

BASICS OF PLAY THERAPY

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PLAY THERAPY BASIS

- Children are *not* miniature adults!
- Children must be understood from a developmental perspective.
- Natural medium of communication is play and activity.
- Through play, children learn what no one can teach them.
- Play bridges the gap between concrete experience and abstract thoughts (Piaget).
- Through play, children re-organize their experiences.

(Landreth, 2002)

WHAT IS PLAY?

- Play is *essential* for children's healthy development.
- A major function of play is to change what may be unmanageable in reality to manageable situations through symbolic representation.
- Play is a child's attempt to organize her experiences and personal world.
- *Playing out* experiences and feelings: a natural dynamic self-healing process.
- Play is the child's language. Toys are their words!

(Landreth, 2002)

PRINCIPLES FOR RELATING TO CHILDREN

- Children are not miniature adults.
- Children are people who experience deep emotional pain and joy.
- Children are unique and worthy of respect.
- Children are resilient.
- Children have an inherent tendency toward growth and maturity.
- Children are capable of positive self-direction.

CHILD-CENTERED PLAY THERAPY

- Children's natural language is play.
- Children have a right to remain silent.
- Children will take the therapeutic experience to where they need to be.
- Children's growth can not be speeded up.

(Landreth, 2002, p.54)

- Therapeutic conditions for growth.
- Being real. Being genuine. Being versus doing.
- Warm and caring acceptance.
- Sensitive understanding. Not evaluation.

RELATIONSHIP

- “I don’t know enough” said the scarecrow... “My head is stuffed with straw... Im going to Oz to ask him for some brains.”
- “O, I see,” said the Tin Woodman. “But after all, brains are not the best things in the world.”
- “Do you have any?”
- “No, my head is quite empty... but once I had brains and a heart also. So, having tried them both, I much rather have a heart.”

The Wizard of Oz (Baum , 1956)

- “When we focus on the problem, we loose sight of the child” (p. 85)
- Warm, caring, genuine interest.
- Full acceptance: therapist does not wish the child were different.
- Create safe and protective space. And permissiveness.
- Believe in child’s capacity to act responsibly.
- Establishes only therapeutic limits necessary to anchor session in reality.

(Landreth, 2002)

FOCUS

Focus on...

- Person of the child
- Present
- Feelings
- Understanding
- Accepting
- Child's direction
- Childs wisdom

Instead of...

- Problem
- Past
- Thoughts or acts
- Explaining
- Correcting
- Therapist's instructions
- Therapist knowledge

FACILITATING GROWTH

- Belief in the child
- Respect for the child
- Acceptance of the child
- Hearing the inner child
- Acceptance of child's will
- Focus on the child's needs
- Freedom for the child to set her own direction
- Opportunity for the child to make choices
- Respect for the child's boundaries
- Patience with the process

GOALS OF THERAPY

- Develop a more positive self-concept
- Assume greater self-responsibility
- Become more self-directing
- Become more self-accepting
- Become more self-reliant
- Engage in self-determined decision making
- Experience a feeling of control
- Become sensitive to the process of coping
- Develop an internal source of evaluation
- Become more trusting of self

TOY RECOMMENDATION

- Create a therapeutic environment: A well-planned and organized space is very important (especially true for distressed and traumatized children).
- Orderly and Predictable
- Allow for Messiness & Ease of Clean Up

SELECTION

- Allow for exploration of real life experiences including cultural values, traditions and roles
- Facilitate contact with the child by gaining the child's interest and attention
- Permit reality testing/limit setting
- Provide the opportunity for development of self-control
- Facilitate exploration of the self and others
- Allow children to express their needs symbolically (without any need for verbalization)

- Provide for expression of a wide range of feelings
- Provide opportunities for insight/self-understanding
- Allow for creative expression
- Toys should also be durable, simple, and easy to operate, allow for success & are fun
- REMINDER: TOYS SHOULD BE SELECTED, NOT COLLECTED

CATEGORIES OF TOYS

- **Real-life and Nurturing:** Doll family, doll house, baby bottle, variety of puppets, animal families, cars, money, cash, register, kitchen, food, medical kit, phone, etc.
- **Acting-out, Aggressive, Scary Toys (or not?):** oBop bag, toy soldiers, guns (colored plastic-not real looking!), scary/aggressive puppets and animals (alligator, shark, etc), rubber knife, foam sword, handcuffs, etc.
- **Creative expression and emotional release:** Sand, water, paints, craft materials, clay, musical instruments, magic wand, dress-up clothes, etc.

TOYS AND MATERIALS

- Doll furniture (sturdy wood)
- Pacifier
- Nursing bottle (plastic)
- Chalkboard, chalk
- Band-aids
- Sponge, towel
- Soap, brush, comb
- Dolls
- Transparent tape
- Building blocks (diff. shapes and sizes)
- Play-Doh or clay
- Pipe cleaner
- Tissue
- Rubber Knife
- Dart gun
- Balls (large and small)
- Medical kit

- Refrigerator (wood)
- Dishes (plastic or tin)
- Pitcher
- Plastic food
- Egg cartons
- Broom, dustpan
- Crayons, pencils, paper
- Toy watch
- Paints, easel, newsprint, brushes
- Lone Ranger type mask
- Tongue depressors, popsicle sticks
- Truck, car, airplane, tractor, boat
- Pounding bench and hammer
- Cymbals
- Toy soldiers and army equipment
- Sandbox, large spoon, funnel, sieve, pail
- Rubber snake, alligator
- Multicolored chalk, eraser

- Stove (wood)
- Pans, silverware
- Dishpan
- Empty fruit and vegetable cans, etc.
- ATV (multi-wheel vehicle for riding on)
- School bus (Fisher Price type)
- Xylophone
- Drum
- Fireman's hat, other hats
- Zoo animals, farm animals
- Bop bag (Bobo)
- Handcuffs
- Toy noise making gun
- Rope
- Purse and jewelry
- Telephone (two)
- Construction paper (several colors)
- Rags or old towels
- Tinker toys
- Blunt scissors
- Play money and cash register
- Hand puppets (doctor, nurse, etc.)

MULTICULTURAL ISSUES

- Remember to include toys representative of the child's culture and experiences, such as:
 - Dolls/puppets of different skin colors
 - Ethnically diverse food as well as kitchen utensils representative of different cultures
 - Musical instruments
 - Hats,
 - Jewelry

SKILLS

- Promote and facilitate the effective communication.
- Child lead throughout the play session.
- Counselor enters child's world and see through the child's eyes.
- Helps children feel in control and become intrinsically motivated.
- Skills are used with the child as he/she plays with the provided toys and materials.

(Bostick & Mitchell, 2009)

CHILD LEADS

By allowing the child to lead:

- You try to see the child's play through his eyes and you join in as a follower.
- Do this through words such as: "During our special play time together, you get to choose what you play with."
- (Using the whisper technique) "Show me what you want me to do with this."
- With puppets, for example: "What should I say next?"
- Child hands you a hat and says, "You wear it." Say: "You want me to put this on."

(Bostick & Mitchell, 2009)

4 IMPORTANT SKILLS

- Tracking
- Encouragement
- Reflection of feelings
- Limit Setting

TRACKING

Tracking verbally states what the child is doing and saying, using names of items after the child has named them.

- "You chose that one."
- "You're putting it in there."
- "You've lined up all the cars and trucks in a row."
(assuming the child has named them already)
- "You've decided to stack those on top of each other."

ENCOURAGEMENT

Encouragement conveys the belief in the child's ability to solve her own problem.

- "You worked hard on that and you did it!"
- "You figured out how to stack those to make them stand up."
- "You have a plan for how you want that to look."
- "You can decide how to do that."
- "It can be whatever you want it to be."

REFLECTION OF FEELINGS

Reflection of feelings uses verbal and visual cues, you respond to the feelings.

- “You seem frustrated that the blocks won’t stand up where you put them.”
- “The noise you heard startled you.”
- “You really wish you could play longer today.”
- “You look proud of how you did that.”
- “You are disappointed that our time is up for today.”

LIMIT SETTING

Limit setting is a three step process:

- Acknowledge the child’s feelings and/or desire to do something that is unacceptable
- Firmly set the limit on the behavior
- Verbally provide an acceptable alternative.
 - “David, I know you would like to play with the play-doh on the floor, but it is not for putting on the floor. You may play with the play-doh on the tray.”
 - “Sara, I know you’d like to pain on the table, but the table is not for painting. You may paint on the paper.”

(Landreth, 2002)

RECOMMENDED READING

- Axline, V. (1969). *Play therapy*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.
- Axline, V. (1969). *Dibs in Search of Self*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Landreth, G. (2002). *Play therapy: The art of the relationship* (2nd ed.). New York: Brunner-Routledge.

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- Bostick, D., & Mitchell, B. (2009). *Four basic play therapy techniques*. Unpublished manuscript.
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