

# Play Therapy

## What is Play Therapy?

Play therapy is an approach to therapy that uses the natural way children communicate and learn (Carmichael, 2006; Landreth, 2002; O'Connor & Schaefer, 1983). Therapists use play therapy to help children express what is troubling them when they do not have the verbal language to express their thoughts and feelings (Gil, 1991). In play therapy, toys are like the child's words and play is the child's language (Landreth, 2002). Through play, therapists can help children heal from trauma, express thoughts and feelings, improve social skills, change behaviors, and better handle anxiety or stress (Pedro-Carroll & Reddy, 2005; O'Connor & Schaefer, 1983; Reddy, Files-Hall & Schaefer, 2005). There are several different models of play therapy, which are categorized by being directive, non-directive, or a combination of both.



## How does Play Therapy Work?

Children communicate their thoughts and feelings through play more naturally than they do through talking. As children grow, their use of language becomes more sophisticated, but throughout childhood, they usually express much more of themselves in their play. Play is the primary way that children learn about the world, understand how different things work, express their thoughts and feelings, and move through developmental stages.

In play therapy, playing becomes a child's primary form of communication to the therapist (Lieberman, 1979). When children play they can communicate about current and past events, can use verbal and non-verbal expressions to describe events in their lives, and can safely develop play themes around their current problem (Lieberman, 1979).

As the child plays, the therapist begins to recognize themes or ways of using the materials that are important to the child. Over time, the therapist helps the child begin to make meaning out of the play, work through traumatic events, and express his or her thoughts and feelings in a developmentally appropriate way.

## How is Play Therapy used to help children overcome issues or problems?

Our therapists use both directive and non-directive play therapy to help children deal with trauma, depression, anxiety, behavioral struggles, anger, and a variety of other concerns. In play therapy children have access to art supplies, sand and sand toys, storytelling aids, and toys for dramatic and fantasy play through which they recreate the emotional experiences they are struggling with internally. Our trained play therapists provide a safe and understanding environment that encourages children to express themselves and develop skills that promote healing and growth.

## Sources

Association for Play Therapy: <http://www.a4pt.org>

Trauma Awareness & Treatment Center: <http://www.traumaawareness.org>

Family Enhancement & Play Therapy Center: <http://www.play-therapy.com>

## References

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O'Connor K. J., Schaefer C. E. (1983). *Handbook of play therapy*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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