



playspace-expressions

‘It’s never too late to have a happy childhood’

For children of all ages

What Is Play Therapy? Information for Parents and carers

Supporting the Child in the Play Therapy Process

Why Choose Play Therapy?

Parents and carers often have very real and deep concerns when their child has a problem that is troubling them and disrupting their behaviour or relationships. Every child is unique, special, and develops at their own pace. Sometimes, they can get stuck at a stage or facing a difficulty or challenge and they need extra help and therapeutic support to manage their feelings and get through an upsetting time or a traumatic event. Children may become unhappy and withdrawn or aggressive and rebellious; they may struggle with concentration or stop sleeping or eating properly. They may show some other behaviours that affects how they get on with their family and friends or at school.

It can be hard for you to know what to do for the best. Seeking help is a really positive way of supporting your child. Play Therapy can help children in the same way that counselling can help adults. The difference is that children communicate their feelings and make sense of what they are going through by playing rather than talking, and using creativity and toys allows them to bring the problem out into the open in a non-threatening environment, so they can begin to have an understanding of events and their own reactions.

How Can Playing Help?

Playing is the most natural way for children to express themselves. Through play they can show things on the outside that are upsetting them inside. Playing alongside a Play Therapist helps children explore and make sense of upsetting feelings and thoughts that have become confusing or even overwhelming. By choosing what they want to play with and going at their own pace, without being questioned or pressured, children can start to feel more in control and this can enable them to cope better in the future. The outcomes of Play Therapy vary: children may feel better about themselves or less anxious; they may be more focused and less reactive; their behaviour may change; they may get on better with family and friends. Each child's experience is unique. It is difficult to say in advance what the outcomes will be or how many sessions will be needed. There will be review meetings every 6 sessions or so when you can discuss how things are going with the Play Therapist who will offer practical strategies to help you support your child and work with you in a playful manner, so you too will build a trusting relationship with your child's therapist.

What Do Play Therapists Do?

Play Therapists have received extensive training in subjects such as child development, neuroscience, and attachment (the bonding process). They are trained to use play to understand and communicate with children effectively. Play Therapists use a variety of toys like puppets, books, small figures and animals, sand tray, water, clay, and art and craft materials to enable children to express themselves. It is important that the therapist provides a trusting relationship in which the child feels safe, comfortable and understood.

The Play therapist will start by listening carefully to your feelings and concerns. It is important to gain an understanding of your child's strengths and difficulties and the things that have been affecting your family. This will include developmental milestones and significant life events. Other relevant information eg. from school, will also help to form a full picture. A plan can then be made about how best to support you and your family throughout the whole intervention.

How can I help my child during the Play Therapy process?

Your support is vital to the Play therapy process. The following points really help:

- Please make every effort for the child to attend every Play Therapy appointment.
- Please avoid asking your child to tell you in detail about the session – they may not be able to put their play into words.
- Please don't worry about your child behaving well or tell them to be 'good.' Play Therapy is a place where 'bad' feelings can be let out and the child mustn't feel they should keep them in or not be able to show the whole of who they are.
- It's best not to suggest what your child should talk about, (but if there is something you want the therapist to know tell them at another time).
- Be aware that your child's behaviour could get worse before it gets better as they may be exploring some difficult feelings. This doesn't mean the Play Therapy isn't working, but that complex suppressed emotions may be coming to the surface. Do tell the therapist if you have concerns or questions along the way as they will be able to offer advice and practical strategies to help manage a difficult time. It is often helpful to tell children, it is ok to have more than one feeling at once.

- Children should wear clothes that aren't too special to Play Therapy sessions - their feelings can sometimes get 'messy' and so can their play! Aprons and wipes are always available to protect the child's clothes.

What About Confidentiality?

Any information you share with the Play Therapist in the meetings or through reports will be kept confidential, unless you say it may be shared with someone else. Play sessions are confidential too, although the child will always be asked if they know why they are seeing a Play therapist. This helps the child to understand they have not done anything wrong and can use the time in the play room to sort out their muddled feelings. We explain confidentiality to the child by saying that sessions are private but not secret. This means the child can share anything they want about what they do, say or feel in sessions but the Play Therapist will not share details of what the child has played, and all work created in the sessions is kept in a special box for the child to take home at the end of therapy.

The only exception is the obligation to share information where there are concerns a child is being harmed or in danger. There will be regular review meetings to discuss together how we feel things are going. The Play Therapist can help support your family and child by referring them to other services or writing to their GP with your permission, for example asking for a referral to an occupational therapist to help with clumsiness.

Play Therapist contact details:

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Information compiled with reference to:

BAPT (British Association of Play Therapists).

(2004) Play Therapy in Schools

(2007) What Is Play Therapy?

Landreth, G. (2010) Play Therapy: The Art of the Relationship, 2nd edn, New York: Routledge.

Find further information at www.bapt.info

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