

## Why Choose Play Therapy?

Think back to something you enjoyed playing when you were young. How did you feel when you played it? Why do you think you gravitated to that particular activity? According to the Association for Play Therapy (a4pt.org), playing has many benefits, including relieving stress and allowing us to practice roles needed for survival. Play has its own neural circuitry, connecting us to people in a positive way, stimulating creative thinking and exploration, regulating our emotions, and boosting our ego. For children, playing out a distressing situation that they may not have the words for can help them feel better, just as adults feel more understood regarding a problem after sharing worries with other adults. Children can feel safer playing out something distressing when they have distance from it using play items in the contained playroom. If you have a concern regarding a behavior your child is demonstrating, play therapy can be helpful to resolve it. If children act out at home, with friends, or at school, they have used up their own problem solving tools and need a safe space to build up new ones. Play therapy can take just a few sessions, or up to one year of consistent appointments, as it works at a neural, psychodynamic level. ( a4pt.org)

### **Play Therapy can help your child and family with:**

- anxiety disorders/selective mutism
- sleep disorders/nightmares
- obsessive-compulsive disorders
- bed wetting/enuresis/encopresis
- depression/harmful thoughts
- attention deficit hyperactivity
- autism spectrum
- oppositional defiant and conduct disorders
- anger management
- natural disasters
- crisis and trauma
- hospitalization
- chronic illness
- sexual and physical abuse
- grief and loss
- divorce and family dissolution
- relocation
- domestic violence
- academic and social developmental
- physical and learning disabilities

## What to Expect in Play Therapy

Through play therapy, children learn to communicate with others, express feelings, modify behavior, develop problem-solving skills, and learn a variety of ways of relating to others. Play provides a safe psychological distance from their problems and allows expression of thoughts and feelings appropriate to their development. Play therapy encourages children to:

- Become more responsible for behaviors & successful strategies.
- Develop new and creative solutions to problems.
- Develop respect and acceptance of self and others.
- Learn to experience and express emotion.
- Cultivate empathy and respect for thoughts and feelings of others.
- Learn new social skills and relational skills with family.
- Develop self-efficacy and thus a better assuredness about their abilities. (a4pt.org).

## FAQ's Regarding Bringing Your Child to & From Play Therapy

### How do I start my child with you in play therapy?

Make an appointment for yourself and any other involved caregivers first. We will meet without your child and discuss the current difficulties you feel are impacting your child.

### What do I tell my child about coming to play therapy?

"We are going to see someone named Ms. Trina at a special playroom with lots of toys. Sometimes when things are difficult at home or school, it can help to have a special place to play/hangout/relax. She works with lots of kids who have (had a mom/dad die, had their parents divorce, lots of nervous feelings, difficulty at school). I will be waiting for you while you play, and sometimes I may even come in and play with you."

With adolescents, they may shy away from the idea of 'play therapy,' yet often engage in play or art in the privacy of a session. I offer them suggestions of activities to try and it's up to them how they would like to participate. You could tell them: "I'd like you to meet with someone who can help you to cope with the tough time our family has been having/ the strong feelings you've been having lately. She will have ideas of things to do to feel better and you can choose to do them or not."

### Do I join my child for play therapy?

Most sessions will be held alone with the child. Once I can determine how a child could be supported effectively at home, parents may come in to talk or play during the session. Remember the rules in the playroom are probably different than those at your home, so leave the limit enforcing up to me. Please wait in the waiting area for your child during the session, unless other arrangements have been discussed.

## **What should we do before the session?**

- When telling them you are bringing them to therapy, assure them it is not a test or for them to feel they have to be right or wrong, rather a chance for them to feel however they want. Don't tell them they are the problem in the family.
- Let them know they will meet with me for 45 minutes each week, or every other week.
- Dress for possible mess as clay, paint, wet sand, and other messy materials could be used.
- Ensure your child has had a healthy snack and is hydrated before the session. It is okay to bring a light snack or water into the session if needed.
- Have your child use the bathroom upon arrival, then wait in the reception area for me to find you. There are keys to the restrooms hanging in the hallways inside the office, and the restrooms are located at the top of the stairs outside our office.

## **Further Considerations:**

- Don't discipline or expect certain behavior from your child during the session if you are included in it. I will enforce all limits and boundaries unless there is something specific we've agreed upon before the session.
- Don't tell your child to "be good" for the session.
- Don't discuss concerns regarding your child in front of them as they commonly feel very uncomfortable with this. Bring them up in our initial session, or I am available via email and phone calls up to 10 minutes. I also offer extended phone sessions for a fee.
- Don't fight an epic battle with your child trying to get them to come to sessions. If there is an issue with this, please call or email me to consult on next steps.
- Don't bribe or give consequences for therapy attendance.

***Please try to bring your child on time and on a consistent basis so they feel more secure and therapy can be more effective.***

## **How about after the session?**

- Don't ask your child what they said or did in the session or if they 'had fun'.
- Do say "Time to go home," or "Now we can grab a frozen yogurt."
- Do listen carefully if your child does decide to talk about the session, letting your child lead the conversation. Be a curious listener without a need to debate right or wrong.
- Do show interest in any art or product they bring from session without passing judgment: "I see you painted with lots of red today," "You sculpted something, what can you tell me about it?" If they are choosing to share something they created in therapy with you, it is important and should be treated as such.
- Give your child some quiet time and maybe even some extra "tender loving care" after a session. They could have just experienced something important that needs a bit of space to process.