

PLAY THERAPY



PLAY Therapy recognizes play as the child's natural medium of communication and uses it as a therapeutic method to encourage the child to "directly or symbolically act out feelings, thoughts and experiences that they are not able to meaningfully express through words" (Bratton, Ray, Rhine & Jones, 2005). For this reason,

play therapy is especially suitable for children between the ages of 3-years to 12-years-old. Therapists assist children in managing and expressing aggression, emotional stress, trauma and other difficulties in a safe and fun environment. During therapy, children have control over the play, which empowers them to create their own coping strategies. As anxiety is relieved, children achieve a 'sense of mastery' and become more equipped in coping with subsequent real events.

“Play is the spontaneous and natural self-healing process in which children express their feelings and thoughts into action while being ‘free from fear of failure or unwanted consequences’”

- McMahon, 1992 -



Play Therapy provides a unique variety of play experiences to encourage positive changes in a child's behavior and facilitate development of communication, social, emotional, and cognitive skills. Play therapy can also help children develop confidence and self-esteem, find effective ways of communicating, promote resilience, and most importantly self-heal. These newly developed skills are then transferred to everyday life.

Children with a wide range of challenges may benefit play therapy, including but not limited to:

- Trauma
- Bereavement
- Attachment
- Confidence Building
- Challenging Behavior
- Supporting Transitions
- Adoption
- Anxiety
- Bullying

Play Therapy Supports Children With:

- Becoming more self-aware
- Overcoming excessive anger, fear or sadness
- Learning to identify thoughts and feelings
- Regulating feelings and behavior
- Adjusting to family changes, transitions, separation/divorce
- Building secure relationships
- Enhancing self-concept & self esteem
- Facilitating healing from stressful or traumatic experiences
- Learning new social skills and relational skills with family
- Developing new and creative strategies to problems



Components of Play Therapy

The aim of play therapy sessions is to allow the therapist and child to build rapport while at the same time, to identify 'themes' or ways of playing with the selected materials that are meaningful to the child. Children are told that they may say or play or do anything they wish to, and that the child's privacy is maintained within the play room. As sessions progress, the therapist and child work towards making sense of the play in relation to issues that are both important to the child and related to their difficulties. A range of skills, including reflective listening; non-verbal communication and establishing structure and boundaries are explored and enhanced. Parents learn how to develop a more perceptive environment that further ameliorates the parent-child relationship. This ultimately facilitates personal growth and change for both child and parent.

“The act of playing gives the sensation of increased autonomy where ‘play under the control of the player gives to the child his first and the most crucial opportunity to have the courage to think, to talk and perhaps even to be himself’” – Bruner, 1983 –



Filial Play

Even though the normal arrangement of play therapy primarily involves clinician and child, Filial Play offers a new dynamic with the involvement of one or sometimes both parents. Filial Play is one of the best-researched child-centered modalities for parent-child therapy (Van Fleet, 2005). In this modification of traditional play therapy, the parent(s) take on the role of 'therapist' whilst the clinician focuses on assessing the family play to then provide constructive feedback in the form of coaching in the basic skills for home-based play sessions with the child. Filial Play can be set apart as being beneficial to the whole family as it relieves the pressure upon troubled parent-child relationship(s) & is particularly effective in improving attachment issues. Parents & therapist simultaneously highlight and reflect upon emerging themes in their child's nature of play. Exploring another kind of relationship.

Group Play Therapy

Group Play Therapy allows children to discover their own uniqueness and the opportunity to relate to their peers. In a small group setting, children gain the ability to learn from each other, encourage & support one another, work through difficulties and discover that they are capable of giving as well as receiving help.

‘ a therapeutic method to encourage the child to “directly or symbolically act out feelings, thoughts and experiences that they are not able to meaningfully express through words” ’

- Bratton, Ray, Rhine & Jones, 2005 -

What Does Research
on Play Therapy
Have to Say?



Recent research by Play Therapy UK suggests that 74% to 83% of the children that undergo play therapy show a positive change. Early intervention has also been shown to be most effective with 80% showing positive outcome from play therapy at age 6. In a 2010 study, Naderi and colleagues deemed play therapy as a “viable and developmentally appropriate intervention for children experiencing a broad range of problems”, including Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Anxiety and weak social maturity. As mentioned above, the efficacy of Filial Play Therapy has been extensively supported by the research literature. Several meta-analyses of experimental play therapy studies revealed a large positive effect for Filial Play Therapy and even so for general Play Therapies (e.g. Le Blanc & Ritchie, 1999; Ray et al., 2001).

Bibliography

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