

WHY PLAY THERAPY?



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Play Therapy Defined:

APT (Association for Play Therapy) defines play therapy as "the systematic use of a theoretical model to establish an interpersonal process wherein trained play therapists use the therapeutic powers of play to help clients prevent or resolve psychosocial difficulties and achieve optimal growth and development."



In other words.....Play therapy is to children what counseling is to adults. Play therapy utilizes play, children's natural medium of expression, to help them express their feelings more easily through toys instead of words.



▣ **Play therapy** is generally employed with children aged 3 through 11 and provides a way for them to express their experiences and feelings through a natural, self-guided, self-healing process. As children’s experiences and knowledge are often communicated through play, it becomes an important vehicle for them to know and accept themselves and others.

▣ - Wikipedia

Why Play?

▣ In recent years a growing number of noted mental health professionals have observed that play is as important to human happiness and well being as love and work (Schaefer, 1993). Some of the greatest thinkers of all time, including Aristotle and Plato, have reflected on why play is so fundamental in our lives. The following are some of the many benefits of play that have been described by play theorists.

“You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.”
-Plato

Play is a fun, enjoyable activity that elevates our spirits and brightens our outlook on life. It expands self-expression, self-knowledge, self-actualization and self-efficacy. Play relieves feelings of stress and boredom, connects us to people in a positive way, stimulates creative thinking and exploration, regulates our emotions, and boosts our ego. In addition, play allows us to practice skills and roles needed for survival. Learning and development are best fostered through play.

Why Play in Therapy?

Play therapy is a structured, theoretically based approach to therapy that builds on the normal communicative and learning processes of children. Therapists strategically utilize play therapy to help children express what is troubling them when they do not have the verbal language to express their thoughts and feelings . Through play, therapists may help children learn more adaptive behaviors when there are emotional or social skills deficits. The positive relationship that develops between therapist and child during play therapy sessions provides a corrective emotional experience necessary for healing . Play therapy may also be used to promote cognitive development and provide insight about and resolution of inner conflicts or dysfunctional thinking.

If play is their language...

toys are their words.



Play Therapy is the most appropriate method of treatment for children who are having difficulties coping with life situations. Though children lack the cognitive skills to express themselves with words, they are fluent in the language of play. Play therapy allows them to express themselves in the way in which they are most comfortable.

History time line of Play therapy

- ☐ 1903- Sigmund Freud outlines the stages of childhood instinctual development - oral, anal and genital.
- ☐ 1925 -Anna Freud uses play to better understand her child patients. 1934 -Fred Allen and R. Rogeson begin non interpretive play methods.
- ☐ 1940 -Carl Rogers "Client Centered Play Therapy."
- ☐ 1944 -Sandplay (Sandtable) therapy.
- ☐ 1949 -Buck's "House-Tree-Person" Technique.
- ☐ 1954 -Erikson's "Eight Ages of Man" offers a broad epigenetic outline of developmental tasks that address adaptation to external events.
- ☐ 1957- Levitt's review suggests child therapy is ineffective. 😞

- ❑ 1962 -Piaget examines children’s cognitive development, defines cognitive differences by age spans.
- ❑ 1963- After much criticism *Levitt* ran more test changing some of the issues previously reported and found an improvement in children’s behaviors but stuck to his previous conclusion.
- ❑ 1971 –Gardner’s "Mutual Storytelling Technique."
- ❑ 1971 -Davidson involves mothers directly in play therapy.
- ❑ 1972 -Woltman uses of hand puppets in play therapy.
- ❑ 1980s- Structured storytelling applied to trauma treatment.
- ❑ In 1988-Dr. Garry Landreth established the Center for Play Therapy (CPT), which has grown to become one of the largest play therapy training program in the world.

- ❑ 1990s -Growth in services to mothers and toddlers using the child’s play to help parents understand their infants and toddlers better.
- ❑ 1992 -Standardized training in play therapy begins.
- ❑ 1990s -Growth of managed care emphasizes "results" on specific issues, cognitive approaches gain favor, play approaches wane in the public sector.
- ❑ 1998 -LeBlanc shows .66 standard deviation effect size for play therapy. (This is comparable to effect sizes for other effective therapies.)
- ❑ 2005- Evidenced based studies on Play showing significant improvements with children.

Evidenced Based

“The implication of research for practitioners is that play therapy demonstrates itself to be an effective intervention for children’s problems, one that is uniquely responsive to children’s developmental needs. Of significant note, play therapy has a large effect on children’s behavior, social adjustment, and personality. Typically, children are referred for treatment because of one of these three presenting problems. Behavior problems, in particular, are of great concern for the significant adults in children’s lives— primarily parents and teachers—who often expend a great amount of energy in trying to change problematic behaviors. The present research supports play therapy as an agent in changing behavior. Social adjustment and personality are also concerns for most parents. Parents want their children to grow up well-liked and well-adjusted. The need to belong is primary to a child’s growth and acceptance of self. When children are unable to socially adapt or modify their behavior to fit in, children and parents alike are negatively affected. According to this research, play therapy demonstrates its effectiveness in these areas.” -2005

http://www.moplaytherapy.org/uploads/media/Research_The_efficacy_of_play_therapy_with_children.pdf

How Does Play Therapy Work?

Children are referred for play therapy to resolve their problems. Often, children have used up their own problem solving tools, and they misbehave, may act out at home, with friends, and at school . Play therapy allows trained mental health practitioners who specialize in play therapy, to assess and understand children's play. Further, play therapy is utilized to help children cope with difficult emotions and find solutions to problems. By confronting problems in the clinical Play therapy setting, children find healthier solutions. Play therapy allows children to change the way they think about, feel toward, and resolve their concerns. Even the most troubling problems can be confronted in play therapy and lasting resolutions can be discovered, rehearsed, mastered and adapted into lifelong strategies.

Who Benefits from Play Therapy?

- ▣ Although everyone benefits, play therapy is especially appropriate for children ages 3 through 12 years old. Teenagers and adults have also benefited from play techniques and recreational processes. In recent years, play therapy interventions have also been applied to infants and toddlers. It also can be used effectively with adults with expressive difficulty, learning problems, head injury, and PTSD. Play therapy is used in individual, group and family therapy.

How Will Play Therapy Benefit A Child?

Research supports the effectiveness of play therapy with children experiencing a wide variety of social, emotional, behavioral, and learning problems, including: children whose problems are related to life stressors, such as divorce, death, relocation, hospitalization, chronic illness, assimilate stressful experiences, physical and sexual abuse, domestic violence, and natural disasters

Play therapy helps individuals:

- ▣ Become more responsible for behaviors and develop more successful strategies.
- ▣ Develop new and creative solutions to problems.
- ▣ Develop respect and acceptance of self and others.
- ▣ Learn to experience and express emotion.
- ▣ Cultivate empathy and respect for thoughts and feelings of others.
- ▣ Learn new social skills and relational skills with family.
- ▣ Develop self-efficacy and thus a better assuredness about their abilities.

Play
therapy
can help:

Anger Management

Control of anger has become an increasingly prominent issue in recent years. We see this lack of control acted out in school shootings and an increase in bullying in school. Many children struggle to express their emotion in healthy ways and without causing injury to other children. Play therapy can help children to work through their anger and find more appropriate ways to express the angry emotions that can lead to acting out.

Grief and Loss

Children, like adults experience many losses ranging from death of a loved one or family pet to relocating to a new town and losing secure connections; children react in multifarious ways . Behaviors and symptoms include anger, biting, withdrawal, prolonged sadness, despondency, lower grades in school and much more. Play therapy is a helpful intervention that helps children sort out feelings and develop healthier adaptations.

Divorce and Family Dissolution

When a family falls apart, children feel the loss deeply . When this loss goes unrecognized symptoms can exacerbate. Symptoms match the child's developmental level and have a broad range . Children often blame themselves; Younger children often believe the parent who has left the home may never come back. Older children may react with violence and anger issues. Whatever the behaviors and feeling, Play Therapy assists by providing an environment for the child to explore the feelings and pain that are bottled up inside.

Crisis and Trauma

Children react to Trauma in a multitude of ways and the impact of trauma on the children depends on many factors including resiliency levels and culture . Traumatic events can be individual to the child (such as witnessing an animal being killed by an automobile), the entire family (the families home might have been burglarized) and an entire community (the community may have been impacted by a tornado). These events, while happening every day, have devastating effects upon children, especially when they go unprocessed . Children need opportunities to make sense of bad things that happen. Play therapy provides that opportunity and enhances the child's ability to gain mastery very fearful events.

How Long Does Play Therapy Take?

Each play therapy session varies in length but usually last about 30 to 50 minutes. Sessions are usually held weekly. Research suggests that it takes an average of 20 play therapy sessions to resolve the problems of the typical child referred for treatment. Of course, some children may improve much faster while more serious or ongoing problems may take longer to resolve.



How May My Family Be Involved in Play Therapy?

Families play an important role in children's healing processes. The interaction between children's problems and their families is always complex. Sometimes children develop problems as a way of signaling that there is something wrong in the family. Other times the entire family becomes distressed because the child's problems are so disruptive. In all cases, children and families heal faster when they work together.

The play therapist will make some decisions about how and when to involve some or all members of the family in the play therapy. At a minimum, the therapist will want to communicate regularly with the child's caretakers to develop a plan for resolving problems as they are identified and to monitor the progress of the treatment. Other options might include involving a) the parents or caretakers directly in the treatment in what is called **Filial** play therapy and b) the whole family in family play therapy. Whatever the level the family members choose to be involved, they are an essential part of the child's healing .

Who Practices Play Therapy?

- ▣ The practice of play therapy requires extensive specialized education, training, and experience. A play therapist is a licensed (or certified) mental health professional who has earned a Master's or Doctorate degree in a mental health field with considerable general clinical experience and supervision.
- ▣ With advanced, specialized training, experience, and supervision, mental health professionals may also earn the Registered Play Therapist (RPT) or Registered Play Therapist-Supervisor (RPT-S) credentials conferred by the Association for Play Therapy (APT).

Play Therapy for Adults

By adulthood, most people have lost their ability to playfully explore themselves. Play therapists are trained to help a person relearn the valuable tool of play. Playful exploration has been proven to enhance both cognitive and physical behaviors and there is a vast amount of research from neurophysiology to molecular biology that supports Play Therapy as a valid therapeutic technique.

Play Therapy : Not just for Kids!

Those adults who have shown to benefits using play therapy are:

- ▣ Persons who have Posttraumatic stress disorder
- ▣ Head Injury Victims
- ▣ Persons who have learning and speech issues
- ▣ Grieving individuals
- ▣ Family play to enhance and improve family communication and understanding
- ▣ Anyone who has trouble putting their feelings and experiences into words.

Types of Play Therapy

- ☐ Directive Play Therapy
- ☐ Non-directive Play Therapy
- ☐ Filial Therapy
- ☐ Art Therapy
- ☐ Theraplay ®
- ☐ Puppet Play (Storytelling)
- ☐ Sand Tray Therapy (Sand Play Therapy)

Non-directive play

Modern non-directive play therapy (NDPT) is based on Carl Rogers' person-centered therapy and theories of child development, including attachment theory also called client-centered therapy.

In this mode of play therapy, the child is offered a safe and consistent environment together with a safe and consistent relationship with the play therapist. All feelings are accepted and are explored symbolically and/or explicitly, depending on how the child or young person is able to use play therapy. Not all behavior is acceptable, so the therapist sets firm and consistent limits.

"The play therapist is never an observer but is always an emotional and verbal participant" (Landreth).

Directive Play therapy

- ☐ Where the nondirective therapist may do more observation, the therapist who uses directive approach may engage in play themselves with the child and introduce new topics to keep the play moving. The therapist may select certain games or activities to do depending on what the child issues are and what behaviors or feelings are needing to be worked on.

Theraplay

- Theraplay is a dyadic psychotherapy for two individuals: the child and her caregiver. The main focus of the therapy is to improve the relationship between adult and child through direct interactions between the two individuals.

Sandtray Play

- Sandtray**, Sandplay or **Sandbox Therapy** is a form of experiential therapy which allows greater exploration of deep emotional issues. Sandtray therapy is suitable for children and adults and allows them to reach a deeper insight into and resolution of a range of issues in their lives such as deep anger, depression, abuse or grief.
- Through a safe and supportive process they are able to explore their world using a sandtray and a collection of miniatures. Accessing hidden or previously unexplored areas is often possible using this expressive and creative way of working which does not rely on "talk" therapy.
- "Sand tray participants are invited to create a diorama (a story or miniature world) by arranging toy people, animals, and other items in the sandtray. The therapist evaluates the participant's choice and use of objects to draw various conclusions about the subject's psychological health. This non-invasive method works especially well with those individuals who are young or have trouble comprehending and talking about difficult issues, such as domestic or child abuse, incest, or the death of a family member."

Play therapy as a complementary therapy for persons with Traumatic Brain Injury

There are many different forms of play. Regardless of which one is used play therapy is resourceful for children and adults with traumatic head injury because it can help the person cope with a stressful situation. In addition it doesn't make the person feel inferior or overpowered by the therapist. Play therapy allows the individual to express what he or she cannot, will not, or does not say with words. Play therapy is a volunteer activity it allows the person to feel in control of the situation and conversation.

How do people with traumatic brain injury experience sandplay therapy?

The participants all stated that they were able to express themselves through sandplay in a manner unavailable to them verbally. Additionally, each participant experienced the multisensory aspects of play as beneficial. By selecting symbolic representations of their experiences, interacting with the sand on a sensory level, and making a scene, participants connected directly to their bodies, feelings, and creative energies. These connections, in turn, led them to self-discoveries and new possibilities.

**SANDPLAY THERAPY WITH
TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURED ADULTS:
AN EXPLORATORY QUALITATIVE STUDY**
Lorraine Razzi Freedle
Santa Fe, NM



Filial Therapy

Filial Therapy: a therapeutic intervention that can help children by teaching parents (and other paraprofessionals such as teachers) basic child-centered play therapy principles and methods to use with their children (Guerney, L., & Adronico, 1966; Landreth & Bratton, 2006). Parents learn to become a constructive force for change in their children’s behaviors and attitudes by utilizing basic play therapy skills in once-a-week 30-minute play sessions with their children. Throughout the process, parents receive on-going training and direct supervision from a trained play therapist.

Directive Play Therapy Activities

- ▣ 1) One of the main goal of therapy is to help children talk about their feelings and be able to identify those feelings. Any children's game can be used. For example, Hi Ho Cherry-, Chutes and Ladders/ When you land on a negative consequence (the dog or bird in HI Ho Cherry-O) you have them talk about a negative emotion and what caused it to happen. The same when landing on a positive move, talking about positive feelings or have them list strengths .

- ▣ 2) Other games using feelings with cards (Hearts- happy, Diamonds- anger, etc.) Candyland identify color with name of feelings.
- ▣ 3) Drawing faces and body and filling them in (also where do you feel different feelings)
- ▣ 4) Puppets to aid in talking about feelings and issues
- ▣ 5) Dress-up – asking how does the princess feel?
- ▣ 6) Tic Tac Toe- Three in a row- tell me something I don't know

- ▣ 7) Have them draw their family and each person doing something (then how do they feel) This can be done with families too.
- ▣ 8) Draw a heart and fill in colors according to feeling. Each color represents an emotion (red- angry, yellow-scared etc.)
- ▣ 9) Story telling, writing and drawing things that has happened to them and talk about the feelings
- 10) Play Charades using feelings as the topic.

**Missouri Association for Play
Therapy**



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