

# Ear Reconstruction Service

## Clinical Psychology

Information for patients and carers



Living with appearance-related differences and thinking about surgery can be daunting for children, adults, and their families alike. The Ear Reconstruction Service (ERS) has a clinical psychologist to help with some of the issues that can arise.

### What is a clinical psychologist?

A clinical psychologist is a clinician who specialises in mental health. This means working with people to help them understand and improve their emotional well-being. They use different theories and therapies to work with different problems, which can include mental illness, coping with physical health problems, and coping with difficult life events. In the ERS this might mean, for example, helping people to cope with comments made about their appearance, or dealing with a trauma.

Clinical psychologists work in a holistic manner. This means that they develop an understanding of the whole person, instead of focusing solely on a problem or making a diagnosis. They consider the situation from different angles and focus on what the individual wants to change. In the ERS this might mean helping children and their parents, or adults to make a decision about if and when to have surgery.

With children and young people, clinical psychologists have a special role in helping prevent future mental health problems. In the ERS, this might mean helping parents to anticipate and prevent difficulties; or ensuring children are properly prepared for surgery.

### The clinical psychologist in the ERS

The surgical team will routinely ask if you would like to meet separately with the psychologist. When parents think carefully about the process of surgery, including the potential impact on their child's psychological well-being, the decisions that are made are usually better for the child's overall well-being. The psychologist can help you with this, and the surgical team encourages you to take advantage of this service.

The clinical psychologist offers three services to people attending the Ear Reconstruction Service:

#### 1. Pre-surgical assessment

If you think you would like to go ahead with surgery, you will be sent a preadmission appointment to meet with preadmission nursing staff, the ERS nurse, surgeon and psychologist. During your time with the psychologist you will fill in some questionnaires as well as exploring your thoughts/feelings about undergoing surgery, your appearance, hopes regarding surgical outcome, and your general well-being.

This appointment is to help you with making a final decision about surgery, help you prepare for surgery, and to gather information that will help the surgical team provide you with the best possible service.

## 2. Routine consultation

The psychologist will be at your main appointment with the team. This is so that you can meet them and they can hear how things are for you. You will never be expected to talk about very personal matters in front of the whole team. There may be the opportunity to meet with the psychologist individually following your main appointment.

## 3. Individual consultation

You can make contact with the psychologist at any time. If you have concerns about how you or your child are coping with daily life or how you/they will manage surgery, it may help to speak with the clinical psychologist.

They can help you with:

- Making a decision about if and when to have surgery
- Identifying potential issues
- Preparing for surgery
- Adjusting to a new appearance
- Managing the impact of visible difference and/or the surgery on the family
- Attending appointments (e.g. anxiety about attending, confidence about asking questions)
- Advice for parents
- Coping with people's questions about the ear(s)
- Starting school.

This support is provided in a range of ways:

- Joining you in meetings with the surgical team
- Separate appointments with you and/or your child
- Telephone conversations
- Written resources.

If you or your child are having significant difficulties coping at home and school and you are concerned, please see your family doctor (GP) in the first instance. The clinical psychologist can help you link in to local services so that you can receive more regular support and help.

## How do I contact the psychologist?

Appointments usually last 1 hour and, if you live at a distance, can be linked in to your appointment with the surgical team to minimise travel. If you live in Edinburgh, you will be offered an appointment at another time. **You can arrange an appointment through the team co-ordinator.**

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