

## S2 Mini8: What to Expect from Family Therapy

### That's a Hard No Transcript

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*Heather:* Welcome to That's a Hard No the podcast about saying no and setting boundaries.

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*Sarah:* So you can become the authentic and empowered you that this world needs.

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*Heather:* Before we start, a quick reminder.

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*Sarah:* While I am a licensed professional clinical counselor, this podcast is in no way a replacement for one on one therapy with a mental health professional. If you notice this content triggers some big feelings. Visit our website [HardNoPodcast.com](http://HardNoPodcast.com) for mental health resources and other helpful links.

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*Heather:* In season two of that's a hard no, we're making it a priority to dig deeper into the process of finding and utilizing the help you may need. We want to take the time to discuss whether in-house expert Sarah Saunders. What to expect from therapy and all of its intricacies. Hi Sarah!

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*Sarah:* Hi Heather!

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*Heather:* This is such an important topic and I know you have a lot of experience in it and I'm excited to take a deep dive into the topic of family therapy. I don't know that much about it. Can you start by explaining what actually is family therapy?

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*Sarah:* I would love to, so family therapy is a type of psychotherapy that can help family members improve communication and resolve conflicts. So listeners, if you haven't yet go back and listen to our last minisode, which was on couples counseling. In that episode I had shared that just like couples therapy, therapists that provide family therapy should have the same type of specific training. So the similar credentialing to a relationship therapist, background in marriage and family therapy. The reason is that it's very important that a sound therapist that does family therapy comes from a systemic perspective, meaning that they work with the whole family system, understanding family patterns and things like that. So family therapy is often short-term therapy. It may include all family members or just those that are ready and willing to participate. Everybody has their own level of readiness, so some people just might not be ready yet. Treatment is based on each family member, unique circumstances and situations. So there's not one size fits all. Just like with individual therapy. Family therapy sessions will teach skills to deepen family connections, offer more understanding and help family members really be able to better navigate difficult times even after the therapy is over. That's a really big key. That I always try and remind people is that you want to be learning skills and feeling that there's change happening even outside of session, and so people seek family therapy for a variety of reasons. I'm just going to list a few that kind of based on the work that I do in my practice. These are some things that I'm

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seeing a lot of, you know, parent-child dynamics. Maybe a family member has a serious mental illness and they may not be seeking their own therapy for or it's really impacting the family. So having better understanding on how to support that family member, also taking time to identify how it's impacting all of the involved. Maybe even if it's addiction, there's codependency happening. Levels of enabling, things like that. Trouble setting boundaries. Oftentimes people will come into my office because, feeling very stuck, they're feeling like they're having a hard time breaking out of certain generational patterns and need to learn how to set better boundaries, blended family or coparenting. So as long as there's that mutual understanding, that mutual agreement, they're coming in because they're having to work together with all of these kids and decision-making and, and you know, really getting on the same page. This is also just to note. This is not legality, this is not about any lawyers involved or things like that, but to really be on the same page about things. And there are certain family therapists that if you are going through a divorce or there is some type of blended family, you can seek specific therapy for that and you can talk to your lawyer about that. But in general, yeah, that co parenting and blended families, another thing that I see a lot of is a major trauma that has occurred. Maybe there's been a death in the family, maybe even of a, of a parent, and so having that you know the parent and the child you know come in and kind of learning how to navigate that, a major job change maybe a big move and kind of circling back that the generational patterns, specifically regarding parent preferences. I've had grandparents who are big caregivers in a child's life, parents, and then the grandparents actually have come into sessions together to kind of, you know, talk about. This is how we want to raise our kids and it's not to use the language. It's not to blame, shame, judge or criticize, but to just talk through when this behavior happens. With so and so. This is how we would like, you know, to kind of support them through it.

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*Heather:* Yeah, that can be really tricky. I've i've had lots of friends who've had issues with setting boundaries with parents and in-laws and you know the rules of our house need to apply wherever our children are, and that's tough. That's hard, and so having someone to kind of help you navigate and negotiate all of that, I would think, would be very helpful.

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*Sarah:* Yes, and it can feel so intimidating because it feels like I am. You know what I say goes, but that's really not how it is so having a third-person a third party, to kind of just have those conversations, because at the end of the day the whole goal is to help you and your family members understand one another better and to really learn. You know skills and togetherness, connectedness. We're all in this together, and so how can we best you know, support one another through it? So I just want to kind of go through. Give you guys some very specific ways to prepare for family therapy. If that's something that you are seeking, you can always ask your doctor or another primary care provider for referral. Family members or friends may have had a really good experience, so you can always check-in with them if they know of anyone. Your employee assistance program is something you could check-in with your church. Of course there's Google. So wherever you're looking, it's important that when you do find someone that you are interested in, ask them about their education and experience. What is, you can say, What is your educational and training

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background? Are you licensed by the state? Are you accredited by the AAMFT or other professional organizations? Do you have specialty training and family psychotherapy? That piece is really important, and then do they have experience with what you're coming to them with? So have they experienced that before? If they're like no, I've never dealt with this before. To me that may be a red flag. It's something to just say okay, well, do you have any referrals for someone that would be able to best support us? The second thing is location and availability, so asking them: where is their office located? What are their hours and also understanding what they do in case of emergencies. How do they handle that? Are they available? Is there an on call person or how would you be able to reach them in some of those situations if it occurs? The third thing is length and number of sessions. As I've mentioned, all treatment plans are individualized. However, you can ask how long are sessions? What does the initial intake appointment entail? How often are sessions scheduled and what is an expected length of therapy? And then the fourth, which we talk a lot about, is, you know, fees and making sure you understand how much does each session cost? Are services covered by insurance? Does the provider accept an a or an, and then what is the cancellation policy? That's often something really important to note.

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*Heather:* Think that's true with all therapy, the cancellation policy.

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*Sarah:* Yes, yes, and then what to expect. So often times when people come into the office and this is in no specific order. But what you expect going in is that the therapist is going to examine your family's ability to solve problems and express thoughts and emotions in a productive manner. They're going to want to explore family rules and roles and patterns of behavior to identify issues that may be contributing to the conflict or issue at hand. They're going to want to identify, you know family strengths, such as you know caring for one another, but then also what are some weaknesses? Maybe you know having difficulty, you know talking about certain things or confiding in one another. They're really going to take some time to explore the dynamics and really support the family to ensure that the reason they're coming in you can take bite size, you know, pieces, to get to where their ultimate goal.

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*Heather:* Wow, that's really involved and it sounds again like it's not a cookie cutter thing. You can't expect a specific, singular outcome because some other family went to a certain someone like your family is your family, and your therapist will help you figure out, you know what's working, what's not working and how to work together in the future.

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*Sarah:* And ultimately, it allows you to hold space for all of those that are involved in keeping in mind that everybody is there willingly. Most everyone is there. You know willingly that they, that they're on the same team and it's trying to figure out how can we best acknowledge each other's feelings and how can we work together and going to see a family therapist It doesn't automatically solve the family conflict or make these unpleasant situations go away, but it is a starting place that can help you and your family members

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understand one another. You know, learn these skills to better cope and navigate these challenging situations and really, as i've mentioned before, it's really that togetherness and that connectedness to feel heard, seen, validated and then be able to move.

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*Heather:* That was so helpful, Sarah. Thank you so much. And the next minisod we're going to be talking about the difference between life coaching and therapy.

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*Sarah:* Thank you.

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*Heather:* Thanks for listening everyone.

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*Sarah:* We'll see you next week.