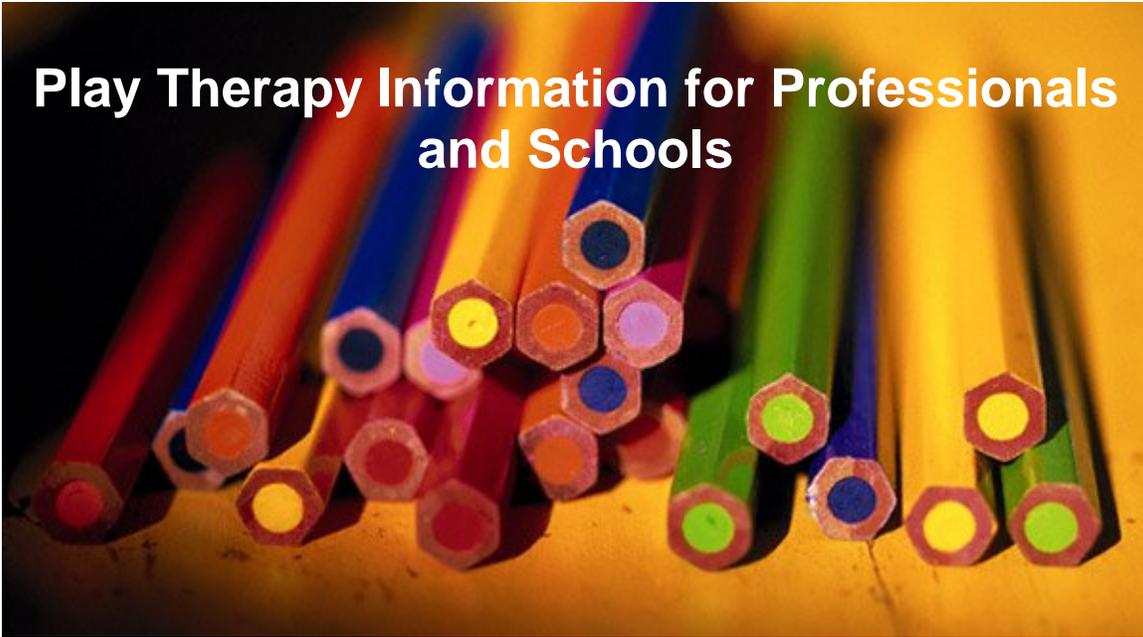


Play Therapy Information for Professionals and Schools



What is Play Therapy?

If you are currently in contact with a child who you feel needs extra support perhaps Play Therapy is the answer.

Play Therapy is an effective therapy that helps children modify their behaviours, develop social skills and boost self esteem. It is also an ideal therapy for children who have experienced trauma in their lives.

In Play Therapy, children are supported by the therapist to express their confusing and painful emotions through play activities, through playing with the child. The Play Therapist has the experience to understand where the child is having difficulties expressing emotion.

Once an understanding is established the Play Therapist will be able to draw attention to the child's difficulties and help the child make sense of their confusing and painful experiences, they are then assisted to assimilate this new understanding of their emotions.

While adults use talking therapies, children use play as a form of language communication. Children can benefit from Play Therapy as a means of emotional expression as they do not have the words to describe their thoughts, feelings and perceptions of their internal and external world.

Children can be referred to Play Therapy for many reasons:

- Parental conflict, separation or divorce
- Traumatized (sexual, physical or emotional abuse or neglect)
- Adoption or foster care
- Bereavement
- Hospitalization

- Domestic violence
- Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD/ADHD)
- Trauma/ Post Traumatic Stress
- Persistent anger, worry, sadness or fear which hinders the daily life of the child
- Separation anxiety
- Excessive shyness
- Low self esteem
- Learning/ Developmental problems
- Sleep problems
- Eating problems
- Bedwetting/ soiling problems
- Preoccupation with sexual behaviour

Play Therapy is confidential.

Much like adult therapy the Play Therapist make a contract with the child. Within this contract is the agreement that the Play Therapist will not share information on what the child has said or played with in the session to anyone. The exception to this rule is also put into the contract explaining to the child that when a Therapist is concerned about the child's safety for any reason then this will have to be passed on to the relevant people. This agreement is essential in the development of a trusting relationship between child and therapist, and therefore it is not ethical to share information on sessions. It is however appropriate for Therapists to share how the child is getting on overall and what might be useful in his/ her healing.

Attending Play Therapy is unconditional.

Attending sessions is not to be viewed as a reward or threatened to be removed if a child misbehaves. It is essential that the child attends session on the regular scheduled appointment times. This gives the child a sense of security and also has an impact on the development of the therapeutic trusting relationship. Although at times it may be tempting to take this away as a punishment as the child enjoys it so much, it would be more beneficial for the Play Therapist to be informed prior to the session (without the child's presence) of any instances which have caused difficulty. The therapist can then work on this with the child and process their feelings.

It is also important to be aware that as the child gets deeper into the process and gets closer to facing his/her difficulties their behaviour can at times get worse for a short period or appear to be returning to old behaviours. Although this does not happen with every child, if it does emerge it can be disheartening for those involved in the child's life. This is a normal part of the child's healing and points to the importance of not preventing the child to attend due to negative behaviour.

Play sessions are private.

It is important to note that for a child to feel secure within a session they need to know that they have the play space to themselves for their allocated time. This helps them to relax and open up. It is not useful for them if the room is in a very open area ie; ideally not in a room where other children can hear or watch through a window. It can also be hindering to them to have people interrupting the sessions.

How long will the child attend for?

This will depend on the child and the complexity of their needs; children will normally attend for a minimum of 12-15 sessions. Ideally a child should be given adequate time to process their emotions and experiences and learn to adapt them into the world. The sessions are often broken down into sections with reviews occurring regularly. It takes

several assessment sessions for the therapist to get an understanding for the child, ending sessions are also crucial in the child's healing. The Play Therapist will agree a time frame for ending at a review meeting and it is essential that the child is allowed this time otherwise this can be detrimental to the child and the positive work he/she has done to this point.

The therapist working with the child should check in with the parent/carer and teacher (when working within a school) regularly to assess the child's progress and offer advice on support that a child may need from those in his/ her life.

If you are concerned about children in your school please consider the benefits of having Play Therapy Available within your school.

Having Play Therapy in schools can be the ideal environment for the child, family and indeed teachers. It is quite normal for children in schools to go out to additional learning support and other appointments, so attending Play Therapy can also become a normal part of the school day.

Play Therapy in schools can;

1. Help children to develop social skills and relationships with peers and teachers. These positive relationships can bring school enjoyment and respect for teachers. This in turn affects the child's desire to act positively for positive attention.
2. Many children's educations are affected by the worries and stresses they experience. Attending Play Therapy gives them an outlet for this stress and helps to develop coping skills; the child will then have more focus on schoolwork and can lead to improvement in academic achievement.
3. The child will have learnt to express themselves in a more emotionally appropriate manner; reducing challenging behaviour and fighting.
4. There are many children who often cannot attend outside agencies due to familial circumstances. Play Therapy within the school allows at risk children to access much needed assistance.
5. The play therapist can offer advice and support to staff as well as the possibility of providing resources and techniques for teachers to use in the classroom with the child.
6. As a child spends much of his/ her day in the school system this can often take the added pressure off families to schedule in meetings and travel to and from sessions.
7. The Play Therapy sessions can also benefit from the experience and knowledge the class teacher has of the child, as often the child can be very different in at home and in school. Having regular contact with teachers enables the process to be linked closely to any behaviour changes in the classroom.