Bringing a Friend to Therapy: Information for Adolescents and Parents

Information for Adolescents and Parents

Sometimes adolescents ask if they can bring a friend to a therapy session. In certain situations, this can be a valuable therapeutic intervention. In others, it may interfere with treatment. The decision is made collaboratively between the adolescent, parent or guardian (when appropriate), and the treating clinician based on the client's treatment goals, clinical needs, and stage of therapy.

Why Might a Friend Be Invited?

A friend's participation may be appropriate when it supports a specific therapeutic objective, such as:

- Practicing healthy communication skills.
- Learning to establish and maintain healthy boundaries.
- Resolving a conflict in a structured, supportive environment.
- Increasing comfort and reducing anxiety about attending therapy.
- Strengthening healthy peer relationships.
- Improving interpersonal effectiveness, assertiveness, or problem-solving skills.

The purpose of the session remains focused on the client's treatment goals. The friend is not becoming a therapy client and will not receive treatment during the session.

Potential Benefits

When clinically appropriate, including a trusted friend may:

- Increase engagement in therapy.
- Reduce anxiety or hesitation about attending sessions.
- Provide opportunities to practice communication skills in real time.
- Improve conflict resolution with therapist guidance.
- Strengthen healthy peer support.
- Help adolescents learn how to support friends without taking on the role of counselor.

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Potential Risks

Inviting a friend may not be appropriate in every circumstance. Potential concerns include:

- Reduced willingness to discuss sensitive topics.
- Loss of privacy once personal information is shared with another person.
- Distractions from therapeutic goals.
- Reinforcement of unhealthy relationship patterns, including codependency, enmeshment, or peer pressure.
- The possibility that the friendship changes or ends after the session.

Because of these considerations, every request is evaluated individually.

Expectations Before a Friend Attends

Before a friend may participate:

- The request must be discussed with the treating therapist in advance.
- The therapist will determine whether the visit supports the treatment plan.
- Parents or guardians will be involved in decision-making when appropriate and consistent with applicable laws and clinical practice.
- The friend and, when applicable, the friend's parent or guardian may be asked to provide written consent acknowledging the purpose of the session and the limits of confidentiality.

Please do **not** invite a friend to attend therapy without prior approval from your therapist.

Expectations During the Session

If a friend attends:

- The therapist will explain the purpose and structure of the session.
- Everyone will be expected to communicate respectfully.
- The therapist may redirect conversations that move away from the therapeutic goals.
- Either participant may request private time with the therapist.
- The therapist may end the joint portion of the session or ask the friend to leave if it is no longer clinically beneficial.

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Confidentiality

Therapy is a confidential service. However, inviting another person into a session changes the level of privacy available.

Before the session:

- The therapist will review confidentiality expectations with everyone present.
- The friend will be asked to respect the client's privacy outside of therapy.
- While the therapist is legally and ethically obligated to maintain confidentiality, the therapist cannot guarantee that another participant will keep information private after leaving the session.
- Confidentiality may still be limited by mandatory reporting laws or other legal and ethical obligations.

Alternatives

Sometimes another option is more appropriate than inviting a friend to an individual therapy session, including:

- Individual therapy to prepare for a difficult conversation.
- Family therapy.
- A structured adolescent skills or process group.
- A planned joint session designed specifically to address a relationship concern.

Our Goal

Our goal is to provide a safe, supportive, and clinically effective environment while helping adolescents build healthy relationships and effective communication skills. When involving a friend will meaningfully support treatment, we will work together to determine the most appropriate way to include them.

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