



## Play Therapy and Your Child

### *What is play therapy?*

Play therapy is a form of counselling for children. Play therapy uses play to allow children to express themselves with toys, play and creative materials instead of just words. Whilst children are developing the cognitive skills to communicate their thoughts and feelings with words, they are fluent in the language of play. Play therapy allows them to express themselves with a sense of freedom and in a manner that respects their knowledge and developmental stage.

### *How is play therapy helpful for children?*

Most children experience difficult times during their childhood, such as parental separation, death of a family member, social difficulties with peers or difficulty dealing with changes. Some children have additional challenges such as ongoing medical issues, developmental delays or disorders, or traumatic experiences. Play therapy, in combination with family support, can assist children to overcome difficulties holding them back in their developmental journey, and support them emotionally. Play therapy can also give you a better understanding of what your child is going through.

### *Can play therapy be helpful for adolescents?*

Play therapy is suitable for children as young as 3 years and can also be helpful for older children and adolescents. The essential ingredients for play therapy and counselling are the same: a therapeutic relationship of safety and trust is established between the therapist and the child; the therapist holds a deep respect for the individual person of each child; the therapeutic space is a place where each child and adolescent can be themselves and make meaning of their world at their own pace.

### *Can I watch my child in play therapy?*

Just as a counsellor who works with adults keeps the information shared in sessions confidential, your child's play therapy sessions are also confidential. There are some limits to confidentiality and I will discuss these further with you.

### *Will you tell me about what my child does in play therapy?*

I will arrange for us to have regular Caregiver Consultations for you and I to discuss your child's progress and developmental stage, discuss your concerns, and talk about any questions you may have related to your child's progress in play therapy. I try to schedule these after every 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> play therapy session that your child attends. Some parents/caregivers like to keep these on a separate week to their child's play therapy session so that there is 1 appointment that week rather than 2, for ease of scheduling and payment.

Every child is exquisitely individual and therefore their play therapy journey is also unique. However, there are specific stages that all children move through in play therapy and I will discuss these with you as they relate to your child. I will also talk to you about the themes I am seeing in their play therapy process. We will discuss ways that you can assist your child in relation to their play therapy process.

If there are events that occur in your child's world in between play therapy sessions (specific changes, worries and/or traumatic events) please give me a call or make a time to let me know. It is also helpful to share any positive changes you are noticing in your child's world between sessions. When you bring your child to play therapy sessions this is his/her special time and I would ask that you do not discuss with me what has been happening for your child in front of them. Instead, please phone me and we will make a separate time to discuss any concerns you have.

### *What should I tell my child about why he/she is coming to play therapy?*

You can tell your child that he/she will be coming to a special playroom to see Claire. If your child asks why, you might say something like: "when things are hard at school/home/with friends, it can help to have a special place to play".

If there has been a traumatic incident in your child's world, I will let your child know that I know during our first play therapy session. I will not expect your child to respond or talk about this, it is just to let your child



know that it is not a secret. I will discuss this with you during our intake meeting before I see your child for their first play therapy session.

### ***How long and how frequent are the play therapy sessions?***

Play Therapy sessions are scheduled on a weekly basis for 45 minutes, but is dependent on the child's developmental stage, individual needs and therapeutic goals. This will be discussed with you and decided during the Intake phase. I like to have a regular time scheduled for you and your child because predictability and consistency are important components in building safety and trust within the therapeutic relationship. Because each child is unique, there is no 'one size fits all' timeline for Child Centred Play Therapy. On average, a child will require 15-25 sessions, but this could be less or more depending on the child's individual circumstances and frequency of attendance.

### ***What toys are in a playroom and why?***

Toys are carefully selected for the play therapy room to facilitate creative and emotional expression from children. The types of toys used can be played with in many ways and therefore enhance the development of decision-making, problem solving and self-control in children. They are also very durable and sturdy materials to allow for repeated use and rough play.

### ***What's the difference between play therapy and playing with my child at home?***

Playing with your child at home is strongly encouraged, as you are the most important attachment figure in their life. However, play therapy is different to regular play because play therapists are specifically trained to provide an environment of acceptance, empathy and understanding in the context of the therapeutic relationship. Play therapy uses the child's natural tendency to "play out" their reactions to life situations, in the presence of a counsellor, to help the child feel accepted and understood and gain a sense of control or understanding of difficult situations. Just as with counselling for adults, children may process difficult or strong feelings through play therapy, therefore a child's play therapy session will sometimes be hard work for them.

Occasionally I may be running behind time. If this does happen, I will extend the session to give your child the designated time allocated. If you arrive late for a play therapy session, we will be finishing at the scheduled time unless there has been an agreed rescheduling of the session time at least 24 hours prior.

### ***Do I need to stay when my child is attending the play therapy sessions?***

In the beginning yes. This is important so that your child knows that you are in the waiting room and they can come and check in with you if they become anxious. As your child gets more comfortable and confident over time, you may be able to transition to a drop off/pick up scenario. This can be discussed in the intake phase to determine what will work best for your family.

### ***What should I say to my child when he/she finishes a play therapy session?***

I recommend that you do not ask your child if he/she had fun at play therapy or how it was in the playroom. As parents, we can be desperate to know that our child is ok, and whilst it may appear that your child is just coming in for a play with lots of cool toys and resources, play therapy can be hard work. Sometimes children do not want to talk after a play therapy session, just as sometimes adults do not want to talk after counselling. It is best if you can follow your child's lead with this. For example, maybe you just ask them "are you ready to go" when they exit the playroom. Your child may wish to tell you about their session and if they do, I suggest responding in an interested and supportive manner, showing interest in what your child is telling you. If you can, hold back from asking questions.

Sometimes your child may choose to draw/make something for you or for someone else in their play therapy session. I recommend that you respond in supportive and general way and try to avoid praise. For example, you might say "you have used so many colours in your picture" or "you really like the picture that you made". We do this because the item created by your child is a valuable part of their 'counselling' process in the play therapy session. How they value and make meaning from this is more important than our praise or interpretation of their work. It is special simply because it has come from your child.

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