

Play Therapy

What is Play Therapy?

Most worries that children have disappear in a short period of time as they mature and find solutions to their difficulties. When worries continue, it is time to consider getting expert help. Play therapy is a structured, theoretically based approach that builds on the normal communicative and learning processes of children. Through play therapy, children learn to communicate with others, express feelings, modify their behaviors, develop problem-solving skills, increase their self-esteem, and learn a variety of ways to relate to others.

Who benefits from Play Therapy?

Play therapy is appropriate for children ages 3 to 12 years old, although sometimes teenagers and adults may benefit from a play therapy approach. Families may also benefit from play therapy interventions.

How does Play Therapy work?

During the initial meeting with the parents or caregivers, the therapist will want to learn as much as possible about the nature of the child's difficulties. Parents will be asked for information about the child's developmental, medical, social, and school history. In play therapy, the clinician meets with the child alone for the majority of the session and arranges times to meet with the parents separately or with the child, depending on the situation. The structure of the sessions is maintained in a consistent manner in order to provide a feeling of safety and stability for the child and parents.

Sessions with parents are important opportunities to keep the therapist informed about the child's functioning at home and school and for the therapist to provide insight and guidance to the parents. Details of the child's sessions are not routinely discussed with parents. This allows children to freely express themselves and engenders a sense of trust in the therapist and the therapeutic process. The therapist will communicate her understanding of the child's psychological needs, abilities, and conflicts to the parents. Parents should look for a therapist whom they feel that both they and their child can have a good working relationship with.

What will my child experience during a play therapy session?

During the early sessions of play therapy, the therapist talks with the child about the reason the child was brought in for treatment and explains that the therapist helps to reduce the child's problems and worries. Children communicate their thoughts and feelings through play more naturally than they do through verbal communication. As the child plays, the therapist begins to recognize themes and patterns that are important to the child. Over time, the therapist helps the child begin to add meaning to the play. This is essential because the play reflects issues which are important to the child and typically relevant to the difficulties they are experiencing.

Recommended Reading:

1. *Play Therapy* by Virginia Axline
2. *A Child's First Book about Play Therapy* by Marc Nemiroff, Ph.D. and Jane Annunziata, Psy.D.
3. The Association for Play Therapy <http://www.a4pt.org/>