Understanding Play Therapy

*What is play therapy?*

🡪 In play therapy, we provide toys for children to use so they can say with toys what they have difficulty saying with words. When children can communicate or play out how they feel to someone who understands, they feel better because the feelings have been released. You have probably experienced the same thing when you were bothered or worried about something and then told someone who really cared about you and understood, then you felt better and could handle the problem better. Play therapy is like that for children. They can use the dolls, puppets, paints, or other toys to say what they think or how they feel. How children play or what they do in the playroom is very important, just like what you might say in therapy sessions is very important.

🡪 Play therapy also assists in the development of children by helping them know and accept themselves. Play therapists are trained to use skills and ways of interacting with your child to promote healing and work towards therapeutic objectives.

*How can it be helpful?*

🡪 We strive to help your child develop a more positive self-concept, assume greater self- responsibility, become more self-directing, self-accepting, self-reliant, and more trusting of her/himself, engage in self-determined decision making, experience a feeling of control, and become sensitive to the process of coping. By engaging in the process of play, children learn to live in our world of meanings and values, at the same time exploring and experimenting and learning in their own individual ways.

*Considerations during treatment:*

🡪 It is best that you refrain from quizzing (asking) you child about what he/she did, what happened, or if he/she had fun. After the play therapy session, if you were to ask your child what he/she did, he/she would probably say, “we just played” in the same way that if someone asked you what you did in a therapy session, you would say, “we just talked.” But what we have talked about is very important. Also, children are sometimes unaware at the moment that something important has happened. Sometimes it is easier for children to explore feelings, especially their fears or anger, with someone who can be objective and accepting than it is with parents or teachers.

🡪 The time in the playroom is a special, private time for children. They should not feel they have to give a report to anyone, even parents. Sessions are *confidential*, just like counseling sessions with adults. I want to respect your child just as much as I respect adults. I am happy to share with you my general impressions, their progress related to goals, and to offer suggestions, but I am not free to tell you the specifics of what your child says or does in the play room. When your child and I come out of the playroom, it would be best if you say, “Hi, I see you are back.” Or, “I guess it’s time for us to go for the day.”

🡪 Sometimes your child may take a painting or drawing from the session. If you praise the painting, he/she may feel he/she should make other paintings for you. It would be best to make comments about what you see in the painting. “You used lots of colors.” If the child gives you the painting, you can say, “you made this just for me.”