

Thriving Families
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Letter of Agreement for Separated/Divorced Parents

Psychotherapy can be very helpful for children of a family where there has been or is going to be a separation or divorce. The therapy relationship can:

- Allow a child to safely learn and express strong and natural feelings (such as guilt, grief, sadness, fears, anxiety, and anger).
- Help children understand their realistic part in these transitions, and prevent inappropriate feelings of guilt and misplaced responsibility.
- Help children work out their part in the new family arrangements and learn how to effectively cope with the new relationship dynamics.
- Give observations, feedback, and recommendations to a child's caregivers. These would be based on knowledge of children's emotional needs and the abilities typical of their ages.

However, the value of this therapy will be undermined if the therapy becomes another issue over which parents argue. Because of this possibility, and so I can best help your child, I strongly recommend that each of the child's caregivers accept and agree to the following terms before therapy is started:

1. My main focus as your child's therapist is the best way to respond to your child's emotional needs. To do this best, I may need to meet or talk with your child and each of your child's caregivers (e.g., parents, stepparents, teachers, other mental health or medical providers, Guardian ad Litem or other attorneys, etc.). Phone consultations may be appropriate for daycare providers, teachers, or other professionals. It is very helpful to have parents and stepparents come to the office. I will gather information to understand your child's emotional and behavioral functioning. I may recommend that you consult your pediatrician or other specific professionals.
2. I will not align myself in any way with or against any party to any dispute, and I ask you to all recognize this position, understand it, and make it clear to the child. My allegiance is the best interest of your child.
3. I strongly recommend that parents and caregivers get involved in psychoeducation groups, read books, and/or do their own individual therapy. This way each member can learn how to conduct a divorce in a way that causes the least amount of upset, distress, and harm to the child.
4. Privacy and confidentiality for this kind of therapy has some limits, which you need to know about:
 - I take notes about each therapy session. I also record all contact I have with any people involved with your child. It is possible that these will be subpoenaed by any of you and your attorneys.
 - I have a "no secrets" policy. Please know that the other party could potentially learn any information you tell me.

- Any information that any of you give to me may be revealed to any other caregiver or involved persons.
- I am legally required to act to protect a child if I should come to suspect harm to the child's health or safety. I may also have to act to protect others from harm.

6. I will not be offering any kind of custody recommendations based on this therapy, because the goals, techniques, methods, and kinds of information needed for custody recommendations are different from and may be opposed to those of a child's psychotherapist.

I strongly urge people legally disputing custody of a child to try other ways to resolve the dispute (such as negotiation, mediation, or custody evaluations) and not try to use the courts.

I have compiled this list because I believe that clarity about these points will prevent difficulties that commonly arise. Your signature below indicates that you have read, understand, and agree to the points made.

_____	_____	_____
Caregiver's Signature	Printed Name	Date
_____	_____	_____
Caregiver's Signature	Printed Name	Date
_____	_____	_____
Caregiver's Signature	Printed Name	Date
_____	_____	_____
Child's Name	Date of Birth	Age
_____	_____	_____
Therapist Signature	Printed Name	Date