



# Translating the Play for Parents

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BCPTA Play Café

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# The Plan

1. The Why
2. Synergetic Play Therapy® concept of the Offering/Set up
3. How to set meaningful goals
4. What to pay attention to in the play
5. Putting it together
6. Practice time in break out rooms
7. Debrief and questions

Why do we  
need to  
translate the  
child's play for  
parents?

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Convert right brain feelings and felt sense to left  
brain language and concepts

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Help parents understand what the child is working  
on (not just playing!)

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Share the progress

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Retain clients

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Keep confidentiality for the child

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# When to update parents?

Depends on:

- Model of play therapy
- Work environment-agency, school, private practice, etc.
- Schedule
  
- Important to share info in small chunks to keep in the parent's window of tolerance
- Remember that we have lots of time throughout the child's play therapy process and don't need to rush.

# What is Synergetic Play Therapy®?



Synergetic Play Therapy (2008) is a researched-informed model of play therapy blending the therapeutic power of play with nervous system regulation, interpersonal neurobiology, physics, attachment, mindfulness, and therapist authenticity. It grew from personal experience as well as research in neuroscience, Interpersonal Neurobiology, and attachment theory (see Badenoch, 2008; Porges, 2011; Schore, 1994; Siegel, 1999 for coverage of the ideas behind SPT). Preliminary research suggests that SPT significantly improves emotional tolerance and regulation (Dion & Gray, 2014; Simmons, 2020).

[www.synergeticplaytherapy.com](http://www.synergeticplaytherapy.com)

*\*Lisa Dion, founder of SPT has given me permission to share SPT concepts in this workshop*



## SPT Nervous System Symptoms of Regulation and Dys- regulation:

*Behaviour is understood  
as symptoms of  
dys-regulation in the  
nervous system*



### Nervous System Symptoms of Regulation and Dys-regulation

*All symptoms of dys-regulation arise out of perceptions of the events in our lives. When we integrate our perceptions, we change the symptoms in our nervous system. It is wise to master the art of how to integrate our perceptions and how to regulate the symptoms that arise in our bodies to help return us to a more regulated/ventral state.*

#### Sympathetic - Flight, Fight Hyper-arousal Symptoms

##### *Perceptions of Threat/Challenge*

Hyper-alert  
Hyper-vigilant  
Increased heart rate  
Defensive  
“Pounding” sensation in the head  
Anxious  
Excessive motoric activity  
Overwhelmed, disorganized  
Highly irritable  
Uncontrollable bouts of rage  
Aggressive  
Dissociation

#### Parasympathetic/Ventral Vagal- Regulated Symptoms (Mindful/ “Attached to Self”)

##### *Neuroception of Safety*

Think logically/clearly  
Able to make conscious choices  
Able to make eye contact  
Display a wide range of  
emotional expression  
Feel “grounded” and “in the body”  
Able to notice breath  
Poised  
Internal awareness of both mind and  
body  
Able to communicate in a clear  
manner

#### Parasympathetic/Dorsal Vagal- Collapse, Immobilization Hypo-arousal Symptoms

##### *Perceptions of Threat/Challenge*

Helplessness  
Appear life-less  
Non-expressive  
Numbing  
Lack of motivation  
Lethargic/Tired  
Dulled capacity to feel significant  
events  
Emotional constriction  
Depression  
Isolation  
Dissociation

## SPT Concept: The Offering (The Set up)

- Uses the mirror neuron resonance system (present in everyone)
- SPT Tenet:
- “The child projects his/her/their inner world onto the toys and the therapist setting them up to **experience his perception** of what it feels like to be him/her/them.”
- ‘The offering isn’t a manipulative process. It’s an offering of brilliant information to help us understand what it feels like to be the child.’”

Lisa Dion

Setting  
meaningful  
goals:  
*writing  
simple goals*

- In the Parent Intake session find out:
  - What are their concerns for their child
  - Frame the concerns in terms of simple goals that involve a **decrease or increase in certain behaviours**
    - *Examples:*
    - Decrease running away behaviour related to separation anxiety. Decrease aggressive episodes and increase ability to be at daycare for the whole day
    - Decrease number of meltdowns when transitioning between activities
    - Decrease feelings of inadequacy and increase self-esteem (attachment to self in SPT terms)



Setting  
Meaningful  
Goals :  
*What's the  
baseline?*

- **Baseline behaviour?**
- What is your starting point?
- Find out the following (if fits with the goal)
  - 1. Frequency – How often?
  - 2. Intensity- Use a scale
  - 3. Duration – How long does the behaviour last?
- Context: where, when, and with which people does it occur?
- Setting events: what makes the behaviour more likely to happen?

Setting  
Meaningful  
Goals:  
*What would it  
look like if the  
goals were  
met?*

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This question helps parents begin to track progress by noticing the starting points that you can refer back to throughout the play therapy process.

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This helps you understand if the parents'/caregivers' goals are developmentally appropriate or not.

Setting  
meaningful  
Goals:  
*Are we  
affirming who  
the child is?*

- When setting goals, we need to make sure that we are **affirming the authentic self of the child/youth and not trying to change them into someone that they are not at their core.**
- It is important to consider and respect the following:
  - Culture, race, ethnicity
  - Family values
  - Gender identity
  - Sexuality
  - Neurodiversity
  - Physical, intellectual, mental, emotional, and academic challenges
  - Developmental I delays

Conceptualizing  
the play therapy  
process:

*How does your  
play therapy  
model do this?*

“SPT believes that the toys themselves are not as important as the **energy and emotions** that arise as a result of **how the child is playing** with them.”

Lisa Dion

**\* In SPT we are tracking:**

- 1. Emotions**
- 2. Energy = regulation/dysregulation of the nervous system; body sensations**
- 3. How the child is playing with the toys**

*\*Other Play Therapy models might track themes, toys used, prosocial behaviours, limits set, etc. Track what is relevant for your model!*



Link it! :  
Putting it all  
together with  
examples

## Example 1: Kinetic Sand Cakes

- 10 -year-old girl. Parent concerns include intense angry outbursts related to homework not going perfectly
- Goals: decrease anxiety, perfectionism, aggression, and meltdowns, increase self-regulation
- Play- kinetic sand; cutting out circles, stacking them into a cylinder and making sure that the sides are completely smooth and lined up, over and over. When it doesn't go well, starts again, over and over. Eventually destroys it.
- Set up: intense pressure building up and wanting to smash it!
- Translate the play:

## Example 2: Sudden attack!

- 4-year-old male only child. Daycare has been sending him home due to aggressive behaviour. Challenges with not getting his way, and with not being first.
- Goals: Decrease meltdowns and increase regulation (with co-regulation). School skills: increase ability to tolerate not going first and increase ability to share
- Play: Shooting game using a target and nerf guns. I went first (without thinking or talking about it) and he shot me in the head and then hid in the egg chair and wouldn't talk with me.
- Set-up:
- -Translate the play:

## Example 3: Superhero role play

- 8-year-old girl. Struggling with understanding and completing schoolwork. Wants to be in charge in friend groups.
- Goals: decrease anxiety and ability to complete schoolwork and increase skills for coping with friendship conflict
- Play: asked me to play the character Harley Quinn ( I heard Harlequin ) in a superhero role play game. I asked for information about Harley Quinn, because I don't know about the character. Lots of put downs re: me not knowing.
- Set-up: feeling incompetent and stressed
- Translate the play:



## Example 4: Left behind

- 9-year-old girl. Adopted as a baby from another country. Intense angry outbursts in school and friendship conflict.
- Goals: decrease intensity and frequency of angry outbursts, increase self-esteem (attachment to self) and decrease friendship conflict
- Play: people, furniture and vehicles dumped all over floor. Has families go to a picnic site and some of the people are left there with no explanation given and they are completely ignored for the rest of the session
- Set up: sadness, confusion, overwhelm and anger
- Translate the play:

# Breakout rooms

# Debrief and Questions





**BCPTA**

Thank you for attending the first BCPTA Play Café of 2023.

We look forward to seeing you at future events!