

Play Therapy refers to a large number of treatment methods, all of which make use of the natural benefits of play. Play Therapy differs from regular play in that the therapist helps children systematically address and resolve their problems. This approach is based upon the fact that play is the child's natural medium of self-expression. It is an opportunity which is given to the child to "play out" their feelings and problems just as, in certain types of adult therapy, an individual "talks out" their difficulties. Play Therapy is to children what counselling or psychotherapy is to adults. I use a variety of different Play Therapy approaches and techniques in my work with children. I select and adapt interventions appropriate to the child's age, interest, and treatment needs. For example, I may use therapeutic games, art activities, puppets, storytelling, role-playing, and/or sand play, to engage and assess children, and to help them address their treatment issues.

In Play Therapy, toys are viewed as the child's words and play as the child's language. Therefore, play is a medium for expressing feelings, exploring relationship, describing experiences, disclosing wishes, and self-fulfillment. Since children's language development lags behind their cognitive development, they communicate their awareness of what is happening in their world through their play. Emotionally significant experiences can be expressed more comfortably and safely through the symbolic representation the toys provide. The use of toys enables children to transfer anxieties, fears, fantasies and guilt to objects rather than people. In the process, children are safe from their own feelings and reactions because play enables children to distance themselves from traumatic events and experiences.

What to tell your children about their participation in play therapy?

What to say:

This is your child's opportunity to fully express themselves in whatever way they need to in order to feel their best. A great way to introduce the process is to say something like, "You are going to have your very own special play time to do whatever you need to do to feel great". Most children do not need much more than this as an introduction. If your child does, you can add things such as, "The place where you are going has a room full of toys and you get to play with whatever you want. I also met the person you are going to play with and she is really nice and loves to play with kids." If your child still shows resistance to coming, the best approach is to simply validate their feelings. You might say, "I hear that you do not want to go and I understand that you are a little nervous. It is really important for you to have your own special time, so we are going to go and check it out."

Here is another good reminder:

Your child's participation is a gift, not a punishment. If your child perceives this experience as a punishment for their behavior or if they feel that they are responsible for "fixing" any current issues, they will most likely be resistant to the process and it will take longer for them to develop trust with their therapist.