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INFORMATION LEAFLET ON SOCIO-EMOTIONAL ASSESSMENTS

Thank you for choosing Rooted for the socio-emotional assessment of your child. We would like to take this opportunity to provide you with more information on the assessment and our foundational beliefs when it comes to working with children.

This information forms part of our process of informed consent. Please carefully read through this document and raise any questions regarding your child's assessment journey with your therapist.

Purpose Of The Socio-Emotional Assessment

The purpose of the socio-emotional assessment of the child is to evaluate different systems in the child's world as well as the child's socio-emotional functioning and emotional experience of these systems. The evaluation further aims to identify and understand different factors that contribute to the child's current experiences, in order to make the necessary recommendations in the best interest of the child (Webb, 2011:61). The evaluation process is conducted from a systems viewpoint that recognizes that the child is influenced by the system it belongs to, just as the system is affected by the individuals that belong to it.

Here's why assessment is crucial:

- Assessment helps the social worker gain a comprehensive understanding of the child's life context, including family dynamics, school environment, social interactions, and any significant life events. This contextual information provides insights into potential triggers or stressors that may be influencing the child's behaviour.

- Children's behavioural issues often stem from underlying emotional, psychological, or developmental factors. Assessment allows the social worker to delve deeper into the child's inner world and emotions, uncovering any unresolved conflicts, traumas, fears, or anxieties that may be contributing to their behaviour.

- Every child is unique, and their challenges are often multifaceted. A thorough assessment helps the therapist tailor the treatment approach to the child's specific needs. Through assessment, the social worker can identify specific behaviours, emotional responses, or other issues that need to be addressed.

- Children may have multiple issues or concerns that contribute to their behaviour. Assessment helps identify co-existing conditions such as anxiety, depression, ADHD, or sensory processing issues. Identifying these issues as part of an assessment process leads to a more holistic and effective treatment approach.

- Ethical practice requires a thorough understanding of the client's needs and circumstances. Assessment ensures that interventions are evidence-based, culturally sensitive, and tailored to the child's unique background and experiences.

Various Contexts Within Which Socio-Emotional Assessment Can Be Conducted

Therapy

Socio-emotional assessment serves as a crucial foundational step in therapy by providing an in-depth understanding of an individual's emotional well-being, interpersonal dynamics, and coping mechanisms. This assessment illuminates underlying emotional challenges, identifies strengths, and offers insights into patterns of behaviour and interaction.

As a starting point to therapy, it enables therapists to tailor interventions precisely to the individual's unique needs, facilitating a more effective and targeted therapeutic process. By establishing a comprehensive baseline of emotional functioning, socio-emotional assessment empowers therapists to create a supportive and personalised treatment plan that addresses emotional concerns, enhances self-awareness, and promotes meaningful growth and healing.

Voice of the Child

A socio-emotional assessment can serve as a powerful voice for the child by providing a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. It enables professionals to effectively capture and communicate the child's perspective in various ways. In essence, a socio-emotional assessment acts as a translator, converting the child's emotions, behaviours, and interactions into meaningful insights that amplify their voice, ensuring their emotions and needs are acknowledged, understood, and integrated into decision-making processes that shape their well-being.

Investigations into Primary Residency, Care and Contact

Socio-emotional assessment plays a crucial role in investigations related to primary residency, care, and contact arrangements for children. It focuses on understanding the emotional well-being, social interactions, and psychological needs of the child involved in such cases.

Socio-emotional assessment examines the child's relationships with parents, caregivers, and other important individuals. It aims to identify the nature and quality of these relationships, as well as the child's level of comfort, trust, and communication with each party. This assessment can shed light on how different residency and contact arrangements might influence the child's emotional connections and bonding.

In essence, socio-emotional assessment provides a holistic understanding of the child's emotional state and needs, guiding decisions and arrangements that aim to foster a stable and emotionally nurturing environment during times of transition in primary residency, care, and contact arrangement.

Pre-forensic evaluation where there are concerns regarding possible abuse.

A socio-emotional assessment can play a crucial role as an initial evaluation in cases where there are concerns about abuse. This assessment goes beyond traditional evaluations and focuses on understanding the emotional well-being, behavioural patterns, and social interactions of the child involved.

It provides a neutral and objective assessment through which all the significant adults in the world of the child and all the systems the child is involved in is evaluated. It focuses on understanding the emotional well-being, social interactions, and psychological needs, relationship dynamic, and possible areas of concern related to the child involved in such cases. This approach recognises the potential trauma associated with abuse and aims to minimise re-traumatisation during the assessment process while gathering comprehensive detail about the child.

Broad Outline Of The Socio-Emotional Assessment Process

The socio-emotional assessment process can be outlined as follows:

Step 1: History free socio-emotional assessment sessions with the child (*depending on the age of the child and the presence of any developmental delays or learning deficits*).

Step 2: Perusal of collateral information in the form of questionnaires completed by parents and the school.

Step 3: Collateral interview with parents

Step 4: Feedback session to parents

Note: The number of sessions and specific activities will vary depending on the child's unique circumstances and the purpose for which the assessment is being conducted.

During the evaluation we will be taking a holistic look at your child's functioning in all areas. Areas that will be evaluated during the evaluation will include amongst others:

- School and peer relationships.
- Relationship with parents and siblings.
- Child's experience of marital relationship of parents.

- Other significant people.
- Relationships in which the child might be experiencing discomfort.
- Attachment.
- Screening for possible exposure to trauma including physical and/or sexual abuse.
- Screening for exposure to alcohol or drug abuse or domestic violence
- Gender identity / dysphoria
- Losses

When working with primary school age children and older the assessment is usually complete either in a once off 2 hour session, or over two sessions of 1 hour each. For our toddlers and pre-schoolers in order to ensure a developmentally sensitive process it is sometimes necessary to do the assessment over three sessions of 1 hour each.

If a follow-up session is scheduled, please note that the therapist will not give any feedback between the different sessions in order to complete the evaluation in a history free manner.

Collateral Investigation

A collateral investigation is a way for us to gather a more comprehensive understanding of your child's socio-emotional well-being. It involves gathering information from various sources, including parents, caregivers, teachers, and other relevant individuals who are involved in your child's life. The goal of this investigation is to paint a complete and accurate picture of your child's strengths, challenges, and overall emotional development.

By involving different perspectives, we can gain insights that might not be readily apparent in a traditional assessment. This process helps us create a more holistic assessment plan, which ultimately leads to better support and guidance for your child.

During the evaluation you will be asked to complete a questionnaire regarding your child. Please complete this as honestly and thoroughly as possible, as it provides us with valuable detail. We also require a questionnaire to be completed by your child's school. Both these forms will be emailed to you after your appointment has been scheduled. Please hand in the completed questionnaire prior to your scheduled feedback session with the therapist.

Upon completion of the evaluation the therapist will arrange a collateral interview with you during which thorough information regarding your concern and reason for the referral will be gathered.
The information collected during the collateral investigation is treated with the utmost confidentiality and is solely used to help us better understand and support your child. It's a collaborative process that ultimately aims to ensure your child's well-being and success.

If you have any questions or concerns about the collateral investigation or any other aspect of the assessment process, please don't hesitate to bring this under the attention of your therapist.

Feedback Session

After the collateral interview, once the therapist has had the opportunity to integrate all the available information, a feedback interview will be scheduled during which verbal feedback regarding our findings, and recommendations will be provided.

Feedback is provided to both parents simultaneously. If parents request separate feedback appointments, a 2nd feedback session will be added at an additional consultation fee.

In the case of the socio-emotional assessment being done as part of any psycho-legal investigation (Voice of the child / Investigation into primary residency, care, and contact / Pre-forensic evaluation) feedback will only be provided once the investigation has been finalised. Please take note that where the socio-emotional assessment is court mandated as a part of a psycho-legal investigation direct feedback to parent will not be provided.

Here's what you can expect during the feedback session and how your participation contributes:

- The social worker will present the assessment results to you in a clear and comprehensible manner. This will include an overview of your child's strengths, challenges, and any areas of concern that were identified.
- This is your opportunity to ask any questions you may have about the assessment process, the results, or any terms that may need further clarification. Your understanding of the assessment findings is vital for effective decision-making moving forward.
- We will engage in a collaborative conversation about your child's socio-emotional well-being. Your insights, observations, and perspective as a parent are incredibly valuable. Feel free to share any additional information you believe is relevant to better understand your child's needs.
- Together, we will discuss potential strategies, interventions, and goals that can be set to support your child's emotional growth and development. Your input will help us tailor these recommendations to your family's unique circumstances.

The feedback session empowers you to make informed decisions about your child's future. Your active participation ensures that you have a clear understanding of the assessment results and are equipped with the knowledge needed to advocate for your child's needs effectively.

If you have any questions or would like to prepare specific topics for discussion during the feedback session, please don't hesitate to reach out. If you would like us to provide verbal feedback to a school and/or other professional, please inform the therapist. Please sign the necessary forms providing us with permission to provide feedback as per your request.

PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR THE SOCIO-EMOTIONAL ASSESSMENT

Parents often feel unsure about what to say to children and/or how to prepare their child for the socio-emotional assessment. The preparation of the child is however imperative as it can counter unnecessary feelings of anxiety or fear that children may experience.

Explain to your child that he is going to visit a lady who works with kids. This lady work with kids every day and her job is to get to know him/her a little better and finding out how his heart is doing. Her job is to find out what are the things in his/her life that they like that make them feel happy and also the things in their lives what they don't like and that makes them feel sad or unhappy – so that in the end we (you the child and the therapist) can make plans to make sure that he is happy, most of the time.

Give the message to the child that you know the therapist and trust her, and that he is allowed to tell her anything that he wants to. Reassure him that there is nothing that he shouldn't say or that you will be angry about. Please refrain from using the words "play" when preparing the child for the session. This often creates the wrong expectations with the child expecting to spend the time playing and thus making it difficult to get through all the "work" that needs to be completed during the assessment. If you would like to you can explain that they will be doing many different things, including drawing and looking at pictures, building puzzles ext.

If there is a specific concern, please refrain from encouraging the child to talk about that, as that can influence the assessment and without meaning to contaminate the child's authentic information. Please ensure that your child had breakfast before coming to the assessment. Please pack a light snack (something healthy to eat and drink) should the child become hungry during the assessment. The child is also allowed to bring a security object to the session if it is needed.

Please don't make promises that you cannot keep. Don't promise that you will stay with the child, as the assessment cannot continue with a parent in the room. Please don't promise that you will stay in the waiting room, if you are in fact planning to leave while the assessment is busy.

Thank you for assisting us in making the assessment both predictable and fun for your child.