

Therapists: Parents Should be with Their Children for Adoptive and Foster Therapy Sessions

By Carol Lozier, LCSW

Source: [*Therapists: Parents Should Be With Their Kids for Adoptive or Foster Therapy Sessions - Creating a Family*](#)

In workshops, parents are told: remain in the room during your child's therapy. Yet, most therapists meet with the parents alone, work with the child alone, and then spend a short time with everyone together. While this is common practice, it's not the best approach for adoptive and foster families. In my practice, I keep parents in the session, like a family session — though it's not how I was trained either.

Adoptive mom, Amy, highlights her reasons why parents need to be included in sessions:

“The therapist is partnering with me to help heal my child. The therapist is teaching me how to therapeutically parent my child by modeling the wording. I am there to help the therapist too- she may incorrectly interpret my child's silence, or withdrawal or hyperness. When that happens, I can point out, ‘he does this when x happens,’ and then we can work together to address what to do when x happens at home and she's not there. In speech, OT, PT, there are exercises that you do between visits, and the same is true with ‘feelings therapy’. Besides, she is with him for one hour a week; I am with him the other 167 hours that week and I have to know how to help him.”

10 Reasons for Parents to Remain in Their Child's Sessions

So, let's talk about the 10 reasons parents should stay in their child's sessions.

1. Parents Are Co-Therapist

In an adoption therapy session, one of the parent's roles is to be a co-therapist—they know their child better than we do. Parents can identify a negative belief or trigger that we're unaware of. They may identify helpful information that we unknowingly overlooked.

2. Parents Aid In Healing The Past

When the therapist and child focus on past trauma, a parent's presence offers emotional safety. The parent can make corrective, healing statements during the therapy process which is far more powerful than ours.

Also, issues will come up at home and parents need to be equipped to work on them as they arise. Adoptive mom, Ann, addresses this point:

Today, I helped my son connect to the past and work through an issue. Because we were able to work through it, this has been one of the best weekends we've had in a year. I don't think I would have been able to help had I not been in his therapy. It's helped me to understand him better too. My perspective has changed so much since being a part of his therapy; it has helped me as his mom.

3. Clarify Information

Often, children don't know or don't remember bits of their past. When the parent's available, they can clarify or fill in gaps of missing information during therapy.

4. Correct Inaccurate Information

Along the same lines, the parent can correct a child's misunderstood or misquoted details.

5. The Child Can Seek Their Parent

During the session, the child may have numerous needs from simple questions to reassurance, to needing to use the restroom. We want the child to lean on their parent for help, and not us.

6. Encourage The Child

One of the parent's roles is to encourage their child's hard work. The child will encounter difficult emotions and issues, and the parent can praise and support the child through this time. It's another opportunity for the child to lean on his or her parent, and turn to them instead of away from them.

7. Honesty

Let's face it, there are times when children aren't honest. There are many reasons they're not honest, but when the parent is present, it ensures honesty. This is especially important: a dishonest answer leads us down the wrong path, wasting precious time for the child.

8. Role Model

Parents learn valuable skills when they watch us work with their child. And we can coach them on parenting and therapy skills. Adoptive mom, Lynn, shares,

Being in the room allows me to be a better parent at home. These issues can't be fixed just in therapy sessions. They get fixed by the parents doing what they need to do between the sessions. Being in the room, I'm able to learn how to respond to things better.

9. What's My Homework?

In adoption therapy sessions, we're teaching healthy coping skills to the child. If the parent isn't involved, they aren't familiar with the instructions and don't know how to encourage their child to practice their newly acquired skill.

10. Bonding

Sometimes children feel upset in sessions, and we want parents to comfort their child. If the parent isn't in the room the task is left to us and then—the wrong person is comforting and connecting to the child.

Janie, adoptive mom to Andrew, explains:

As a mom, I don't want to miss out on the important moments of healing that happen in therapy. We love our kids and work so hard, and I don't want to miss out on the rewards of when my son is genuine and vulnerable, because that's not a side I see every day. It's important that I be a part of that too.

Between Families Newsletter

Reasons for Parents to Be in Their Child's Therapy Sessions

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ½ CREDIT

- 1.) What is common practice during family therapy sessions?
 - a) Only meet with the youth
 - b) Only meet with the parent(s)
 - c) meet with the parents alone, work with the child alone, and then spend a short time with everyone together
 - d) none of the above

- 2.) Name 4 reasons why parents should be involved in therapy sessions:
 - a) _____
 - b) _____
 - c) _____
 - d) _____

- 3.) The parent can correct a child's _____ or misquoted details.

4.) In an adoption therapy session, one of the parent's roles is to be a co-therapist—they know their child better than we do.

- a) True
- b) False

5.) When a parent is in the room, it allows for them to comfort the child when they are upset instead of the therapist. What is this important for?

- a) Knowing how to discipline the child
- b) Bonding and connecting with the child
- c) Understanding better parenting techniques
- d) Using dysregulation as a tactic

6.) In adoption therapy sessions, we teach healthy _____ skills to the child.

7.) One of the reasons to be involved in the child's therapy sessions is to know how to discipline them in the future.

- a) True
- b) False

8.) The main point outlined in several of the reasons for parents to be involved in these therapy sessions is:

- a) To have the child lean on the parents for support rather than the therapist
- b) For parents to learn how to discipline their children
- c) To make sure the children do not make up stories
- d) To understand the child's negative behavior

9.) The child will encounter difficult emotions and issues, and the parent can _____ and support the child through this time.

10.) When the therapist and child focus on past trauma, a parent's presence offers emotional safety.

- a) True
- b) False

Answer Key

1.) What is common practice during family therapy sessions?

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- d) none of the above

2.) Name 4 reasons why parents should be involved in therapy sessions:

- a. Bonding
- b. _onesty
- c. Role Model
- d. Parents are Co-Therapists

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