



CUSTODY AND ACCESS INFORMATION SHEET

When a child is referred for service, and there has been a separation or divorce, ***Open Doors for Lanark Children and Youth*** will always consider the best interest of the child in making decisions about service.

As a general rule, ***Open Doors for Lanark Children and Youth*** will provide mental health services to children and youth dealing with the impact of parental separation and divorce, even when matters of custody are being discussed. When appropriate, ***Open Doors for Lanark Children and Youth*** will build collaborative working relationships with both parents who share custody or access.

Open Doors for Lanark Children and Youth will not prepare assessments or recommendations related to custody and access. ***Open Doors for Lanark Children and Youth*** will also not provide written reports to lawyers in a custody or access dispute, with the exception of third parties acting in the best interest of the child such as the Office of the Children's Lawyer and the Family Court Clinic.

Open Doors for Lanark Children and Youth may limit, postpone or terminate services if services seem ineffective or detrimental to the referred child.

PROCEDURE

1. As part of the initial referral process for a child whose parents have separated or divorced, Administrative Assistants and/or Quick Response Counsellors will determine the custody status of the referred child.

Unless there is custody order that stipulates one of the following:

- only one parent has rights to plan and participate in treatment with their child,
- the non custodial is not available and is essentially absent,
- the CAS, police or a court has instructed that the non custodial parent has restricted access,

Open Doors for Lanark Children and Youth will assume both parents may be interested in child's wellbeing and will have some level of involvement in the child's treatment.

2. Whichever parent has initiated the referral, the referring parent will be informed that it is ***Open Doors for Lanark Children and Youths'*** practice to notify an involved but non-referring parent of the referral. A plan is developed with the referring parent for ensuring notification of the non-referring parent.
3. If the non-referring parent, upon notification, contacts the identified Quick Response Counsellor to indicate their wish to participate, they will be given the opportunity to have input into the

referral process. Further, a note will be made in the client record to notify both parents upon case assignment.

4. Information will be shared with both parents through a letter to clarify ***Open Doors for Lanark Children and Youths'*** role as a children's mental health service. The letter will also outline clearly for both parents that the Policy of ***Open Doors for Lanark Children and Youth*** states that employees of ***Open Doors for Lanark Children and Youth*** will not prepare assessments or provide information for lawyers regarding services received at ***Open Doors for Lanark Children and Youth***. The information will be forwarded in a letter and if assessed as necessary, the counselor assigned may invite both parents, together or separately, to an orientation meeting to discuss same.
5. Both parents will be called to initiate service. Youth over age 12 can access or refuse service without consent from both parents. If no service has been consented to, either by other custodial parent or youth over 12, Family Caregiver Support can be provided to the referring parent. No service will be provided directly to the child or youth in this case.
6. If consent per the above, from other custodial parent or youth over 12, is not received in a timely manner, alternate options will be discussed with the referring parent.
7. Case will proceed if one parent has sole custody. Documentation supporting sole custody claim will need to be provided at first appointment.
8. Discussion with involved parents will occur in advance of child treatment in order to affirm shared commitment to treatment goals, and address barriers to successful treatment (ie parent conflict). Ideally, that discussion will take place in a joint meeting.
9. Once accord is reached with parents, the ***Open Doors for Lanark Children and Youth*** Counsellor will determine how to proceed with child mental health treatment.
10. Where agreement regarding treatment cannot be reached, parents are informed that treatment options will be limited to crisis response for the child, treatment for mental health issues distinct from parent conflict and/or participation in a parenting group or separation/divorce group. These services will be considered on a case by case basis. A letter will also be sent to both parents indicating that treatment for the child is contraindicated at this time.
11. Clinical records will report on child mental health progress in a manner that is accessible and respectful of both custodial parents.