

Demystifying sexual abuse counselling for children

Visiting a counselling service can be a daunting and quite frightening experience for some children, particularly when they have not previously experienced a therapeutic environment.

Rosie's Place, a community based sexual abuse counselling service for children, young people, and their non-offending family members, has attempted to demystify the counselling experience for abused or neglected young children (and their caregivers) by releasing the booklet, *I Have a Place*, written by Catherine Want, and illustrated by Jennifer Pitty.

Based upon children's responses in a series of focus groups run with children who have been Rosie's Place clients, who were asked to voice their concerns and fears about attending counselling, the booklet is intended to demystify the counselling process and to identify counsellors as people to whom children can safely confide their worries, problems or hurts.

I Have a Place is written for children in the language of children. "When children are hurt or not looked after, it can hurt really badly in lots of ways. It can hurt your feelings, your thoughts, you body and your family. No one should be hurt like this" (p. 4)

The booklet is interspersed with pages of activities intended to help children work through their concerns about attending counselling, the role of the counsellor, making disclosures, and the importance of having a parent/caregiver in support. For example, there is a page entitled "My bag of worries" which encourages children to note their concerns: "draw or write any worries you may have on this page".



The booklet includes: various questions a child may have when he or she is going to see a counsellor; a child's story about her/his visit to a counsellor, thus helping to normalise the counselling process for other children; and pointers or tips that may be useful for children who are about to attend counselling.

I Have a Place sends out a strong message to children that they are not alone, that counselling will provide them with a safe place from which to talk about their fears and hurts. As such, it is a valuable tool for all those working with, or counselling, children who have been abused or neglected. The booklet would also be useful in assisting parents new to the child counselling process to support their child.

I Have a Place is available from Rosie's Place Publications, PO Box 40, Rooty Hill, New South Wales 2776.

– Ellen Fish
Clearinghouse Project Officer