

Background Information Sheet 2B Counselling Framework



The purpose of this document is to assist non-counsellors and other professionals to better understand how counsellors work with children and young people at Bravehearts and how our methods fit within the frameworks of existing, recognised Therapies.

At Bravehearts we specialise in providing one-on-one counselling to children and young people where sexual assault is substantiated or suspected. For this reason the work that we do is specific and specialised to dealing with the issues most commonly experienced by children who have been sexually assaulted. These issues include, but are not limited to; fear, anger, reduced self esteem, negative thoughts, sleep issues, loss of trust, poor boundaries, sadness, guilt and shame.

It must be understood that:

- Clients are always encouraged to make a statement to Police or contact the Department of Child Safety before beginning counselling at Bravehearts.
- At no point do Bravehearts Counsellors take on the role of questioning children or investigating allegations of assault.
- At no point do Bravehearts counsellors ever initiate conversations regarding sexual assault. If a child discloses to a counsellor that they have been sexually assaulted the counsellor will discuss the child's feelings about the assault. Counsellors never ask any questions regarding the details of the assault.
- Many of our techniques used at Bravehearts have been developed by our own counsellors but all fit within the framework of recognised therapies. Our techniques in no way extend feelings associated with trauma but have been proven to alleviate symptoms and help children heal.

Bravehearts counselling encompasses 3 distinct areas; helping children and young people to process the feelings associated with sexual assault, helping children and parents better manage behaviours experienced after sexual assault and teaching children protective behaviours.

Processing Feelings.

Feelings of anger, fear, sadness, reduced self esteem and loss of trust are all commonly experienced by children and young people after sexual assault. A number of strategies have been developed by Bravehearts counsellors to assist children to learn how to label and express these feelings in appropriate ways. One of the most commonly used tools is the 'Special Box'. The 'Special Box' is often introduced in the first few sessions with a child. The 'Special Box' consists of a shoebox that the counsellor and child will decorate with paper, stickers and other craft items to individualise it for the child. The counsellor explains to the child that the idea of the 'Special Box' is that if they have any bad thoughts, dreams or feelings or if anything makes them feel angry they can write it down or draw a picture about it and that will help them to feel better. It is also explained to the child that the box is private, that they can show people what is in it if they choose

Bravehearts Inc

PO Box 575
Arundel BC
Qld 4214

Ph: 07 5552 3000
Fax: 07 5552 3088

www.bravehearts.org.au
admin@bravehearts.org.au



"Protecting children against sexual assault"



Counselling Framework Continued...

to, but that no one is allowed to look in it without their permission. The 'Special Box' fits within the framework of Expressive Therapies. At no point do counsellors ever tell children that they should be angry or scared of anyone or anything but simply help deal with the feelings expressed by clients.

Managing Behaviour.

The confusion and feelings associated with sexual assault often have an effect children's behaviour at home and at school. Children's anger and fear is often expressed as aggression and directed at parents, siblings or other children. Other children express their fear in chaotic 'attention seeking' behaviour and are deliberately naughty and disruptive. To help in these situations, Bravehearts Counsellors will often explain to parents/caregivers how to use Behaviour Charts to encourage children to better monitor their behaviour. At the same time Counsellors will work with children to find appropriate strategies to help alleviate the feeling behind the behaviours. Behaviour Charts are a recognised tool within Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.

Protective Behaviours.

Bravehearts believes that it is crucial to teach all children protective behaviours for their own personal safety. The tools that we used to teach children these important rules are the Protective Behaviours (PB) Book and the Ditto CD-Rom. Both methods give children age appropriate messages regarding personal safety and at no point mention sex or sexual assault. The book and CD cover topics including; private parts, what private means, rules about touching, good secrets and bad secrets, trusting your instincts and who to tell if you feel unsafe.

Understanding Counselling Notes.

Counsellors write up notes regarding each session they have with a client as soon as possible after the session. Notes include any caregiver feedback, the way the child presented and the general content of the session. It is not the role of a Bravehearts Counsellor to interpret children's play or conversation, simply to document it. If at any point a child discloses to a counsellor the conversation is written down verbatim in the session. If a child does make a disclosure the counsellor will only ask how the child felt about what happened, they will not ask questions to obtain further information from the child. Most of the activities mentioned in the notes can be found in the Bravehearts Counselling Toolbox. Unlike adults, children are not comfortable sitting face-to-face for an hour talking about their feelings and emotions. Other activities such as games and craft projects are used for rapport building and to provide time for counsellors and clients to talk. Bravehearts counselling is Client-Centred, this means that to a large extent the child directs what happens within the session. Client-Centred Therapy provides children with a sense of control and empowerment that is often missing in their everyday life, and is totally absent in the case of sexual assault. Activities such as painting, drawing, sand tray and puppets are all part of Creative and Play Therapy and provide children with an age appropriate medium to safely and comfortably express and explore their feelings and emotions.