



Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP)



What is it?

Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP) is for young children from babies to kindergarten age and their parents. In a nice play room, a counselor and the parent talk about the child's life and the parent's early experiences. They play together with the child.

The idea behind CPP is that parents and children sometimes have trouble in their relationship because of scary things that happened to the child or the parent. Carrying those bad memories around can make parents feel bad about themselves and can get in the way of having a happy relationship with their child. Painful or scary experiences can make it hard for both parent and child to control their behavior and emotions. CPP helps the parent and child feel safe with each other. For parents who have spent a lot of time feeling unsafe, CPP can help them feel stronger and better able to take charge of their lives, and help them with parenting.

Source: Osofsky, J. (June 12, 2017), Child-Parent Psychotherapy. Personal communication. Adapted with permission.



How does this work with babies?

Babies cannot talk in words but every smile, wiggle, and cry is meant to tell parents something. In CPP, the counselor helps the parent learn to understand their baby's signals. Every child is special and unique and every child goes through similar developmental steps. The CPP counselor and the parent spend time together enjoying the baby and learning together about that baby's learning style.

So, what can a parent expect from CPP with their child?

A central goal of CPP is to support and strengthen the parent-child relationship. CPP assists parents in understanding how to best help their young children feel safe and secure. It helps parents learn that "behavior has meaning" and with that understanding, help their children name and cope with strong feelings.

In CPP, the counselor does not tell the parent what to do. Rather, CPP helps a parent understand their feelings toward their child and how even their own early experiences may affect how they interact with their children. CPP focuses on stresses in the parent's life that may affect the parent-child relationship. Parents learn to recognize their painful feelings and to cope with anger and sadness in ways that don't harm themselves or their children.

If the child is a little older, what would this look like?

As children begin to use words, the counselor and parent change the way they play with the child. The counselor helps the parent understand that the child's history can affect how they behave, the ways they show us their feelings, and how the parent's earlier painful experiences can affect their actions and relationship with their child. The parent will learn how to have fun with their child and how to provide a safe home that will support the child's development.