

# Children's Therapy: A guide for parents & guardians



Play Based therapy helps children learn about themselves and their world. The toys are their words and the play is their language which they use to work through their internal world, as well as a way to problem solve in the external world.

Play is an essential part of every child's life and in every way: physically, mentally, socially and emotionally. When children feel sad, worried or troubled about an event or incident they may not be able to talk about their feelings like adults do - instead, children communicate through their play.

Parents often worry when a child has a problem that causes them to be sad, disruptive, rebellious, unable to cope or inattentive. You may be concerned about your child's development, eating or sleeping patterns and how they are getting along with family, friends and at school (BAPT, 2005).

Play therapy is a professional therapeutic process that uses play as the medium for the child to "talk" about their feelings, much like an adult does when they see a psychotherapist or counselor. In a child-centered, non-directed play therapy session the child leads the play by deciding how, when and what play therapy tools are used.



Play therapy tools are specifically selected toys and play materials which facilitates play communication so that the child may easily manipulate them in their own way and at their own pace.

Over time the child and play therapist learn to communicate through the child's play within a safe and trusting play therapy relationship. This relationship is a very important part of the therapy and it takes time.

## **What will happen in the Therapy sessions?**

I will supply all the toys and play materials from which your child may choose. These may include art and craft materials, dressing up props, sand and water, small figures and animals, musical instruments, puppets and books. The toys will help your child to express anything that is on his or her mind without having to talk it through. Your child will lead the play. At times I will lead the play if there are clinical reasons for doing so, especially with children that dissociate or find it difficult to be with strong emotions.

## **How long will it take?**

In General, the Play Therapy process can be as short as 10 weeks or longer than 2 years.



Each child is unique and some children have more complex concerns than others and therefore it is not always possible to determine exactly how long the child should receive play therapy (Mullen, 2009).

However, it is anticipated that a minimum of 10 play therapy sessions will be offered. These hourly sessions are usually organized weekly at the same time, place and day. This is important for the child to learn to trust consistency and helps to build the play therapy relationship (BAPT, 2005).

It is usual for the first meeting to be arranged with a parent(s) without your child present. During this time I will ask some questions about your child's strengths as well as any difficulties. A second meeting may be required if you would like to be present with your child when we meet for the first time (this is up to you and your child). All following play therapy sessions are usually with the child only.

## **Working with you and significant others**

I will meet with you to discuss how your child is progressing in the therapy sessions. This will provide an opportunity for you to tell me about any changes and developments you have witnessed or experienced at home, which will assist me to understand your child and his/her experience. Please note that I will not disclose specific details of what

your child has done in sessions, rather I will provide you with a broad overview of the themes which are prominent for your child, and will communicate any difficulties that your child is experiencing.

Sometimes it will be important to communicate with school or other settings that are important to your child. This will only ever be in consultation with you as the parent/carer, sometimes I will provide questionnaire/s to a teacher to gain an understanding of the child across contexts, and in cases where a child is in foster care, I will consult with the school and the care system as an advocate for the child.

## **Confidentiality**

Play Therapy sessions are private between your child and me. You may really want to ask your child what happened during a session – however I would urge you not to ask specific questions or ask your child to ‘be good’. If your child wants to talk to you about the play therapy – please just listen. If your child chooses not to talk to you, it is not because of you. Usually it is because he or she is still thinking about and trying to make sense of what happened.

All information disclosed within the play therapy sessions is confidential and may not be revealed to anyone without your (and your child’s) permission except where disclosure is required by law. In this case it will be discussed with you whenever possible prior to a disclosure. The only time this would not be possible would be if it was deemed that a child was at risk of immediate harm.

You will be asked to sign a consent form including written communication with the referrer. As working with children is such an important and at times complex task, clinicians are required under our professional registration bodies to seek regular peer consultation to assist us in maintaining best practice. Therefore, there will be times that I will discuss your child and his/her therapy with a senior colleague, this will be entirely confidential between us and will not include demographic or identifying information.

Please see our Confidentiality Policy for further information.