



CHILD-CENTRED PLAY THERAPY

A parent-friendly guide to healing through play

For children, play can express what words cannot. Child-Centred Play Therapy (CCPT) offers a safe, accepting relationship where children lead their play and a trained therapist responds with empathy, understanding and appropriate boundaries.

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Why play therapy?

A developmentally responsive way of supporting children

Children may communicate fears, frustrations, hopes and needs through imaginary play, storytelling, movement and relationships with toys. CCPT recognises play as a natural medium for emotional expression without expecting children to explain everything verbally.

Core principles

- **The child leads**
The child chooses activities and sets the direction of their play.
- **The therapist follows with empathy**
Feelings and experiences are noticed, reflected and accepted.
- **The relationship is central**
Warmth, consistency and emotional safety support exploration.
- **Boundaries remain important**
Clear, respectful limits help maintain physical and emotional safety.

What CCPT is not

It is not simply free play, a reward for good behaviour, or a therapist telling a child what to do. It is a structured therapeutic relationship.



What happens in sessions?

Every child and family receives an individualised plan

● **1 Initial consultation**

The psychologist discusses developmental history, strengths, presenting difficulties and family priorities.

● **2 Playroom sessions**

The child can explore appropriate toys and materials. The therapist attends to play, feelings and themes without rushing interpretations.

● **3 Parent collaboration**

Caregivers receive feedback and practical support while the child's confidentiality and therapeutic trust are respected.

● **4 Progress reviews**

Goals, engagement and changes at home or school are reviewed. The approach is adjusted when appropriate.

What might therapy support?

- Emotional expression and understanding
- Coping with stressful experiences and life transitions
- Confidence, self-awareness and relationships
- Behavioural and emotional regulation difficulties

Suitability depends on assessment, child development and presenting needs.



How parents can help

Small changes in connection can matter

- **Follow your child's lead**

Set aside device-free time and join in what your child chooses.

- **Describe instead of directing**

Try "You built a tall tower" rather than suggesting how to play.

- **Reflect feelings**

Try "That looks frustrating" instead of dismissing the feeling.

- **Use calm, consistent limits**

Accept the feeling while setting clear boundaries around safety.

Frequently asked question

Will my child need to talk about difficult experiences?

Not necessarily. Children may communicate through their play. The therapist does not force disclosures or assign fixed meanings to toys.

BOOK AN INITIAL CONSULTATION

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Educational information only; not a substitute for individual assessment.

Further reading: VanFleet, Sywulak & Sniscak (2010), Child-Centered Play Therapy.