

## Considering Therapy for Children involved in Child Welfare:

### **WHY? *If therapy is not carefully considered, it can create instability and uncertainty***

- Therapy (or the input of a therapeutic professional) might benefit a child experiencing:
  - Problem Behaviour: a child may be demonstrating difficult behaviour as a result of uncertainty and change, and/or traumatic experiences. If the child is still in limbo, therapy may not be helpful. However, with the right factors in place, therapy might provide the child with the opportunity to develop new coping skills and self-regulation strategies.
  - Experience of Trauma: If the child has continuity of care in place and has secure caregivers to turn to, they might benefit from therapy to unpack traumatic experiences in their past.
  - Placement insecurity: If the child's placement is at risk, some therapy may be helpful in supporting the child in the home, however it would be vital for this to include the caregivers to work on interactions.
  - Often, the way to support the child is to support the caregiver in helping the child on a daily basis.

### **WHEN? *Considerations of the timing of intervention is meaningful in influencing the outcome***

- The child needs to feel secure about their basic needs being met before addressing trauma and abuse can be effective. Ongoing trauma and safety concerns will preoccupy the child's brain and not allow for the learning of new coping skills.
- The child needs to be in a stable placement where they have a supportive caregiver who can encourage and support the therapeutic process.
- The child needs to have sufficient emotional and cognitive capacity to be able to engage in the therapeutic process.
- The therapist will need to work with the child to integrate their current circumstances and past experiences, and work with current caregivers to support the child in any issues that arise as a result of therapy.

### **HOW? *What modality might best fit the child's needs and abilities?***

- At times it might be more beneficial for the child's caregivers to engage in a therapeutic process to develop and enhance skills in helping the child to regulate during difficult moments.
- Play Therapy involves a therapist providing opportunities during play (therapist- or child-driven) to therapeutically address themes and experiences.
- Talk Therapy involves a therapist engaging a child in discussions or activities to generate therapeutic strategies for addressing problems.
- Choosing play-based or talk therapy, individual or group depends on the child's age and stage of development, their cognitive and emotional capacity, and their preference.
- In choosing a therapist, consider:
  - Does the therapist have experience working with children who have experienced trauma?
  - Can the therapist help the child to understand and integrate their current and past experiences?
  - Can the therapist provide a sustainable relationship and remain committed to seeing the child for the time needed (i.e.. Are there any changes to their availability in the foreseeable future?)
  - Can the therapist work with the child's caregivers to help them support the child at home with resulting behaviours and issues?

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