



playspace-expressions

'It's never too late to have a happy childhood'

For children of all ages

# **What Is Play Therapy? Information for Schools and Referrers**

## **Supporting the Child in the Play Therapy Process**

### **What Is Play Therapy?**

Play Therapy is an effective way of helping children:

- recover from and make sense of difficult and painful life experiences
- express and explore difficult feelings
- achieve a more positive view of themselves and their own value increasing self esteem
- improve their family and social relationships, behaviour and readiness to learn
- develop emotionally and socially due to increased awareness and confidence
- improve communication skills and emotional literacy

Therapies which require or encourage children to talk may be inappropriate for those who struggle to put their feelings into words whereas most children are fluent in the language of play and naturally gravitate towards using metaphor.

Play is the child's way of expressing and exploring their internal and external worlds. The Play Therapist provides a safe environment and develops a bond that leads to a dynamic, trusting relationship where children can express themselves freely, at their own pace. Emotions which may otherwise seem overwhelming or uncontrollable can

be contained in the metaphors of play, enabling the child to experience a healthy sense of control, and inviting them to discover a different perspective.

## **Who can benefit from Play Therapy?**

Play Therapy is appropriate for children, young people, and adults but is most often used in primary schools with children between 3 and 11 years. It is recommended for children who have experienced:

- Bed wetting and sleep disturbances
- Separation anxiety and school refusal
- Emotional or behavioural difficulties
- Loss through bereavement, family breakdown or relocation
- Foster, kinship, or adoption
- Illness, hospitalisation, and disability
- Being a witness to violence or substance abuse
- Cutting and self-harm
- Abuse or neglect
- Trauma due to single incident or prolonged trauma
- Bullying and bullying others.

### **Play Therapists work with individual children**

and may also offer joint work involving parents/carers or siblings.

Play Therapy is accessible to children of varying abilities and who come from different genders and cultures. It is a particularly suitable intervention for children with learning, physical and sensory impairments. It may also be appropriate for those for whom English is not their first language.

## **What is a Play Therapist?**

BAPT registered Play Therapists are graduates with experience of working with children e.g. teaching, social work, psychology. To be registered as a Full BAPT member they must have met the following criteria:

- **completion of a BAPT accredited Full Play Therapy training course**
- **ongoing personal therapy**
- **on-going clinical supervision of their Play Therapy practice**
- **commitment to the BAPT Ethical basis for Good practice in Play Therapy**
- **up-to-date clear CRB enhanced disclosure**

Play Therapists draw on an extensive repertoire of neuroscience, attachment (bonding) theory, psychotherapy methods and theories from child-led, non-directive techniques to more focused interventions to enable the child to reach the targets and goals set for the intervention.

## **The Play Therapy Process**

Play Therapy usually follows a standard procedure including:

1. Referral
2. Discussion and liaison with referrer/school staff
3. Consultation with parent(s)/carer(s)
4. Consent from adults with parental authority
5. Assessment meeting with the child
6. Play Therapy at weekly intervals
7. Regular review sessions with child, parent(s) / carer(s), referrer /school staff separately or jointly as appropriate
8. Planned endings or indication of short, medium or long term intervention.
8. Discussion and liaison with referrer/ school staff

Play therapy is most effective when significant adults in the child's life i.e. parents/carers and referrer/school staff are committed to supporting the child throughout the duration of the Play Therapy process. There will be regular meetings at which information and progress can be reviewed. Ending Play Therapy is a crucial part of the process and takes several sessions – premature or sudden endings are detrimental to the child

**Confidentiality:** The content of Play Therapy sessions is confidential to enable the child to feel safe, allow exploration and build trust in the therapist. The child can share with anyone they choose about what they play, say or feel in sessions but the Play Therapist will not share details. There is however, an obligation to share information to safeguard children from harm. It is made clear to children *that what you say in here, stays in here, with the exception of if someone is hurting you, you want to hurt someone, or you want to hurt yourself.*

**Consistency:** Play Therapy takes place in set sessions at the same time and in the same space each week. Interruptions during the sessions are detrimental to the child's sense of safety and should be avoided. If a child behaves disruptively at home or school, it may be tempting to withdraw their session as a sanction. However access to Play Therapy needs to be unconditional so the child can depend on their 'space' being available each week to work through the difficult feelings underlying the difficult behaviour.

**Commitment:** When the play therapist, parents/carers and other involved adult's e.g. social worker, school staff work in partnership with trust and mutual support for the child, the best results can be achieved. The Play therapist will build a relationship with all the systems around the child, and be able to attend outside meetings and provide reports as requested.

**Consent:** Written consent from the parent/carer (person holding legal parental responsibility) and verbal consent from the child must be received before Play Therapy can begin. If there are court proceedings in place, the play therapist will get permission from the presiding judge.

**Child Protection:** Play Therapists adhere to School/Local Authority Safeguarding procedures and the BAPT code of Ethics.

## **FAQs**

### **How long will Play Therapy take?**

It is not possible to say in advance how many weeks a child will need in Play Therapy as the complexity of their needs will vary. As a rule of thumb, the more complex the case or embedded the difficulty, the longer the intervention. Typically a minimum of 12 -20 weeks is required. Meetings are held at approximately six-weekly intervals to review the child's needs and progress with the parents and school. Outcome measures are used to provide an evidence based intervention.

### **Is Play Therapy always appropriate?**

Sometimes there are factors in a child's life which mean it is not the right time for Play Therapy or a child may need a different type of intervention to meet his or her needs.

**What progress can be expected?**

In Play Therapy children deal with difficult and painful issues. Their pace is not to be rushed and specific results cannot be predicted in a time frame. Play therapy can help release a child from shame which supports progression towards health.

Most children find Play Therapy a helpful way of releasing and making sense of upsetting feelings and experiences; this has a beneficial and positive effect on behaviour, relationships and development.

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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?

Find further information at [www.bapt.info](http://www.bapt.info)

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