

Conjoint Therapy Info Sheet for Family Law Professionals

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 our clients about the process?

Bottom line is that both parents **MUST** have two characteristics to make this process work:

1. They both truly believe that the best interest of their child(ren) is served by having the best relationship possible with both parents and their extended family.
2. Both parents must be open and willing to look at the ways that they are, knowingly or unknowingly, contributing to the relationship breakdown and are willing to dig deep in therapy and change some of their behaviors.

Another important point to make is that every case is unique, just as unique as the people involved. Therefore the pace and timeline is unique as well. It will be up to the CFT Therapist (with input from clients) to determine these details.

What if my client is convinced that their co-parent is alienating and 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 your client is convinced that the only reason the child(ren) is resisting a relationship is because of the alienating behaviors of their co-parent, a more formal parenting plan evaluation (custody evaluation) or complex family assessment (ex, Children4Tomorrow) is 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.

