

How Can I Connect to My Loved One's Therapist?

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[Amanda Ann Gregory, LCPC, EMDR Certified](#)

Your loved one is participating in therapy, and you desperately want to talk to their therapist. How can you do this? As a therapist, I encounter this question often. There are many reasons why you might want to connect with a loved one's therapist. Here are some the most common that I've encountered:

- You feel that your loved one is not being honest with their therapist.
- You want to provide information and insights that the therapist might not have.
- You're concerned about your loved one and you want to know what's happening in therapy and what that plan is to help them.
- You want to know if your loved one's therapist is a good fit for them.

Connecting with a child's therapist

Legal guardians of children usually have the ability to communicate with the child's therapist. However, I recommend that guardians do not seek complete information from the therapist. In fact, some child therapists will not allow guardians full access due to their need to provide a safe and confidential space for the child. If you are the legal guardian of a child in therapy, contact their therapist directly to discuss sharing information.

All therapists need written permission

Here's a hard truth. If your loved one is an adult without legal guardianship, you cannot talk to their therapist without their written permission. Due to HIPPA regulations, an adult client must give their written permission for a therapist to communicate in any way with anyone (with the exception of immediate safety concerns as observed by the therapist). Usually, your loved one will need to sign a prepared form. However, this form does not automatically provide you full access to all information. Your loved one can restrict the information their therapist is allowed to share. For example, your loved one can give their therapist permission to talk about family dynamics and parenting interventions but not their diagnosis or sexual history.

Methods to coordinate with therapists

Once your loved one has given written permission, there are many ways in which you can connect with their therapist. It's best to coordinate with your loved one in order to decide which method is best. Also, their therapist might have suggestions or preferences. Here are some ideas:

- Attend a family therapy session with your loved one so that your loved one is present during all communication that you have with their therapist.
- Attend a family therapy session without your loved one present. (Note: Some therapists might require that you attend a scheduled session so that they are able to receive compensation for their time and effort).
- Reach out to the therapist by phone or email in order to arrange a time to connect.

- Send the therapist official medical records to review.

Why is the therapist not responding?

There are times when you may contact a therapist and they do not respond. Here are some reasons why this occurs:

- The therapist does not have written permission from your loved one. Without this, a therapist cannot admit that they are your loved one's therapist, even if you know that they are. If you were to call the therapist and say, "I'm Ann's mother and I'd like to talk to you." The therapist may respond "I cannot confirm or deny the existence of this person. If you feel that this is an error, please speak with them." If you send an email, text, or voice message, you will likely not receive a response.
- The therapist has written permission but has not yet coordinated with your loved one to discuss the specifics of your request.
- The therapist believes that sharing information with you will be detrimental to your loved one's treatment. Your loved one is able to provide you with all their information, but the therapist may not be open to doing so. For example, if your loved one asks their therapist to tell you that they want to end their relationship with you, the therapist might instead require the client to inform you on their own or to invite you to a therapy session.

If you are struggling to manage your thoughts and feelings regarding your loved one's experiences in therapy, it might help to talk to your own counselor or to participate in family or couple's therapy with your loved one.