

An Introduction for Parents to Play Therapy



WHAT IS PLAY THERAPY?

- Play Therapy is a therapeutic approach based on developmental principles.
- Play Therapy is a process where the child chooses objects, symbols, or types of play to express their inner concerns or work through particular problems.
- Play Therapy is done with a trained child therapist who is skilled in interpreting the child's play. The child therapist assists in promoting growth and change.

HOW IS IT DIFFERENT TO THE PLAY MY CHILD DOES ON HIS /HER OWN?

- Play is generally important to your child's development because it offers them the opportunity to make sense of their world and helps them rehearse for adult life. Play between a parent and child provides a sense of joining, security and attachment.
- In *Play Therapy* the Child Therapist is trained to read the metaphors of the play and observe emerging patterns. The main goals of play therapy, regardless of the symptoms, are to help the child regain their former level of functioning, enhance self-esteem and build the child's coping resources.
- In *Play Therapy* the child uses the whole self (mind & body) to express unconscious thoughts, fears, anxieties and wishes, etc., which helps them process or resolve "stuck" thoughts and feelings. This often happens in subtle ways, with effects noticed in the child's daily functioning.
- The Play Room is viewed as the child's "kingdom" where they are free to explore and express themselves through various mediums such as fantasy play, sandplay, puppets and miniatures. The toys are carefully selected to offer an opportunity to engage the child's imagination and express various feeling states and experiences. For example, both symbolically aggressive and passive toys are available for the child to select in their play.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

There are critical phases to child therapy

- **Engagement Phase:** The child explores the environment and tests for limits.
- **Working Through Phase:** The child and Therapist establish a relationship of trust and the child begins to play out underlying issues. A decrease in the child's functioning may accompany this phase.
- **Therapeutic Growth Phase:** At this stage the child is empowered and has re-worked their earlier concerns.
- **Termination Phase:** This important phase entails the therapist and child summarizing their time together and preparing to end the relationship.

DOES IT WORK FOR EVERY CHILD?

- The approach works well for children between 2-to-12 years of age (generally). Older children may also benefit if it is developmentally fitting.

HOW LONG DOES IT LAST?

All children are unique in how they move forward in stages of Play Therapy. Length of time depends on the presenting problem and level of family support. For example, longer term work may be necessary for children who have experienced trauma related to death, divorce, accidents, medical trauma and physical or sexual abuse. Many issues indicate a need for more than 20 sessions.



PARENT INVOLVEMENT

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR CHILD

- *Tell* your child they are going to meet a counsellor and let them know the person's name. Introduce the person as someone who works and plays with children.
- *Describe* the environment and let them know you will bring them to meet that person.
- *Support* your child by telling them you would like them to feel better or happier.

PARENT/FAMILY ROLE

You may be involved in one or all of the following roles:

- **Observer** -You play a central role in reporting what comes up between sessions
- **Advocate** – Through consultation you may be asked to introduce ideas to family members as well as school or daycare personnel.
- **Play Partner** – You may be asked to join sessions for specific reasons or to follow a “play time” recipe at home.
- **Provider of Limits** – Family routines, rules and limits will be explored and you may be asked to experiment with new ideas.
- **Consultant** – This is a two-way process. Parents have lots of ideas and know their child best. We believe that effective treatment requires a team effort.

CONFIDENTIALITY

- The child's therapy should be regarded as their own private time. Parents should refrain from asking the child too many questions after sessions.
- It is the child therapist's job to help you understand what is happening in your child's sessions.