



## **Parent's Guide to Adolescent Counseling at Refuge Counseling Center**

As parents and caretakers, we are given a great honor and responsibility when it comes to raising adolescents. Sometimes the challenges that go with this can seem daunting, especially when trying to apply faith-based values in a world that is often against a Christian worldview.

We want you to know that you are not alone. We are here to form a partnership with you in helping your child overcome the struggles they may encounter. Behavioral or academic problems, anxiety, depression, parent and child conflict, unplanned pregnancy, and sexual identity are some of the common themes we work with at Refuge Counseling Center. Although every situation is different, the following is a guideline on what parents can expect during the counseling process.

### **Scheduling An Appointment**

If you have not yet scheduled an appointment, we encourage you to call and speak to our receptionist at (208) 465-4985. She is trained to assist you in finding the counselor who will be the best fit for your adolescent and their particular needs. In some cases it may be appropriate to set up a consultation with the parents and counselor before your adolescent begins counseling.

### **Creating Safety in the Counselor-Client Relationship**

Whether they admit it or not, your adolescent needs to feel safe to process what is going on. It is not uncommon for people to talk to a third-party person, like a counselor, more quickly than they will talk with those they are familiar with. The counselor has no history, which means there are open channels for conversation and trust to develop.

Our goal in counseling is to create a relaxed place of safety to explore feelings of doubt and fear as a young person moves toward adulthood. Counselors are not shocked by harsh language, anger, and many of the other emotions present when processing difficult or confusing things. Please understand that in creating rapport with your teen we are not agreeing with or condoning their views, but we are giving them space to explore their struggles with another person as opposed to struggling alone and without guidance.

We typically avoid judgements about what they are experiencing and don't evaluate their feelings as good or bad. All our counselors operate from a Biblical worldview and are comfortable navigating spiritual conversations. They will use discernment to carefully challenge beliefs that are not founded in truth and help adolescents see beyond this struggle toward the future. In the end, we hope to help your teen reflect on their experiences, beliefs, and values to find a language to tell their stories and live authentically.

### **Parent Involvement and Confidentiality in Counseling**

Counseling is not three against one. Sometimes a teen will think it is mom, dad, and the counselor against him or her. This is normal. From the start we will let your teen know that we are for them. We don't choose sides; there are no sides. We are on the same team, hopefully working toward the same goal.

Please note: If at any point during the counseling process your child discloses abuse or intent to harm themselves or others, the counselor is required by law to break confidentiality and report through the appropriate channels. Please

refer to the counselor's Informed Consent for more detailed information.

### **Preteen (Middle School)**

For young people in this age group, parent involvement during counseling sessions is still necessary, but there is confidentiality between the child and therapist. Having a foundation of trust between the child and the counselor is very important in making progress, and the child being able to speak freely without his or her parents around helps build rapport.

Although the majority of the session is spent with the therapist and child alone, the therapist will usually meet regularly with parents at the end of counseling sessions or set up a separate meeting to discuss concerns and strategies to implement at home.

### **Late Teens (High School)**

Depending on the concern, the parent involvement in counseling is typically much less for high school students and older teenagers. Although an individual in this age group still relies heavily on parents, it is a phase of life where they begin to transition from child to adult and are learning to reflect on problems and come up with their own solutions.

Although older teens have a lot of independence and adult-like activities, such as driving, making their own money, and keeping a schedule, a parent staying engaged and keeping the counselor updated on the teenager's life is important. There will always be situations where a teen will need a parent's help, or be in a situation where a parent will need to be more involved.

### **Emotional Challenges**

One of the challenges many parents face is feelings of guilt or a cycle of “what if” questions. It is not uncommon for parents to ask the question, “What did I do wrong?” If you find yourself facing feelings of guilt or other questions, please know our approach to counseling is to come alongside your teen rather than focusing on the “what ifs,” or pointing fingers. It is common for the family or parent to experience many feelings of their own. As we figure out the best way to support and relate to your teen, we can also explore resources to support the family system, marriage, or individual parent.<sup>1</sup>

Challenging times put stress on a marriage and it is important for you and your spouse to turn toward each other to find strength and support. If you are a single parent, find people who are safe and trusted that you can talk openly with as you process the inevitable mixed emotions. It is not uncommon to experience love, guilt, concern, disappointment, and other frustrating feelings during a time of struggle.

### **Relationship Challenges**

As you talk through the difficulties, you may recognize that your teen is in a very different place than you are on some issues. Some parents may feel stuck as they try to sort out their own feelings about what their son or daughter is experiencing, and others may feel pressured to respond in a way that goes against your principles.

There may be a sense of grief or disappointment that some of the dreams you have had for your teen may not happen as you expected. As you process what is happening, take time to reflect and make decisions slowly and thoughtfully. It may be helpful to talk with a trusted friend, pastor, or counselor, and think through your beliefs and values in order to find a way to communicate these in the context of love and regard for your son or daughter. Regardless of how difficult things may seem there is always hope. Counseling can give insight and transform how we look at our lives.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers, by Chap Clark may be a helpful resource. Counselors may have other resources to suggest based on specific issues.

<sup>2</sup> Some of the content of this document was adapted from Sexual Identity: A Guide for Parents, by Mark A. Yarhouse, Stephanie K. Nowacki-Butzen, Trista L. Carr, and Christine H. Hull; sexualidentityinstitute.org.