



Tips and Techniques for Virtual Counselling



Compiled and Created by Counsel to Secure Justice

Introduction

Counsel to Secure Justice (CSJ) is a Delhi based organisation working towards access to justice with a focus on children. Our work currently focuses on providing restorative practices, psychosocial interventions and legal support to children who have been sexually abused and children in conflict with law.

CSJ has strived tirelessly to ensure that we remain the anchor for children's psychosocial and emotional needs. While re-imagining our course of intervention, we as an organisation have built our own capacity to manoeuvre the challenges with respect to virtual counselling. This document is a compilation of our learning and aims to assist professionals working with children. We hope these tips prove to be efficient and facilitate you in the process.

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Rapport Building



- The counsellors/social workers should have a clear primary objective and must explain their role to the child to begin with.
- For building rapport, one must keep in mind the simple and clear use of language, particularly the language with which the child is comfortable.
- Co-create a safe space with the child, it will help the child develop trust with the counsellor/social worker and encourages a participative approach.
- Establish the fact that the co-created space is judgement free and respects the child's experiences.
- Allow the child to take their own time to develop rapport, do not rush the child.
- Be patient as rapport building may take longer than usual virtually.

Maintaining Continuity & Being Patient with the Child

- The counsellors/social workers can start by establishing routines, especially in the present times when there is so much uncertainty, it assures the child of some certainty.
- Schedule the sessions on particular days and fix suitable timings. This will help maintain the continuity. Involve the child in making such decisions and encourage their autonomy in the process.
- Try to keep same backgrounds for video conferencing to bring in more predictability as well.



Flexibility in Practice

- Being flexible with the children gives the sense of 'I understand, or I care' which is helpful.
- It is important the children are allowed to negotiate the process with you such as time frame of the session, doing certain activities while talking such as colouring or playing some game.
- As social worker/counselor, there is a need to be flexible as the settings that we always worked in have changed.
- Learning should not only be limited to traditional methods; we have to explore newer ways constantly hence reliance on traditional methods for learning may not always work.



- Allow the child to ask as many questions during the process, allow yourself and children break in between sessions.

- Be flexible in exploring different online platforms for virtual counselling with the child, for example zoom, google meet, or chat etc.

Confidentiality and Informed Consent

- 🌟 Establishing confidentiality is crucial as it will encourage the child to share.
- 🌟 Explain the limits of confidentiality to the child and under what circumstances the counsellor/social worker may need to share certain information with someone.
- 🌟 Let the child know that they have the right to withdraw and refrain from answering any question and or participate in any activity at a given point of time.
- 🌟 Take the child's consent if you are planning to take notes during the session. Tell them why you need to take notes.



- Keep yourself legally informed about confidentiality and discuss with the child what are the legal obligations as to maintaining confidentiality and the implications too.
- Look at section 33, 37 and rule 4 (8) of the POCSO Act, 2012. And section 3(xi), 99(1) and 74 of the Juvenile Justice Act.

Planning a Session



- Make a pre-session checklist to ensure smooth functioning such as the internet connection, audio-visual settings, sitting in a no-disturbance zone etc.
- It is essential that social workers/counsellors maintain case notes as it helps in preparing for the upcoming session.
- Discuss with the child prior to the session about disturbances or technical glitches that may occur on both ends.
- Try to reflect on the previous session with the child to understand how it has helped them. This process is also helpful in obtaining feedback from the child.
- Identify the needs of the child and plan the session focusing on those needs. For example, prepare activities to help de-stress the child as they are concerned about approaching tests in school or working particularly on certain emotions such as anger, self-harm, low self-esteem etc.
- If the identified objectives are achieved involve the child to decide what are the other things, they may need help with.
- It is important that social workers/ counsellors continuously work on building their own capacities via participating in workshops and trainings. It is also essential that we seek guidance/help from other professionals in the field as well.



Safety Tool Kit

The social workers/counselors can have a safety tool kit ready keeping in mind that there can be situations where the child has immediate needs. For example, in cases of any kind of abuse or threat to the child's safety, the counselor should be able to provide immediate assistance and ensure the safety of the child first.

- Inform the parent/caregiver/authorities
- Educate the child about available resources
- Discuss about coping skills & support systems
- Trust on your instincts and pick signs
- Share a list of helpline numbers with the child



Reach out for help – 1098 (Childline), 100 (Police) or contact the CWC/DCPU

Using Helpful Activities & Grounding Techniques

What is grounding?

It is a technique that helps keep someone in the present. These activities can be helpful in managing intense anxiety and overwhelming feelings

- ✿ The counselors/social workers can practice grounding techniques with children such as breathing exercises. It can be used to calm them down in stressful situations. It is also a great way to break the ice and build rapport with the child.
- ✿ The counselors should perform the activities along with the children and should not only stick to the traditional methods of counseling. Having a more interactive session can be helpful in establishing rapport with the child.



Resources

For easy use we have compiled other useful resources. To access them please visit:

- 📄 https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1QjXcMYQ3q3b40qgwiRnUpWe9xTq_Xfn3?usp=sharing
- 📄 <https://childmind.org/coping-during-covid-19-resources-for-parents/>
- 📄 <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors/professional-development/learn-more/virtual-school-counseling-toolkit>

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