CFT Therapist that the child is able to enjoy and maintain a healthy relationship with both parents and smoothly readjust to the parenting plan and time-sharing, the CFT will hold a conclusion session and make any recommendations for follow-up care.

Source: National Conjoint Therapy Consult Group

This info sheet provides general guidelines for Conjoint Family Therapy. Specifics will be detailed in the service agreement and with the court order determining any differences.