



TIPS FOR OPERATIONALIZING AND TRACKING SYMPTOMS, Ashley Fiore, LCSW

1. Try to get the client and caregiver to help you operationalize the symptoms causing distress -- the smaller you can make each symptom the better. Otherwise, you may be comparing apples to oranges, and you want to make sure you're tracking the same thing each week. An example would be: "How many times this week did your heart beat really fast when you thought about sexual abuse?" Or "how bad were your nightmares this week on a scale of 1-10?"
2. Consider intensity, severity, and duration. An example would be: "How many times this week did your heart beat really fast when you thought about the sexual abuse?" Or "how bad were your nightmares this week on a scale of 1-10?"
3. Operationalize each symptom you want to track; get input from the client and caregiver on what each wants to track. Focus on 2-3 symptoms for the child and 2-3 for the caregiver; no more than 5 combined.
4. Use their responses on the measures to guide you (and let them see you are really taking what they said and using it!), but also conceptualize it from the perspective of "Our job is to shrink your symptoms; how would you know you were doing better?"
5. Everything we do is focused on reducing the child's symptoms, including equipping the parent with the skills needed to coach the child in using coping skills and using effective parenting to reduce their symptoms, whether behavioral or emotional.
6. You'll ask them each session to rate their progress. Don't worry if they're really just telling you about the day before the session rather than capturing the data to reflect the whole week. That snapshot will show a trend over time.
7. Make sure you track symptoms in separate sessions with client and caregiver. Otherwise, you run the risk of working against your goal of all conjoint sessions being positively focused. This may result in the child feeling criticized by the caregiver to the therapist about his/her behavior that week (symptoms).



Weekly Progress Sheet

Operationalized
Symptom or Problem

