

## PARENTS GUIDE

### Introduction

Green Sparks was set up with a plan to accept referrals from schools, however recently we have also had a number of direct approaches from parents asking us to work with their children. The information below is intended to make sure parents have a full understanding of what we offer. Please get in touch with us at [green.sparks.referrals@gmail.com](mailto:green.sparks.referrals@gmail.com) or 07796 253 092 with any questions.

### Our Values

At Green Sparks we believe any child or adult can struggle with their mental health and this shouldn't be a cause of shame. We exist in order to provide skilled help in our community of West Dorset, face-to-face, and on a non-profit basis. We offer tailored services for children who are struggling with their emotions and/or behaviour. We believe the best way to help most children is to build a relationship with them to help them feel as safe as possible, get them outdoors in nature, join them in exploring the world through play and creativity and teach them new skills in the moment. Every child is different, but we do not expect most children to be able to tell us in words what they are thinking and feeling, instead we learn about their world through joining them in it.

### The Children We Work With

The children we work with are usually affected by a number of different challenges;

Some are neuroatypical – the way their brains work and the way they process information is different from the majority, so there is a mismatch between what they need and what mainstream services provide.

Some are experiencing social, emotional and mental health problems – something is happening in their inner world that is causing them distress and anxiety, and living with those difficult emotions is exhausting them and leading to all sorts of challenging behaviour as they try to find ways to cope and communicate.

Some of the children we work with have experienced trauma that they need help to make sense of and recover from. This can be big, obvious trauma like the death of a loved one or something harder to see and put into words, like the creeping sense of fear and loss many children (and adults) experienced during the pandemic.

Some children are having difficulty forming attachments or managing relationships with other people. This may mean there was a challenge for them when they first formed their relationship with the person who cared for them as a baby. Parents can feel judged, blamed and shamed when children are having attachment difficulties but the reality is all sorts of unavoidable events in early childhood – for example being born unwell and having to remain in hospital – can impact a child's first relationship and can be completely beyond a parents' control.

You may already know which of these categories is affecting your child, or it may be that you recognise that your child is not thriving but aren't sure why not. We are happy to spend time getting to know you and your child as individuals and try to detangle what is happening for your child. One of our parent-proof-readers gave us this perspective which we wanted to include *"I found a lot of time we as parents want to look for the reason why our kid is feeling the way they feel. For instance when we started on this journey with our son - it was our first thought - surely something must have happened at school - that is why he doesn't want to go there. And funny enough even after we*

*understood that this is not the case, when other adults asked the same questions (and almost without fail they did - did something happen at school?) it was still hard to explain there is no actual Reason or Cause why my kid is feeling the way they feel... They don't know the 'source' of what is making them feel the way they do - they don't want to talk about that - they just need to talk about what pops up in their head in that moment"*

### **What We Do**

Our main approach is called social and therapeutic horticulture. It involves supporting children to head out into nature, and to grow and care for plants and the environment around them. Each child has different interests and strengths, so we also blend in play-based and craft-based activities to make sure they are interested and engaged. A lot of the children we work with need help to reconnect with what is going on in their bodies, and we use sensory work to help – planning activities to connect with a particular sense like smell, sound or touch.

While all of this is going on we are building a safe and trusting relationship with your child and acting out the qualities we want them to learn. When natural setbacks arise we are there in the moment next to your child giving them an example of how to cope. The theme of all of our work is to notice together what we are feeling and find ways to ride out the feeling instead of immediately being swept away by it.

### **What We Can and Can't Offer You**

Families with children experiencing these kinds of difficulties are often exhausted, worried and under pressure. It is really important to us at Green Sparks not to do anything that could make life harder for you and your family. For that reason, we want to make sure you are aware of the following information before you reach a decision about whether the service we offer might be right for your child.

Our service is developed and delivered by social workers who complete direct work with children. Direct work is what social workers are doing when they work face to face with a person, building a relationship with them, trying to understand where they are coming from and trying to work out how they can best be helped to achieve their goals. It is important to us at Green Sparks that you understand that we offer direct work with children. We do not offer counselling or therapy because we are not trained counsellors or psychotherapists.

Social work is systemic and holistic. This means we believe that human beings are connected to each other and are affected by things going on around them – the place that they live, the school they go to, their workplace, politics and all sorts of other things. When social workers try to change things, they don't just concentrate on the person at the centre who might be struggling, they think about all the other parts of their lives that are making it harder or easier for them to change. For your child, that means although we will be working with them face to face, we will also be thinking about what else is happening in their lives that is helping or hindering change. That might mean talking to you about other services that could help, or asking you or your child's school if changes can be made, or it might be something really simple like making sure we schedule your child's session at a time that frees you up to take a break and some time for yourself. We know that in families when one person is not ok, everyone is not ok, and we want to support you in every way that we can, not just focus on your child on their own.

Direct work in social work is goal orientated – that means before we start work we all need to have agreed on a clear aim for our work with your child. It will be important that we are realistic about

this goal and that it is something your child also wants to achieve. We will work with you to try and pin down exactly what your priorities are. It might be something new like helping your child learn to build social relationships. It might be that what you and your child need most isn't change but a rest from the pressures of the outside world. We will help you to be realistic about what we can all achieve together so that you and your child get the best out of our service. We will also check back in with you as we work with your child, and stay open to changing our shared goal as we learn more about your child's world.

At Green Sparks we cannot diagnose your child with an Autistic Spectrum Condition, or a mental health problem, or an attachment disorder, because we are not qualified to do so. What we can do is talk to you about the pathways you would need to follow if you feel your child is neuro-atypical, suffering from a mental health issue or needing additional support. We can point you in the right direction and make sure you have access to the right information. We can attend meetings and/or prepare written reports on our work with your child for an additional fee but we will need to talk to you about this first to make sure it is going to be helpful to you.

Social workers have a governing body which we all have to register with and a code of ethics which we all have to follow. You can find out more about this at <https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/> Like everyone who works with children, we have a duty to report any safeguarding concerns to the Local Authority if we come across them. This is rare, but if it happens we will talk to you first as long as it is safe for your child for us to do so. We can show you our safeguarding policy or discuss this with you if you want to know more.

### **Next Steps**

If you are interested in referring your child to us then please get in touch by email and we will arrange a convenient time to call you back and talk. It can be difficult reaching us during the working day without an appointment as we are usually working with children and can't come to the phone, but you are welcome to try.

We will be able to talk to you about any funding options that might be open to you or put together a quote for you if you are thinking about paying for support yourself. As a guideline, we charge £45-£65 an hour. This varies depending on the complexity of the work that you need, the length of involvement you are asking for and things like where you are geographically and whether we can fit in appointments with other children around the work with your child.

Please get in touch with us at [green.sparks.referrals@gmail.com](mailto:green.sparks.referrals@gmail.com) or 07796 253 092 with any questions.