

Play Therapy is...

Information for Practitioners & Referrers



What is Play Therapy?

Play Therapy is a mode of therapy that helps children to explore their feelings, to express themselves and to make sense of their life experiences. Play is children's natural medium to learn, communicate and to explore their worlds.



Recovery from difficult life experiences can be facilitated by a Play Therapist allowing a child freedom of expression in a safe and trusting environment.

Conventional talking therapies may be inappropriate for children and young people who struggle to put their feelings into words. Play Therapy allows children the opportunity to explore and understand these feelings. It can enable them to shift their perspective of abuse or difficulty so that they are less likely to internalise blame. The resulting empowerment and increased self-esteem can be the springboard to help the child to cope with difficulties in the real world.

Who can benefit from Play Therapy?

Play Therapy is an effective intervention for children with a variety of presenting difficulties including:

- Children or young people who have been abused, neglected or traumatised;
- Those who have experienced loss through bereavement, family breakdown or separation from culture of origin;
- Children who are ill, disabled or who cope with carers or siblings with disabilities;
- Those who have witnessed violence or the abuse of substances;
- Children who have emotional or behavioural difficulties (e.g. depression and/or aggression) arising from their experiences.

Play Therapy can offer such children a space in which the feelings these experiences generate can be expressed and contained. It can promote resilience within each child to enable him or her to discover a more hopeful view of the world. Play Therapy is appropriate for young people of all ages, but is most often used for children aged between three and twelve years. Play Therapists work with individual children and many also offer joint work involving parents/carers or siblings and groups. Some Play Therapists use other methods such as Theraplay or Filial Therapy which are useful interventions when there are attachment difficulties. Children from different cultures, genders and with varying abilities can all be helped by Play Therapy.

What happens in Play Therapy?

At the referral stage the Play Therapist will begin by engaging with others concerned with the welfare of the child and will establish a contract for the work. Good mutual communication is essential if the intervention is to be supported and meaningful.

Consistency is also important so Play Therapy sessions usually take place once a week, at the same time. This may be at the child's home, school or clinic, but it is crucial that these sessions happen at the same place every week.

Play Therapy offers a confidential space in which personal issues can be safely explored. The Play Therapy relationship helps the child to make sense of their life experiences and to express difficult feelings through the metaphors of play. Play Therapy may be a short-term intervention or a process that extends over a longer period, according to each child's needs.



Every BAPT Play Therapist is supported by a qualified Clinical Supervisor who oversees the Play Therapist's work.

What is a Play Therapist?

A BAPT Play Therapist is a professional who has completed an intensive training that has been accredited by the British Association of Play Therapists. Most Play Therapists are graduates who have already trained to work with children, eg Social Workers, Teachers, Psychologists. For a Play Therapist to become a Full member of BAPT they must usually have met the following criteria:

- Completion of a Masters level Play Therapy training course (accredited by BAPT. See website for details of accredited courses);
- Personal Therapy;
- On-going clinical supervision of their Play Therapy practice;
- Commitment to the BAPT Ethical Basis for Good Practice in Play Therapy;
- An up-to-date and clear Disclosure and Barring Service Check.



Play Therapists draw on an extensive repertoire of methods and theories, from child-led non-directive techniques to more focused interventions.

Finding a Play Therapist

To find a qualified Play Therapist, please telephone, email or go to the BAPT website to access the on-line register at www.bapt.info/findaqualifiedplaytherapist.asp



The photographs of children used in this booklet are models and do not portray actual events.

If you have a complaint, we would like to hear from you. Please contact BAPT on the contact details below.

Further information contact BAPT

For further information, please contact BAPT at:

Tel: 01932 828638
Fax: 01932 820100
Email: info@bapt.uk.com
Internet: www.bapt.info

Written by the Communications and Public Relations Sub-Committee (BAPT). Redesigned by Sonia Murray from leaflet first published 2007

Copyright © The British Association of Play Therapists (2013) All rights reserved. The British Association of Play Therapists is the trading name of The British Association of Play Therapists Ltd, registered in England & Wales (Company number 5477406). Registered address: 104a Sedlescombe Road North, St Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex TN37 7EN
Registered Charity No. 1115673

