

Conjoint Therapy Info Sheet for Parents

What is Conjoint Family Therapy?

Conjoint Family Therapy or CFT (sometimes called reunification therapy¹) is a type of court-ordered therapy that focuses on repairing relationships between parents and children in an attempt to meaningfully restore the social, emotional, and interpersonal bond that aligns with the best interests of the child and the health of the family system².

When is Conjoint Family Therapy appropriate?

CFT is appropriate when a child or children are resisting or refusing a relationship with a parent and not adhering to the parenting plan set forth by the courts often after a divorce, separation, or dissolution of the parent's relationship. It is appropriate when both parents can and will support the therapeutic process.

Who participates in Conjoint Family Therapy?

CFT is a family systems-based therapy approach, therefore the entire family (parents, children, and if applicable, grandparents and step-parents or other primary caregivers) will be asked to participate. This does not mean everyone will have sessions together. But rather, CFT is a series of sessions that focus on different individuals and dynamics within the system as determined to be appropriate by the CFT Therapist. It is a goal of CFT to hear perspectives to get a full picture of the family system and its unique dynamics.

How much does CFT cost and who pays?

Unlike traditional therapy, CFT is not covered by health insurance. Your CFT Therapist will likely require parties to put down a retainer for their services (ex: \$2400 total, split between parties.) Retainers may need to be refilled depending on treatment plan and pace. Who will pay is determined in court order. Traditionally, joint custodial parents split the costs 50/50.

¹ The term Reunification therapy has traditionally been used in the context of child protection and removal services, where a parent and child need help reintegrating after restoration of parental rights. For our purposes, conjoint (defined as "combining all or both people or things involved") is more appropriate.

² CFT is anchored in the belief (supported by legal precedence and psychological research) that every child should have the opportunity to make and maintain a healthy relationship with both (all) of his or her caregivers.

What should we tell the children about the process?

Both parents need to let the child(ren) know that you are coming together to get some help on improving all the relationships in your family. It is important to let the child(ren) know that this is a child-centered process, for the benefit of the child. While ease and comfort cannot be guaranteed as it is naturally an anxiety-inducing proposition, the CFT Therapist is committed to working with the unique needs and pace of the child(ren).

What if I *know* my co-parent is engaging in alienating behaviors and they will undermine any possible progress?

CFT Therapy is not an assessment or evaluation of whether or not there are alienating behaviors in the family system. An order for CFT does not mean there is alienation. The reason a child resists/refuses a parent are myriad and on a continuum. The CFT Therapist will be working with **both** parents to guide them in their posture and behaviors during the process. This can include anything that the CFT Therapist views as a barrier to what appears could otherwise be a healthy relationship between parent and child. But if you, a parent, are convinced that the only reason your child is resisting you is the alienating behaviors of your co-parent, a more formal parenting plan evaluation or complex family assessment may be more appropriate.

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.

