



## 9 PLAY AS THERAPY

Play Therapy is a type of counselling or psychotherapy for children. It uses the child's natural language – play – as a form of communication. Instead of speaking about what troubles them, as in adult counselling, children have the opportunity to explore their feelings through play.

The creative language of play offers access to deep-rooted feelings, in a way similar to the process of dreaming. Through play, with the support of a trained adult in a safe space, children may express themselves more freely and work through difficult feelings or troubling events.

### Who is it for:

Children who have experienced trauma or loss, or present a range of emotional, physical or behavioural difficulties, can benefit from play therapy. Changes in family life, hospitalisation, difficulty with forming friendships, being on either side of bullying, anxiety, aggression, hyperactivity, and phobias are some of the reasons children are referred for play therapy, alongside more significant traumas such as domestic violence, abuse or neglect.

Play therapy is most often offered on a one-to-one basis for children between the ages of 3 - 12. It can also be used in group therapy as well as with young people and adults, especially when spoken language could be a barrier.

### A holistic approach:

Play therapy works with the whole child in mind, their physical, emotional and mental wellbeing.

### Did you know ?

**Research shows that about 70% of clients referred for play therapy show positive change, a figure very similar to that of the effectiveness of adult counselling.**

### History

The therapeutic use of play has been recognised since the early days of psychoanalysis – Sigmund Freud, Anna Freud and Melanie Klein have used play to engage young children. The earliest recorded use of play in therapy is in 1914 by the first child analyst Hermine Hug-Hellmuth.

In the 1940s Virginia Axline developed a method of non-directive play therapy and formulated the principles that are largely followed by practitioners today. Her method is based on the person-centred approach of the American psychologist Carl Rogers. Play Therapy is centred around a warm and friendly relationship based on respect.

*Today play therapy can be non-directive, when a child decides what to do in a session, directive, when the play therapist takes the lead, or a mixture of the two.* Recently a key influence from play therapy is in the area of **attachment theory**, which stresses the significance of relationships for healthy development and the early bond between the infant and primary carer.

### Some of the tools included in a play therapist's 'toolkit' are:

- art, crafts and clay
- music
- dance and movement
- dressing up and role play
- puppets
- sand play
- water
- small world play
- storytelling

### Further Reading

British Association of Play Therapists:

<http://www.bapt.info/>

Play Therapy UK:

<http://playtherapy.org.uk/>

Axline's principles of play therapy:

<http://playtherapy.org.uk/ChildrensEmotionalWellBeing/AboutPlayTherapy/MainPrinciples/AxlinePrinciples>

### Smart Play Network Members Support

Member you have access to telephone and email support. For more information about the topics covered in this guidance sheet, or any other queries you may have about your project, please contact us using: 0131 554 2620 or [admin@smartplaynetwork.org](mailto:admin@smartplaynetwork.org)