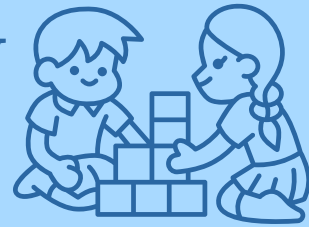


Play Therapy FAQs



What happens in a play session?

Play is to children as counseling is to adults. Imagine yourself as a child sitting in a chair across from a counselor, verbalizing and expressing all of the difficult emotions you are experiencing. Almost impossible right?

It is proven that a child's natural language is not talking but playing and the toys are their words. In a play session, your child is empowered by choice which then builds confidence, skills, and autonomy. As counselors, we are trained to interpret and decipher meaning through themes and types of play. By using non-directive skills (see other handout) such as tracking, non-evaluative praise, and limit-setting, your child can utilize this environment and the therapeutic relationship to foster any change that is needed.

What is my role as a parent throughout this process?

One part of the parent's role is to look for changes in behavior, which may be subtle in different settings. The counselor may notice changes that they are seeing in the playroom and will share those areas of growth with you. It is also helpful to be collaborative with teachers and family members so they can also provide input on if they are seeing growth as well. Counselors often recommend that parents collaborate with them to utilize the same language being used in the playroom.

Can I know what my child talks about in session?

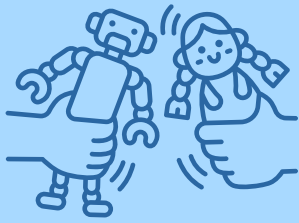
By using confidentiality within the playroom, children can build trust and explore the different presenting concerns they may have. In efforts to preserve the therapeutic relationship, consultations will include counselors sharing themes and where they are in the process but refrain from specific content.

How will my child know the different expectations between the playroom and outside environments?

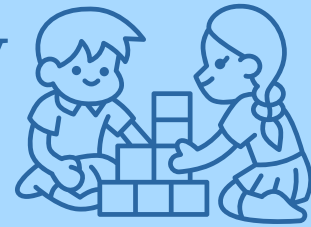
The counselor often uses the phrase "special play time" throughout sessions to emphasize the difference between environments. Oftentimes, the counselor will also explore the differences in the environments to differentiate the expectations in both. An example would be "In special playtime, you get to make all of the choices here! Now, that is not the same at school or home, right? But that is part of what makes this place different!"

How often do children attend play therapy sessions?

In the beginning of the process, counselors will likely recommend weekly sessions in order to build the therapeutic relationship with your child. After rapport has been built, the counselor and parents will discuss what frequency is the best for your family's needs.



Play Therapy FAQs



My child has lots of fun in play therapy. How do I know if it is working or if he/she just enjoys coming to play each week?

The therapeutic relationship in itself is a healing dynamic. The idea of a child having an adult's attention for an hour can be a corrective experience. Just like with adults, sometimes it is helpful to have a space that is just a nonjudgemental, open environment to express anything that is needed, that they may not receive elsewhere.

Counselors will also check in with parents to follow up on the goals that were initially set, to assess where the child is in the therapeutic process. It takes a lot of trust in your child, and in the therapist to know that it is more than just playing that is occurring in the playroom. It is unethical as counselors to play with your child in a nontherapeutic way. As therapists, we are trained in intentional play skills to integrate to make it a therapeutic environment.

What are the benefits of play therapy?

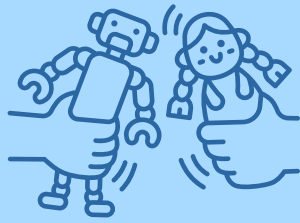
Play therapy has been demonstrated to be an effective therapeutic approach for a variety of children's problems such as abuse and neglect, aggression and acting out, attachment difficulties, emotionally disturbed, fear and anxiety, grief, transitions, and divorce related issues. Research shows that there are numerous benefits surrounding a child being in play therapy.

What is the role of the counselor in the room?

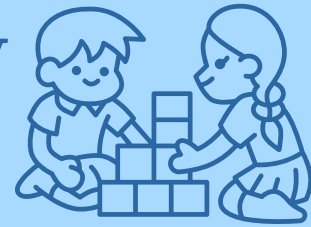
The role of the counselor is to provide three core conditions for change including genuineness, unconditional positive regard, and empathy to create a safe environment fostering any change or healing that is needed. It is an approach that is collaborative with the child. The counselor is working to help children establish autonomy and empowerment to find the skills within themselves to face different challenges. The counselor is not an individual who is aiming to get children to answer questions or to investigate different situations for the children, but rather to be a safe person that they can build a relationship where they feel comfortable addressing concerns in their own time.

Benefits of play therapy

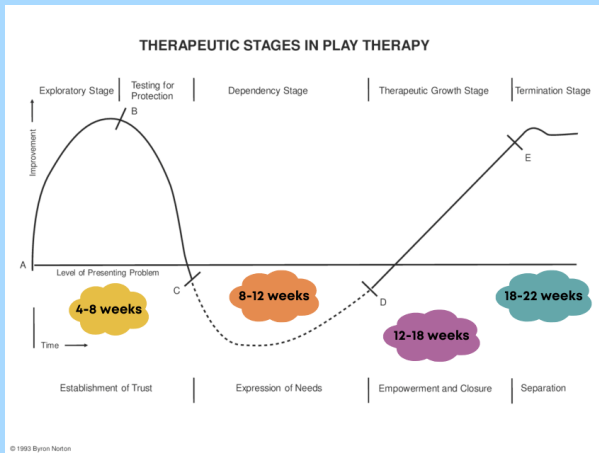
- **Expression of Emotions:** Children may not always have the verbal skills to express their emotions and experiences. Play therapy provides a non-threatening and natural way for them to communicate and express their feelings.
- **Emotional Regulation:** Engaging in play allows children to learn how to manage and regulate their emotions. They can practice self-control, patience, and develop a sense of emotional balance.
- **Understanding Trauma:** For children who have experienced trauma, play therapy can be a way to explore and process these experiences in a safe and controlled environment.
- **Enhanced Self-Esteem:** Success and positive reinforcement during play therapy can boost a child's self-esteem. It provides a safe space where children can experience a sense of accomplishment.
- **Parental Involvement:** Play therapy often involves collaboration with parents or caregivers, helping them understand their child's experiences and providing tools for continued support at home.



Play Therapy FAQs



How long will this process take?



This is something that can be very different for each child. Typically, play therapy is a slower process and is led at the child's pace. This is because counselors are meeting the child where they are developmentally. It is important to know that it is not a quick-fix experience so that parents can continue to trust that it is a helpful space for the child. Healing for anyone takes time!

Phases of treatment in play therapy

Initiation Phase- In the first phase of treatment, many things take place. More than any other objective, a rapport and bond is built between the child and the therapist. The child learns what to expect, and that play therapy is safe. A relationship is established as they get to know each other and learn more about each other. The child understands that the therapist can be trusted. And the child becomes familiar with the process, the toys, and the expectations for treatment.

Resistance Phase- As with any client, adult or child, resistance is a natural part of therapy. The client comes to the crossroads where all of the easy and nice stuff has been processed. So, the child has a choice to make – I can either dig in and face all of the things that need to be addressed, or I can fight it because it is scary, uncomfortable, and difficult. This process typically is observed as acting out emotionally or behaviorally, either at home or in the play room. This is usually a brief time period, but it is significant in the process. As soon as the child realizes that she can handle therapy, and that she is brave and strong enough, the bulk of the progress begins.

Work Phase- This is the phase where the child is fully invested in the process and working hard to address all of the issues and struggles in the play room. The child is continually healing, growing, and making progress on all of the areas of concern. This is also the time frame in which you will be able to notice the most marked changes in behavior, emotions, interaction, and communication. The child begins to demonstrate better coping skills, self-regulation, and resilience.

Termination Phase- This final phase of treatment is centered around termination of treatment. This is necessary so that children feel equipped and prepared to continue without therapy and without the therapeutic relationship. This is also an opportunity to create a healthy and happy goodbye for children, who typically experience negative associations with goodbyes. The child and the therapist reflect back on all of the things that were addressed, and a celebration of the progress and growth marks the final session.