# FORENSIC COUNSELING SERVICES

Aaron Robb, Ph.D., LPC-S
*Program Director*

Mailing address:
2831 Eldorado Pkwy, Ste. 103-377, Frisco, TX 75033

Telephone: 972-360-7437
www.texascounseling.org


## Letting kids know it is OK to talk in counseling

Counseling is a place where you can learn to talk about your feelings and learn new ways to solve problems. Counseling is not a place for blame; blaming does not solve anything. Your child needs your support in communicating with their counselor. When they sense you are upset or disapproving it shuts them down, it does not demonstrate the kind of communication you want with them, and it makes it harder to resolve issues.

Kids do not always understand why they are doing what they are doing, and probing them for information often takes focus away from building skills and engaging in positive behaviors. Worse than probing kids for information about their own actions (which they may frankly not understand) is using a child to gather information about what is going on with their other parent. Even when your actions are motivated by good intentions, kids often misunderstand and feel pressure as a result of such questioning.

By letting your child know you are open to them sharing and talking with their therapist you give them permission to be themselves. When both parents give their child the same message at the same time the child sees you working together to help them and learns they can be themselves in both of their homes.

Sometimes it takes well-meaning parents time to learn new behaviors; few of us “get it right” on the first try. If parents don’t always live up to these expectations the family can address the fact that we are all human, make mistakes, and have to work on living as our best selves. Giving kids permission to help parents be better alerts parents when they may have inadvertently missed the mark, or when there has been a miscommunication.

Sometimes parents have an unhealthy agenda and interact with their children inappropriately. For those situations with parents who have goals other than openly addressing issues in a healthy way, having the parent articulate a desire for openness (even if they do not mean it) creates an opportunity for the child. By exposing their parent’s contradictory behaviors the child can then learn to adapt to a parent who says one thing but does another. While a less than ideal scenario, it is better than the child never learning to cope with a duplicitous or troubled parent.

For parents raising a child between two homes it is often helpful, once they understand the information above, to communicate this information jointly in a counseling session to their child. I recommend you:

- Meet with your child's counselor beforehand to discuss exact language that works for your child's age and circumstances. Include critical issues such as:
    - It is always OK for your child to talk about how they feel or what they have experienced.
    - There are expectations regarding the child's behavior, and logical consequences when those expectations are unmet, but the child will never be punished for talking about how they feel or for what they chose to bring up to their counselor.
    - If the child and parent have different views on what has happened it is OK for the child to tell their parent or their counselor that the child sees things differently.

- Agree on and write down what you are both going to tell the child on a single 3x5 index card.
    - Each parent should literally be reading the exact same language as the other parent. This way the child hears exactly the same thing from each parent.
    - This isn't a long speech. If it does not fit on a 3x5 card it's likely too long and needs to be reworked.
    - Speak for yourself – use "I" language and talk about what you want.

- Schedule a joint session with the parents, the child or children, and the counselor. You may want to consider adding other family members, such as a stepparent, if appropriate.
    - The session should start with the counselor noting to the child that the parents have something they have agreed to share with the child.
    - The parents should take turns reading the statement on the card to the child. If there is a dispute over who goes first flip a coin with the counselor before you start. The order is not that important.