

Seeing our Psychologists

A Parents Guide to Support Young Adults

Whilst growing independence means your child is stepping up and facing situations on their own, they often still rely heavily on parents for emotional, financial and logistical support. As parents we understand you want to give them the space to manage these moments on their own, but you are also keen to know what's happening, what they are experiencing and how you can help. Therefore we have put together some helpful information to allow you to stay in the picture and know how you can best support your young adult.

What should they bring to their First Session?

- Your young adult can bring a list that outlines their concerns with examples.
- It is helpful to consider when concerning symptoms do and don't occur, when they started, what your young adult would like to get out of attending, and any questions they may have.
- If applicable, your young adult should also bring a Mental Health Care Plan (MHCP) letter from their GP and their Medicare card.

What can I expect in the First Session my child has with their Psychologist?

- The first session takes two hours and is an opportunity for us to develop a working relationship with your young adult. The psychologist will ask a variety of questions to get a sense of what has brought them to see us, as well as discussion around their life history and other life areas, such as work and interests. An in-depth discussion about why they are experiencing their difficulties and treatment options will also occur.
- The initial session typically will only involve your young adult and their psychologist. Others such as yourself are welcome if your young adult feels they need a support person or someone else's perspective on their difficulties.
- As they are an adult we are bound confidentially not to release any information without their consent unless there is a risk to their safety. Therefore information disclosed in this session will not be shared. This can be difficult to feel like you're on the outside, but it is a time for you to trust that the psychologist will treat your young adult with the utmost care, and guide them to be open with their communication.

What can I expect after their First Session?

- Emotions and behaviours after the first session are a bit of a mixed bag – they largely vary and can be difficult to predict.
- Some young adults may feel exhausted after talking about their emotions and desire solitude after the session. Others may be visibly distressed after talking about difficult emotions and thoughts for a couple of hours; this is particularly likely for young adults who avoid talking about the 'bad times'. In this case, you may either observe your young adult opting to talk about the session and even desire physical comfort, or alternatively want some space and quiet time.
- Some young adults may feel content and relieved after expressing themselves and being listened to by another adult.
- Do not be surprised if your young adult does not want to immediately discuss the session with you. They may choose to do so later at a time when you are not expecting it. However if not, it can be helpful to accept their choice to not disclose this with you. Not speaking with you does not mean there is anything wrong with your relationship; it is a sign of healthy and normal adult development.

What should I do after the First Session?

- It is difficult to predict how your young adult will react to the initial session, even for themselves. For this reason after the session, the best approach is to let them know that you are happy and willing to talk about the session if this is what they want. But if not, it is most helpful to accept this.
- Your young adult not wanting to talk after the session is not a reflection that the session went poorly or they are withholding information from you, rather it is an indication that they need time to process their own emotions and thoughts or that they are beginning to exert a sense of independence, which is common and normal during young adulthood. In these times, it is helpful to say you will be there to listen to them and speak about the session, when and if they choose to.

What should I tell my child before their First Session?

- It is helpful to discuss the initial session process prior to the appointment. Let your young adult know that it will be their decision as to whether they would like you in the session or not.
- You can let your young adult know that they are likely to discuss the problem, context around the problem, and other more enjoyable topics such as university or work, hobbies and friends.
- It can also be helpful to explain that although sessions may not always be enjoyable, they will be beneficial in the long term. Explore the benefits that may arise with your young adult, for example what behaviours they might no longer experience (e.g. procrastination with study) and what might they be able to do (e.g. make new friends, travel).
- It can be helpful to ask your young adult how they feel about talking with someone they do not know and how they expect to feel after. Offer if there is anything you can do to make them feel more comfortable during the process.
- Encourage your young adult to ask their psychologist any questions that they might have. Let them know it is important to be honest with their psychologist so that they can be helped. It is important to explain to them that after each session they will be given an at-home task to practice what they have learnt, which may include writing self-reflections or trying something new.

When will I see a change in my Young Adult?

- Noticeable change takes time. Most young adults have developed their unhelpful thoughts, emotions or behaviours over years. These patterns have become habits, and like any habit they will take time to shift, and this process may at times be challenging for your young adult.
- In the first session, any issues are identified. At the beginning of therapy, youth often feel confused and overwhelmed. The following stage of treatment typically involves skill development. During this time a trusting relationship with the psychologist should emerge and your young adult may begin to feel more comfortable and become more open and willing to try new things. As a result after the middle stage of treatment, parents may be able to observe 'glimpses' of change, such as experiencing a greater sense of 'good times' when you are with them. This may include less angry outbursts or fewer instances of emotionally shutting down, and more enjoyable family and peer interactions.
- More noticeable change will likely take longer. For your young adult to feel more confident in their daily life, strategies will need to be implemented and reinforced regularly and in different situations. Parents and members outside of the family can often observe clear changes after 10 sessions. However longer term traits and more engrained patterns of thoughts, emotions and behaviours can take time to shift, and therefore reaching observable change will be a longer process. If your young adult's therapeutic journey is likely to take some time, their psychologist will explain this to them during sessions.

As a parent, what will my involvement in therapy be?

- It is likely that most, if not all sessions will involve the psychologist and your young adult alone. However, if you think it would be of benefit to your young adult, and they are willing for you to be more involved in therapy, it is helpful to just let the psychologist know. The psychologist is bound by confidentiality and therefore it is your young adult's decision as to what the psychologist is able to speak with you about. Nevertheless, open communication with the psychologist about your concerns is encouraged, and a second perspective can be helpful.

Why your Young Adult may be hesitant about treatment

- All parents have their young adult at the forefront of their mind and it makes sense that as a parent you may be naturally concerned about their progress. Times when it can be particularly easy to doubt progress is when your young adult becomes unwilling to attend therapy, especially if they previously had been enjoying it.
- Around the middle of treatment your young adult's psychologist will begin to challenge their unhelpful thoughts, emotions and behaviours, and encourage them to engage in more helpful ones. This may be difficult for your young adult to do; although at the same time is vital to their progress. As a parent, your role is to encourage them to stick with therapy, letting them know it will get easier over time. Reminding your young adult about a change earlier on in their lives (such as when they first started high school or their first job) and how difficult that was initially but how easy it seems now, may be a helpful starting point.
- The second reason your young adult may be reluctant to attend sessions is that young adults often avoid talking about negative thoughts and emotions as this makes them feel 'bad'. However, at times it will be necessary to discuss these thoughts and emotions, which may feel challenging. Sometimes this may result in them appearing more distressed or emotionally shut down after the session. This is largely a reflection that your young adult is not used to speaking about difficult thoughts and emotions, although with practice this will get much easier over time. As a parent, your role is to empathise with your young adult, and remind them of how courageous they are being by using support. It is also helpful to explain to them that by choosing to talk about their negative thoughts and emotions now, they will be unlikely to 'pop up' in the future without their control.

