

Parent Partnership

Parent Recommendations for Somatic Treatment with Children

By Brandy Vanderheiden MFT

I'm so glad for you and your child that you are ready to make the commitment to somatic work with me. Your role is crucial for your child's ability to heal through these sessions. Here are some ways you can increase the chances of success.

Intake appointment:

- Our first session is an intake with adults only. This is the time for me to get to know you, your child, and your family. I will gather details of your child's symptoms, behavior and history.
- Please be sure to let me know about any other therapies or treatments your child is doing.
- During your intake appointment, we will decide on the treatment plan and frequency of visits. I find it helpful to choose a regular time each week to meet because consistency is holds the container for the healing.

Before we start:

- Part of the healing is the one-on-one relationship that you share with your child. One of the goals in therapy is to increase or improve the relationship. Because of the intensity of the work, it's best that you do not bring other siblings to appointments.
- Depending on your child's age, personality and the situation, you will want to tell them something about what we are going to do together. Ask me if you want suggestions for your child.
 - Example: Brandy is a therapist who helps people like you and me relax. When we go to see her she will have some things planned for you and her to do. I'll be there with you the whole time.
- Some children enjoy resting or napping during our sessions, however others will need something to do while on the table. Please bring a book, fidgets or other activity to keep them engaged during our session. Please no electronic devices or phones during session.
- Some children prefer to sit, while others will lie on their side, stomach or back. All are okay.

In Session:

While working with your child, my intention is always to build a sense of safety.

1. It is best for your child that you are present during all sessions.
2. During our sessions, I think it's best that we do not discuss adult matters in front of your child. I will communicate with you by email regarding your child's progress. You are always welcome to email me if there are unusual symptoms, behaviors or incidents. I will email you Monday-Friday between 9am and 8pm.

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3. Because of the attraction that your child may have to mobile phones or devices, please do not bring them into session.
4. Please keep conversation to a minimum while the child is on the table.
5. It is not necessary for your child to discuss stressful content for healing to take place. If there is something happening that I should know about, please email me before the session.
6. There may be times when I need you to sit next to me at the table. Other times you can sit and relax.
7. While your child is in session with me, please allow me to handle behaviors.
8. As your child enters a state of relaxation and regulation, he/she/they may look to you for connection. They may seek eye contact, your hand, or want to snuggle with you after they come off the table. Please feel free to meet these needs when they arise.

After Session

- The longer your child stays in this regulated state, the more he/she/they will be able to maintain it and the greater the healing.
- Please do not question your child about what took place in the session. This allows for deeper integration.
- When you leave the office, the two of you will be “co-regulating” to keep the state.
- Please avoid planning high energy activities after session.
- It may be difficult to focus on homework after a session, at least for an hour or two.
- You may notice that things come up for you after session. Realize that you have participated in the session. We ask you to do good self care by drinking water and resting along with your child after session.

In Between Sessions:

- Remember the time we are working together is a “healing phase.” During this phase, parenting might be different from other times. During the healing phase, the priority is present time. The focus is on helping build regulation and strengthening relationships between parent and child.
- Please note anything different or unusual directly after session and throughout the week and note how long it lasts (e.g. fatigue, restlessness, agitation, calm, cooperation, etc).
- To support self-regulation during this healing phase, you will be watching for signs that your child is going into our out of regulation. When your child goes out of regulation he/she/they will

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go to patterns of “management” like whining, complaining, anger, tantrums, fatigue, isolating, video games, anxiety, refusing, etc.

- When your child goes out of regulation, your job is to support bringing them back to regulation by:
 1. Reducing activation in the environment (sensory stimulus, sibling challenges, etc.)
 2. Staying with the child while they calm down.
- Please use “time in” instead of “time out” when your child is upset or acting out.

Other Predictors of Success:

- When both parents are in agreement about the treatment and parenting strategies, children tend to improve faster.
- When at least one parent also receives Somatic treatment with me, it helps the parent stay calm during intense times as well as giving a first-hand understanding about what their child might be experiencing.

Important resources for parents:

- Free Online Developmental Trauma presentation. Watch a presentation by me on developmental trauma and learn the basic concepts I use to help parents understand their child’s nervous system. Free on my website.
- Dr. Stephen Terrell. See the parent resources on my website for an interview with Stephen. This is especially helpful for understanding basic concepts of regulation.
- Dr. Laura Markham. I recommend Dr. Laura Markham’s work for the nuts and bolts of parenting through the healing phase and beyond. Her website *ahaparenting.com* is an excellent resource for specific questions. The book *Peaceful Parents, Happy Kids* gives great fundamentals that support our somatic work. For help with sibling challenges, she also has *Peaceful Parent, Happy Siblings*.
- *Parenting from the Inside Out* by Daniel Siegel. To understand why what your child is doing triggers you.
- *Traumaproofing Your Kids*, By Dr. Peter Levine and Maggie Kline. Wonderful information to keep on hand to support the emotional health of your children through anything from falls, losses, surgeries, and more.