

Why Play Therapy?

Play therapy is a research supported approach for helping children heal. Play therapy is a safe way for children to make sense of the world while they process and express their thoughts and feelings. Play therapy helps children to heal from emotional experiences that have impacted them when they do not have the verbal language to do so, or when it is too difficult to talk about directly (Gil, 1991). Play therapy can help children heal from confusing and upsetting events (i.e., traumas) using their natural language of play – the toys become the child’s words. Through play therapy children can also learn that their feelings are acceptable, learn to be creative and resourceful, learn how to make choices, learn how to solve problems, learn healthy ways of interacting with others, as well as help them to develop their capacity for self-control (Landreth, 2012).

What happens in play therapy?

Play therapy usually occurs once a week, often on the same day and time in a special place called the play therapy room. The child usually directs the play around the issues, ideas, and feelings about which he or she is confused or upset by. The child expresses his or her difficult issues by having the toys take on various roles, feelings, or actions. Play therapists are trained to attune to the child and follow and guide him or her in the process as he or she plays out themes. Play therapists are also trained to know how to respond to what the child expresses through play. The therapist may or may not engage in talk with the child about his/her play at first, but will help the child move through his/her feelings regardless. The therapist accepts all feelings, and encourages more appropriate ways of expression. Play therapists can help parents understand how their children feel and how to best support their emotional needs.