



The New Zealand Psychological Society

Te Rōpū Mātai Hinengaro o Aotearoa

Qualifications for Counselling Children through the Family Court

Submission to the Ministry of Justice

on behalf of the

New Zealand Psychological Society

Introduction

The New Zealand Psychological Society welcomes the opportunity to comment on the qualifications required to undertake counseling with children in the context of the Family Court and in accordance with the Care of Children Act 2004 and the Care of Children Amendment Act 2008.

We note that that Section 46P relates to post-orders counselling to assist children accepting the terms of the orders, Section 46t(3)(9c) to establishing the children's views and communicating these to their parents and Section 46Z to counselling to clarify the children's views for a mediation conference at which they might attend. It is our view that the qualification criteria for post-order counselling should be a higher degree (Masters level degree plus post-graduate diploma or higher degree) because of the probable complexity of the presenting issues.

Counselling Qualifications

In general the Society believes that qualifications for counselling children in a Family Court context need be based on defined standards for training and practice in this very specialized area. The qualifications should be conferred by an accredited educational institution, the counsellor should be registered by a Responsible Authority under the

Health Practitioners Competency Assurance Act, be a member of a professional body and be subject to a code of ethics including a requirement for supervision.

The practitioner should also have at least two and preferably four years experience in working therapeutically with children and their families, to have had at least two years working in the Family Court system and have an understanding of the principles of the Family Court and the relevant Acts.

We believe that content of the qualifications should include most of the following areas with an additional expectation that the counsellor will have knowledge and practical competency in the areas that are important in any one referral.

- Knowledge of child development and parenting
- Knowledge of family systems and dynamics
- Knowledge of the effects of separation and divorce on children
- Knowledge of developmentally appropriate care plans for children
- Skills and experience in interviewing children generally
- Skills and experience in assessing family relationships and ascertaining children's wishes
- Theoretical knowledge about and skills for general therapeutic work with children
- Skills in solution-based counselling skills within a resilience and positive wellbeing model
- Skills in behavioural counselling and therapy
- Skills in conflict resolution and mediation
- Bicultural competencies and competencies in working with diverse groups

In addition we believe that the qualifications and experience in Section 46P counselling should where relevant include knowledge and skills in working with children in the context of:

- alienation and reconnection processes (children and adults)
- post trauma intervention
- attachment issues
- parenting issues (including neglect)

- developmental and educational issues in childhood
- family violence
- adult drug and alcohol addiction
- mental health issues (children and adults)
- sexual identity issues
- relocation issues

Context for the Counselling of Children in the Family Court

The Society believes that counselling of children in the Family Court needs to take place within a context of opportunities for professionals to communicate with others who are working with the family. It would also be helpful if the Family Court were to develop protocols about the documents that are made available to counsellors, for example Lawyer for Children's reports, Section 133 reports and the relevant Decisions and Judgments of the Court.

Conclusion

The New Zealand Psychological Society will be pleased to assist further in the any continued consideration of these issues. Please contact Dr Pamela Hyde, Executive Director – executivedirector@psychology.org.nz, Ph: (04) 473 4883