



15 FILIAL PLAY

Filial Play Coaching / Mentoring is an intervention which offers parents the tools and skills to bring positive change to the relationship with their child. (The word filial comes from the Latin word for son / daughter.) The coach / mentor works with the parent, training them on four core skills, which allow them to carry out child-led play sessions at home.

Filial play coaching is not a therapy; however, there is a therapeutic element to it. Therefore, to train as a coach / mentor it is necessary to be a qualified therapist. The approach is based on attachment theory, and the principle that a strong parent-child bond forms a secure base for overall development and other relationships in life.

The four skills echo the fundamental principles of non-directive play therapy:

1. setting boundaries of space, time, physical and emotional safety
2. focusing on the child and following the child's lead
3. reflecting back thoughts and emotions that the child expresses
4. being predictable and consistent

These skills are taught through coaching sessions using a variety of methods. The programme is flexible and is designed to adapt to each individual parent-child relationship.

Filial play coaching is a strength-based model. It places the child at the centre, and offers the parent the understanding and confidence to relate to their child in a way that is more rewarding for both. It encourages empathy and self-awareness in the parent and self-regulation in the child. The new skills are learnt for life and the strengthening of the parent-child bond usually has further positive impact on the whole family.

Other Interventions

The parent-child relationship is so significant for brain development, emotional and physical health, that several models have been designed to help get this relationship right.

Filial Therapy / Filial Play Therapy are psychotherapy interventions, in which the therapist works with both the parent and child, as a dyad. Not to be confused with Filial Play Coaching / Mentoring.

Other psychotherapy models for the parent-child dyad are **Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy** (DDP).

Another approach in supporting and empowering parents is **Hand in Hand Parenting** with emphasis on self-guided learning for parents, as well as community and peer support.

Also worth mentioning is the well-established **Solihull Approach** to emotional health, with training programmes for parents from conception, as well as for professionals working with children and families.

Despite their differences, all these models have some key elements in common. Their theoretical underpinnings are found in attachment theory and the significance of early relationships, as well as in the recent findings on brain development. All models take a child-centred approach, aiming to develop in the parent the ability to listen to the child, and to see the emotions behind their behaviour. They work towards building emotional literacy in both adults and children. Finally but just as essential, all interventions use play, and playfulness, as a means for adults to better understand and communicate with children.

Further Reading

Play Therapy Principles

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

Filial Play Coaching

<https://playtherapy.org.uk/Training/TrainCrseFilialPlay>

Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy

<https://ddpnetwork.org/>

Solihull Approach

<https://solihullapproachparenting.com/>

Hand in Hand Parenting

<https://www.handinhandparenting.org/>

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