



## Calming Waters Counseling

447 S. Sharon Amity Rd, Suite 105, Charlotte, NC 28211

P: 980-299-7436

F: 980-226-5507

www.amandaklcsw.com

### **Reunification Therapy: A balance of four roles**

Thank you so much for choosing our practice, Amanda K. Crowder, LCSW, PLLC practicing as Calming Waters Counseling to work with you and your family using reunification therapy. Reunification therapy is one of the most challenging and difficulty therapies for a number of different reasons. Many times, both parents are angry with each other; and many times, both want the therapy to go "their way". Because of common problems that occur in every reunification therapy case, a document has been prepared that describes each role involved in the case, and each party is requested to sign in agreement to the following certain "rules" and recommendations:

**Role of custodial parent:** This is the parent who currently lives with the child(ren) and typically has a good relationship with the child(ren). This parent is often wary of the reunification therapy process and unsure if he/she even wants the child(ren) to see the other parent again. For therapy to work, this parent needs to FULLY support the therapy process by:

1. Scheduling the child(ren)'s appointments in a timely manner and at the frequency recommended by the therapist, and/or as ordered by the court.
2. Not engaging in discussions with the child(ren) about therapy or court proceedings. If your child(ren) initiates a discussion about therapy or court, please give a reminder of privacy. If your child(ren) persists, then please advise the therapist for further recommendations in addressing concerns and questions.
3. If you have concerns, please schedule your own appointment to discuss these concerns. Do not discuss concerns with your child(ren).
4. Encourage the child(ren) to participate, follow the recommendations, and trust the therapist as the therapist is going to ensure their emotional well-being, safety, and happiness.
5. Follow all of the therapist's recommendations and trust the process.

**Role of estranged parent:** This is the parent who has often not seen his/her child(ren) in some time and is using reunification therapy as a tool to rebuild the relationship (and resume visitation, in most cases). This parent is usually very eager for therapy to begin and sometimes wants to pressure the therapist to move faster and "tell the other parent" what they should or shouldn't do. This parent also sometimes struggles to accept feedback from the child(ren) and apologizes or make amends when needed. For therapy to succeed, this parent needs to:

1. Understand the problems took a long time to occur, and therapy cannot change things overnight. The parent has to be patient and trust the therapist will move things along at a pace appropriate given the specific circumstances of the case. This parent should not tell the therapist what to do with respect to "making" the other parent do certain things.
2. Accept feedback from the child(ren) about what the parent has done to contribute to problems or hurt the child(ren). Don't be defensive and blame the child(ren) or the other parent. Apologize with sincerity and reassure the child(ren) he/she wants to make amends and earn back their trust.
3. Follow the therapist's recommendations about when to send written communication or be available by phone or in-person sessions.

Role of the child(ren): Some children do not want to attend reunification therapy. They have often been hurt by the other parent, and sometimes have been told negative things about the other parent (or misleading things). They often do not have the "full picture" of what has happened between their parents, and are often adamant that they do not want or need a relationship with the other parent. In order for therapy to be successful, the child(ren) need to:

1. Attend therapy when their parent tells them they have a session. If not, then there needs to be consequences in place as this process is mandated by the court.
2. Come to therapy with an open mind, ready to consider that the other parent is not "all bad" in the same way their custodial parent is not "all good". Be open to talking about the situation from a new perspective, and be open-minded about therapy helping to heal past disappointments and hurts.
3. Trust that the therapist has their best interest at heart, and will only make recommendations when the therapist thinks they are ready (the child may not feel that way, but that's where the trust comes in). Follow all therapist's recommendations, knowing it will be "baby steps" of monitoring progress, and no drastic changes.
4. Respect the confidentiality and privacy of your therapy sessions. Your parents have been advised not to discuss the therapy with you, as these are your sessions, and this is your potentially "new" relationship with the estranged parent.

Therapist's role: The therapist is not "team mom" or "team dad". The therapist is also not going to only empathize with and validate the child(ren)'s feelings. While the therapist will do that at times, the therapist's role is to challenge the child(ren) to think and behave differently, and to gently move the process forward while taking note of: the estranged parent's behavior, the custodial parent's support, and the child(ren)'s well-being. As ordered, or applicable, the therapist will provide updates to the court or attorneys about the progress of therapy and everyone's adherence to these guidelines and recommendations.

Should these guidelines not be followed, your case will be subject for review to determine appropriate course of action, including but not limited to, progress update to the court and/or referral to an alternative provider.

Typical Outline of Reunification Therapy Process:

1. Review of materials, one meeting with custodial parent, one meeting with non-custodial parent, and 2-4 meetings with child(ren).
2. Start sessions with the child(ren) and non-custodial parent together to improve communication, heal past disappointments and hurts, establish goals for a healthy relationship, and re-establish a positive and fun connection. Sometimes, the custodial parent is asked to be a part of the first few sessions for more comfort. This depends on how the child(ren) are doing and the age of the child(ren). The number of sessions during this step varies and is dependent upon how severe the problems are and how supportive each parent is of the process.
3. Sessions are spaced out or are scheduled "off-site" at fun locations so the parent and child can have more natural interactions (parks, museums, restaurants, etc.).
4. The therapist can help provide feedback to parents, attorneys, or judges regarding visitation and custody, and if reunification therapy is still needed. This will typically be discussed while in court.

**Custodial parent:**

I have read the above and agree to follow the reunification therapy guidelines of this practice. I understand session notes will not be released, so that confidentiality can be ensured and the details of the reunification therapy are protected.

I agree to follow the recommended steps listed above in order to help therapy succeed:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Non-Custodial/Estranged parent:**

I have read the above and agree to follow the reunification therapy guidelines of this practice. I understand session notes will not be released, so that confidentiality can be ensured and the details of the reunification therapy are protected.

I agree to follow the recommended steps listed above in order to help therapy succeed:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Child 1:**

I agree to follow the recommended steps listed above in order to help therapy be successful:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Child 2:**

I agree to follow the recommended steps listed above in order to help therapy be successful:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*Treatment summaries will be provided on a regular basis. Fees associated with any documentation are based on the fee schedule outlined in the court fees agreement.*