

Being with Children at Co-counselling Events

Being with your own children

Bringing children to a co-counselling event can be an immensely rich and rewarding experience. Children may have opportunities to grow, emotionally and socially; make new friends and participate in new kinds of activities. As with all aspects of child-rearing, however, there can be frustrations for you as a parent, so do not forget to ask for support and sessions if/when you need them!

Please remember that, although there may be times when childcare is arranged, the other people at the event have not contracted to take responsibility for children. This means that you are responsible for your child/ren at all times unless someone else has explicitly agreed to look after them. It is probably not wise to assume that, "There are loads of people around so the kids will be OK" - make sure that the children know either where you are or which adult they can go to if necessary. Whoever is looking after your child/ren also needs to know where you can be found.

Another assumption that may be unwise is that "Everyone here is a co-counsellor so they're all caring, safe, aware people". This may well be true. On the other hand, there may be people who do not share your ideas about what behaviours are appropriate with kids - it's just a point to bear in mind.

Being with other people's children

A co-counselling event with children can be a great opportunity to play with children and, perhaps, regain some of the freedom of childhood. In recent years, however, there has been some discussion about the safety of children at workshops - the guidelines below are intended not only to protect children but also to help you feel relaxed with the young people at the workshop.

Please remember that children may still be learning about boundaries and may need to be reminded to respect yours. If a child is treating you in a way that you find uncomfortable (for example, jumping on you when you wish to have a quiet conversation) please ask the person, politely but firmly, not to do that. It is better for children to be taught to respect other people than to believe that any behaviour is OK. Similarly, if children are being noisy at a time when the group is listening to people (for example, opening circle) then it is better to ask the individuals concerned to be quiet and show respect for the speaker.

Try to avoid creating situations where you will be alone with a child unless you have the parent's permission; for example taking a child for a walk. No matter how innocent your intentions, other people may be suspicious and if there is no other adult present then it could be difficult for you if allegations of improper behaviour are made.

It may be wise to remember that behaviours, which are appropriate with adults, may not be so with children. For example, in woods and water or massage workshops, it is quite usual for some participants to be entirely naked whilst others are completely or partially dressed. In a children's woods and water, however, it may not be appropriate for adults to be entirely unclothed - even though the children may be unperturbed. How would a description of the workshop appear to teachers reading the child's diary next week?

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