

A Caregivers' Guide to Finding a Play Therapist

British Columbia Play Therapy Association

When looking for a play therapist for your child, it is important to find someone who is not only professionally qualified but also a good fit for your child's emotional needs and your family's values. Below are key points to consider:

1. Credentials and Training

- **Credentials:** Ensure the therapist is a qualified mental health professional. Look for a master's degree in counselling psychology or social work (e.g., MA, MEd, MSW), a PhD, or equivalent.
 - **Professional Registration:** The therapist should be registered with a recognised professional body, such as:
 - Registered Clinical Counsellor (RCC)
 - Canadian Certified Counsellor (CCC)
 - Registered Therapeutic Counsellor (RTC)
 - A registered member of the College of Psychologists or Social Workers
 - **Specialised Play Therapy Training:** Look for registration or certification in play therapy, or evidence of equivalent training and supervised clinical practice.
 - Certification or registration in play therapy is a shortcut to knowing that the practitioner has completed:
 - A master's degree
 - 150+ hours of play therapy training
 - Approximately 2,000 hours of supervised clinical experience
 - **Play Therapy Credentials:**
 - BC Registered Play Therapist (BCRPT) / Supervisor (BCRPT-S) – BC Play Therapy Association
 - [Click here](https://www.bcplaytherapy.ca/designation-acronyms/) for a list of the more commonly used acronyms of designations for those who work with children and families
 - **Experience:** Ask how long the therapist has been practising clinically, and specifically their experience with children of your child's developmental stage and concern (e.g., trauma, anxiety, ADHD). Play therapy is generally suitable for children aged 3–12.
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2. Rapport with Children & a Child-Friendly Environment

- As complex and difficult issues come up in the therapeutic process, the play therapist continually works on emotional safety, relationship, and engagement in therapy.
 - Play therapy rooms showcase tools such as sand trays, figurines, art supplies, sensory toys, and games — distinct from the setup typically found in a talk therapy room.
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3. Caregiver Involvement

- Play therapists involve caregivers in their child's therapy in many ways. This is often discussed in the intake meeting.
 - This may include updates, caregiver consultations, information about child behaviour, child development and parenting, and referral to other supports.
 - Play therapists need to maintain confidentiality for their child clients, while also keeping caregivers informed. Ask your therapist how they will keep you updated while respecting your child's right to privacy.
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4. Clear Treatment Approach

- The therapist needs to clearly explain:
 - Their therapeutic approach (e.g., non-directive vs. directive play therapy)
 - Therapy goals
 - How progress will be monitored
 - You need to understand what to expect and get a sense of the therapy duration. It can be difficult to predict the exact number of sessions needed. However, the therapist will be able to give you a general idea.
 - Play therapy with pre-teens and teens often combines play and talk-based approaches. However, it is important to understand that counselling with young children that primarily relies on talking, even if toys are present for engagement, is not considered true play therapy.
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5. Comfort with Specific Concerns

- Ask whether the therapist has experience with specific concerns, such as:
 - Anxiety
 - Divorce
 - Grief
 - Trauma
 - Behavioural challenges
 - Neurodivergence

6. Compatibility with Family Values and Cultural Humility

- Look for a therapist
 - that is a good fit for your child's and your family's beliefs and parenting style
 - and that wants to learn more about your family's and child's cultural background

7. Directories for Finding Play Therapists

- When finding a play therapist, you may want to
 - seek out recommendations from peers/colleagues/family/professionals
 - search with the assistance of
 - a play therapy-specific directory such as the [BC Play Therapy Association's Directory](#)
 - the websites for registering bodies such as BC Association of Clinical Counsellors, the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association, and Colleges of Social Work or Psychologists

Questions to Ask a Potential Play Therapist

Use these questions to assess qualifications, approach, and fit during an initial consultation:

Credentials and Experience

- What registrations and certifications do you hold?
- Are you a registered or credentialed play therapist? If not, what play therapy training and supervision have you completed?
- How long have you been working with children in a therapy setting?
- What age groups do you typically work with?
- Do you have experience with children experiencing [insert concern]?

Play Therapy Approach

- Can you describe your play therapy approach?
- Is it more directive (therapist-led) or non-directive (child-led)?

Caregiver Involvement

- How do you involve parents/caregivers in the therapy process?
- Will I receive regular updates on my child's progress? How often?
- Do you offer parent/caregiver coaching or support alongside the play therapy sessions?

Goals and Progress

- What types of goals do you typically set?
- How will we know if therapy is helping?
- How long do children usually remain in therapy for concerns like [insert concern]?

Fit and Environment

- How do you support children who are hesitant or anxious about therapy?
- What does a typical session look like for a child of my child's age or developmental stage?
- What should we expect during the first few sessions?

Logistics and Practicalities

- How do I book sessions? Should I book sessions on a weekly/biweekly basis?
- What are your fees?
- Are you a provider for ____ [Autism Funding, FNHA, CVAP, Jordan's Principle, etc.]?
- Do you direct bill [Insurance provider], or will I need to submit receipts?
- What is your cancellation policy?
- Do you offer telehealth options?

Tips

- Most therapists offer a free 15-minute initial phone consultation.
- Consult with more than one therapist before deciding on who to work with.

For further enquiries, please contact:

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