

# Play Therapy

## Frequently Asked Questions

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### **WHAT IS PLAY THERAPY?**

Play therapy is to children what counseling is to adults. When adults have problems, it often helps for them to share their thoughts and feelings with a trusted friend or therapist. Children do not have the ability to express themselves with words as adults do, so it is difficult for them to verbalize what is troubling them. Play therapy allows children to communicate through play (their most natural form of expression) their thoughts and feelings, and their needs and desires. With the help of a trained Play Therapist, children can learn to understand themselves and their world better, work to resolve their problems, and develop coping skills to better deal with life.

### **WHY DOES MY CHILD NEED PLAY THERAPY?**

In the process of growing up, most children at some point experience difficulty coping with their life experiences. Or, sometimes children exhibit behaviors which are concerning to their parents or teachers. Generally, if you, your child's teacher or physician become concerned about your child's behavior, or see that your child is having difficulty coping, play therapy is the recommended approach to helping your child.

### **WHAT CAN I EXPECT FROM PLAY THERAPY?**

Play therapy is a process of the therapist building a trusting relationship with a child, the child revealing and/or working through his/her problems, coming to a resolution, practicing new skills, and then preparing for termination. Behavior and mood changes are normal and expected throughout the process of play therapy. At times, it may seem as though things are getting worse and not better. This can be expected and is very normal. If you notice this happening, please talk it over with your child's play therapist. Additionally, in play therapy, the therapist will not "pump" the child for information about their life or any traumatic incident. Children are allowed to work through their problems at their own pace.

There is much more freedom in the play therapy room than is allowed in other areas of the child's life. During the therapy session, every thought, feeling and almost all behaviors of the child are accepted. The freedom that is allowed in the playroom is necessary so that the child feels accepted, safe and trusting enough to reveal, and work through their fears and problems.

In the play therapy setting, typical behaviors for which limits are set are ones which may cause harm to the child, the therapist, or the playroom toys and equipment. Limits are important in that they help the child feel safe and secure in his/her environment. Limit setting, along with appropriate choice giving, also helps the child learn self-control, and increases the child's self esteem.

### **HOW DO I TALK TO MY CHILD AFTER A SESSION?**

It is essential that your child does not feel the need to give an account of what happens in the play therapy room. It is important that the child view his/her session as his/her own private hour with the therapist. Allow your child to initiate a conversation about his/her session, if he/she chooses, but also give your child the freedom and permission to NOT talk about his/her session if he/she so chooses.

### **HOW OFTEN AND FOR HOW LONG MUST MY CHILD COME FOR PLAY THERAPY?**

Each child moves through the therapy process at a different pace, and so the length of time a child needs to attend play therapy will vary according to the child's personality, severity of the trauma, and home and life circumstances.

Since children grow and develop best when they have structure and consistency, in order for your child to gain the most benefit from play therapy, it is important that the sessions be consistent. Therefore, it is crucial that you bring your child to his/her regularly scheduled therapy sessions.

### **HOW WILL I KNOW WHEN MY CHILD IS READY TO STOP...AND WHAT CAN I EXPECT AFTER MY CHILD HAS COMPLETED THERAPY?**

During the course of therapy, your child's therapist will notice if your child no longer "uses" the time therapeutically. In other words, when a child's previous pattern and intensity of play shifts to a pattern of more age/developmentally appropriate play, the child may be demonstrating a readiness to "graduate" from play therapy at this time.

As children get older, and as their thoughts about their life experiences are processed in a different, more mature manner, you may find that your child may be experiencing new difficulties, or you may notice your child is exhibiting new behaviors which are of concern. Again, if you or other adults in your child's life, are concerned about your child's behavior or his/her ability to cope, you may find it helpful to bring your child back for counseling.

### **WHEN DO I TALK WITH THE THERAPIST?**

Your child's therapist will want to meet with you regularly to discuss your child's progress. Occasionally the play therapist will also want you to join the session. During these times, the play therapist will offer guidance and support throughout the session. Of course, you may request to schedule a time to meet with the therapist privately if anything of importance or concern regarding your child arises which needs to be addressed between sessions.

### **WHAT CAN I DO?**

Before each session:

Arrive a few minutes early to allow time for your child to use the bathroom, if necessary.

Reassure your child that you will be waiting for him/her when the session is over.

**\*\*Caregivers MUST stay at the agency while their child is in counseling.\*\***

Throughout the counseling process:

You play a crucial role in your child's life and you can play a powerful role in helping your child throughout his/her counseling process. You can bring your own willingness to learn new tools, which can help your child generalize what he/she learns in therapy to his/her home or school. These tools are also likely to improve your relationship with your child. Your child's therapist may offer you information to read while you wait for your child, or during parent consultations. Please accept these as suggestions to try at home.