

PLAY THERAPY

Play therapy is a technique whereby the child's natural means of expression, namely play, is used as a therapeutic method to assist him/her in coping with emotional stress or trauma. It has been used effectively with children who have an understanding level of a normal three to eight year old, who are; distraught due to family problems (e.g., parental divorce, sibling rivalry), nail biters, bed wetters, aggressive or cruel, social underdeveloped, or victims of child abuse. It has also been used with special education students whose disability is a source of anxiety or emotional turmoil.

Practitioners of play therapy believe that this method allows the child to manipulate the world on a smaller scale, something that cannot be done in the child's everyday environment. By playing with specially selected materials, and with the guidance of a person who reacts in a designated manner, the child plays out his/her feelings, bringing these hidden emotions to the surface where s/he can face them and cope with them. In its most psychotherapeutic form, the teacher is unconditionally accepting of anything the child might say or do. The teacher never expresses shock, argues, teases, moralizes, or tells the child that his/her perceptions are incorrect. An atmosphere should be developed in which the child knows that s/he can express herself/himself in a non punitive environment. Yet, even though the atmosphere is permissive, certain limits may have to be imposed such as restrictions on destroying materials, attacking the teacher, or going beyond a set time limit.

Many psychologists, counselors and other professionals may view this technique as being within their jurisdiction only. They may be correct when referring to long term, in-depth counseling. However, although this technique is usually practiced by school

counselors, social workers and psychologists, it can easily be modified for use by the teacher in the classroom for less intensive problems. If you plan to conduct pre-planned sessions, it is best to obtain the permission of administrators and parents.