

PLAY THERAPY IN THE SCHOOLS:
GEORGIA ASSOCIATION FOR PLAY THERAPY
September 20, 1996

Why Use Play Therapy In The Schools?

Developmentally appropriate: Children's language development lags behind their cognitive development. Birds fly/fish swim/children play.

Safe and unobtrusive: They can transfer anxiety, fears, and fantasies to toys in the playroom freely without the concern of adult evaluation. They can separate themselves from the trauma by reenacting it through symbolism and play.

Time effective: The child's healing journey is propelled forward as problematic situations are reenacted with different endings. Self-control is acquired and then the child can move to an inner resolution of the issue.

The counselor is always interactive verbally by tracking feelings and actions. Effective beliefs in the child + accurate tracking + meaningful toys = a helpful, non-evaluative, shared relationship.

Reality testing of limits enables the child to find out where the boundaries are in the relationship with the therapist. It creates a link between reality and the fantasy play. i.e. "It feels good and fun to throw Bobo all around. Bobo is not for throwing. The stuffed animals are for throwing."

Play counseling helps.....

the child who tends to be nonverbal and shy

the child who often displays oppositional/power plays

the child with dependency needs

the child who grieves

the child with a negative self-image

the child with poor self-control

build a respectful positive connection with any child in the school

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From the moment it was released, children's advocacy groups have ripped into the Republican party's Contract With America, claiming it aims to cut too many programs vital to kids. Now one children's rights group has a plan to defend kids' interests--it's called the Contract With America's Children.

The ten-point manifesto, drafted by the Oakland, California-based nonprofit group Children Now, is meant to persuade politicians and the public to take a child-friendly stand on such issues as foster care, federally subsidized child care, national health care, and welfare, among others. Says executive director Lois Salisbury, "We want people to think long and hard about how their decisions affect kids."

Children Now has already collected more than 10,000 signatures backing the contract, which it plans to send to Congress when the legislature returns from summer recess this month. The contract:

- Children first. We promise to consider children's needs and well-being first and foremost in evaluating health and welfare reforms, or any other national policy.
- Healthy children. We promise to ensure that all children get the basics they need to grow up healthy, including safe food, clean air, and pure drinking water.
- Capable children. We promise all children the chance to realize their potential, and we expect all parents to join in the promise by becoming active partners in their child's education.
- Safe children. We promise to reduce the exposure of children to violence--on television, on our streets, and in our homes--and to educate the public about the risks of firearms.
- Families together. We promise to support marriage, help families stay together, and help young people understand the responsibility of parenting.
- Working families. We promise to help working families stay out of poverty.
- Fair chance. We promise to support a family's efforts to get ahead by making sure that continuing education and job training are available to people of all means.
- Value youth. We promise to provide young people with places to go and things to do that will help them become responsible members of our society.
- Community responsibility. We promise to do our part in our own communities to support all children's healthy development.
- Leadership accountability. We promise to hold our elected leaders accountable for their responsibilities to safeguard the future of America's children.

You can find Children Now on the World Wide Web (<http://www.dnai.com/~children>). You can also call 800/CHILD44 or e-mail children@dnai.com

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Toys & Games in Nesbitt's Playroom

Sackson, Sid, (1991), The Book of Classic Board Games, Klutz, 2121 Staunton Court, Palo Alto, California, 94306

Blocks (big cardboard brick look-alikes & wooden blocks & legos)
Telephones
Different size nerf balls
Dress-up items (clothes, ties, eyeglasses, hats, fake noses, silk flowers)
Swords
Plastic snakes, dragons (two-headed)
Animal with big mouth (frog)
Play people (different nationalities)
Dart guns
Playdoh
Paints
Easel
Paper & crayons
Family house
Baby, bed & blankets
Stuffed animals & pillow people (pillow fighter)
Doctor's kit
Sandbox (inflatable kiddie pool works well)
Wooden play furniture (refrigerator, kitchen, bed)
Punching bag or Bobo
Rope
Masks
Army men
Hand puppets

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Small Group Counseling Groups

1. **SELF CONCEPT GROUP (K-5)**
To develop more self-confidence
To be willing to try new things, take positive risks, i.e. raise hand, participate more in class discussions, etc.
To increase assertive behaviors and actions
2. **LATCH-KEY/HOME-SAFETY GROUP (K-5)**
To feel more comfortable and positive about staying home alone and/or caring for younger siblings
To increase communication between children and parents about staying home alone
3. **DEATH/LOSS GROUP (K-5)**
To provide students with facts regarding death and dying
To explain death as a part of the cycle of life
To provide a support system to share experiences, questions, feelings and reactions
4. **FRIENDSHIP GROUP (K-5)**
To practice appropriate ways of relating to others
To explore current ways of handling friendship situations
To apply newly learned friendship skills to friendship situations
5. **FAMILY CHANGES (K-5)**
To discuss facts about divorce, remarriage, absent parents, and other family changes
To cope with personal situations in a supportive setting
To share, identify, and accept one's feelings
6. **HELP GROUP (3-5)...may accept exceptions!**
To share feelings and experiences about drug abuse by a parent or close family member (not cigarettes)
To cope with personal situations in a supportive setting
To realistically discuss facts about drug use
7. **PEER LEADERS (4-5)**
To further develop already existing skills in leadership, listening, and communication
To apply those skills with other students in one to one, small and/or large group situations
8. **STUDY SKILLS GROUPS (3-5)**
To develop an awareness of one's present study habits
To explore and practice new and improved study habits
To provide a support system to encourage the use of successful study skills and habits
9. **ANGER MANAGEMENT GROUP (K-5)**
To develop an awareness of how one handles emotions, specifically anger
To explore and practice new and improved methods of dealing with anger
To provide a support system to encourage the development of successful anger management

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Filial Therapy Handout

Description and Rationale:

Filial means "of, relating to, or befitting a son or daughter". Filial therapy is an intervention in which parents are trained to have special play sessions with their child. It is an appropriate approach for children between the ages of about 3 and 11 who are experiencing emotional/behavioral/relational difficulties. It can also be used as a preventative method. Therapists interested in using this approach should possess good group skills (if leading a group), be comfortable with their own skills in child-centered play therapy, and have experience with parent consultation. The goals of filial therapy include 1) helping children to feel better understood by their parents (and change possible misperceptions about parents); 2) allowing children to communicate their thoughts and feelings through their most comfortable means of communication....PLAY; 3) assisting children to develop feelings of confidence, self-worth, and responsibility.

Because their language skills and world experience are so immature, young children are less capable of reasoning and communicating verbally. Many adults do not realize the importance of children's play because it is tough to recall what it was like to be a child. Play is how children learn. They practice roles, try new things, and find ways to represent the real world in their play. Filial therapy allows the parent to re-enter this world of toys and make-believe. In doing so, they are able to help their child; and in the process, develop a stronger relationship with the child. Because parents are the most important and influential people in children's lives, there is nothing more powerful and special parents can do for their family!

Filial Basics

- WHO?** The therapist trains a parent or parents who then work directly with their own child. This method can be taught individually or in a group format. After a period of training and demonstration, parents begin play sessions with their child and the therapist operates as a consultant/supervisor.
- WHAT?** 30-45 minute play sessions are conducted with in a fully-equipped playroom or using a toy kit that includes nurturing, aggressive, creative, family, and mastery toys. Example items for a toy kit include paper, scissors, crayons (and other art materials), play dough, soft-dart gun, plastic knife, bob bag, plastic soldiers, dishes, baby doll, bottle and blankets, doctor kit, small doll family (human set and animal set preferable), black and white masks, plastic animals, a puppet.
- WHEN?** Once a week for a time period agreed upon by therapist and parent. If sessions are held in the therapist's playroom, set up a consistent time every week during which therapist can observe (on video monitor or through one-way mirror). If sessions are held at home, parent needs to choose a time that is likely to work for parent and child (free of interruptions, neither part too tired to be successful). At-home sessions should also be held the same time every week.

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WHERE?

If play sessions are conducted at home, make sure that the setting is an area as free from distractions as possible. It should also be a place where there are no a lot of breakables and where messes are not disastrous. An area in the basement, the laundry room, or the kitchen floor might be suitable depending on the household.

HOW?

Parents should explain to children that they are learning how to play with them in a different, special way and that they will have a special playtime once a week. They can introduce the session by stating, "(Name), this is our special playtime. During this time you can do and say many of things you'd like to."

During play sessions, children decide how they want to spend the time, what they want to play, etc. They take the lead and the parent's job is to follow. Parents pay close attention to the child's talk and play. They use reflective listening skills to communicate understanding and acceptance to the child. They listen closely for feelings and try very hard to put themselves in the child's world. Parents should not name objects. Instead use "it", "that", etc. Parents should play actively if child requests their participation. However, they should consider themselves actors under the child's direction.

In the play sessions, parents should not find, do or answer for children things they can find, do, or answer for themselves. Instead, parents can reflect or encourage. For example, "You really wonder where some paper might be." or, "You're wondering what that is. In here you can decide." Or, "in here, that's something you can do for yourself."

When there are five minutes left in a session, parents say, "(Name), we have five minutes of special playtime left today." Then they say, "We have one minute left today." When time is up, they state, "(Name), our time is up for today." If child does not want to leave, set limit. "You'd really like to keep playing, but our time is up for today. We'll have special playtime next week." (Stay calm, put toys away or escort child out of room).

Set limits as necessary for safety of parent, child, and property. For example, if child points gun at parent, parent says, "you'd really like to shot me (acknowledge feeling), but I am not for shooting (state limit). You can shoot the wall or the stuffed animals (give alternatives), but I am not for shooting." If child proceeds to shoot parent, parent states, "I see you've chosen not to play with the gun. You can try again next week." (Remove gun and hold in lap if necessary).

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- Moser, A. (1988). Don't pop your cork on Mondays. Kansas City, MI: Landmark Editions, Inc.
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Books For Children

- Thomas, Marlo. (1987). Free To Be A Family. Bantam Books, Inc. 666 Fifth Ave., New York, New York 10103. Compilation of short stories, poems, and songs dealing with life issues.
- Navara, Tova. (1989). On My Own: Helping Kids Help Themselves. Barrons Educational Series, Inc. 250 Wireless Blvd., Hauppauge, New York 11788. Great to use for individual or small group counseling on latch-key issues.
- Livingston, Carole. (1978). Why Was I Adopted? Lyle Stuart Inc. 120 Enterprise Ave., Seacaucus, New Jersey 07094. Excellent resource when working through adoption issues.
- Pappas, Michael G. (1982). Sweet Dreams For Little Ones. Winston Press, 430 Oak Grove, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55403. Bedtime fantasies to build self-esteem.
- Mayle, Peter. (1986). Sweet Dreams and Monsters. Harmony Books, 225 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10003. Explains what happens when we sleep, how daytime experiences can affect our dreams and different kinds of dreams and nightmares.
- Cain, Barbara S. (1990). Double-Dip Feelings. Magination Press, 19 Union Square West, New York, New York 10003. Discusses how natural it is to feel contradictory emotions. Presents situations, such as the first day of school, the birth of a sibling, or a move to a new house, and identifies two emotions each event is likely to elicit.
- Weinman Sharmat, Marjorie. (1977). I'm Terrific. Scholastic Book Services, 50 West 44th Street, New York, New York 10036. Tale on perfectionism.

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- Davis, Diane. (1984). Something is Wrong at my House. Parenting Press Inc., Dept. 425, PO Box 75267, Seattle, Washington 98125. A book about parents fighting.
- Mayle, Peter. (1988). Why are We Getting a Divorce? Harmony Books, 225 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10003. This resource offers reassurance, humor, empathy & ideas on how to cope with a family's divorce.
- Douglass, Eileen. (1990). Rachel and the Upside Down Heart. Price Stern Sloan, Inc. 360 North La Cienega Blvd., Los Angeles, California 90048. True story about the grief process experienced by a little girl who loses her father.
- Varley, Susan. (1984). Badger's Parting Gifts. Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Book, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York 10019. A touching generic tale on death and dying.
- Webster-Dyle, Terrence. (1991). Why is Everybody Always Picking on Me? Atrium Society Publications, PO Box 816, Middlebury, Vermont 05753. Stories and activities show how to handle conflicts nonviolently.
- McPhail, David. (1980). Pig Pig Grows Up. E.P. Dutton, a division of Penguin Books U.S.A. Inc. A very humorous tale of how "the baby" in the family decides to grow up.
- Fassler, Joan. (1971). The Boy With A Problem. Behavioral Publications, Inc., 72 Fifth Ave., New York, New York 10011. The boy learns that talking about his troubles to someone who listens goes a long way toward solving them.
- Reilly Giff, Patricia. (1980). Today Was A Terrible Day. Viking Penquin Inc., 40 West, 23rd Street, New York, New York 10010. Everything goes wrong at school. Ronald and his teacher work it out at the end showing the healing power of a respectful relationship.
- Alexander, Lisa. (1991). No Red Monsters Allowed, Western Publishing Company, Inc. A Sesame Street/Golden Press Book. Deals with prejudice and multi cultural issues.

Games

The following games and toys are all available from the catalog *Child's Work/Child's Play*, Center for Applied Psychology, P.O. Box 61586, King of Prussia, PA. 19406 1-800-962-1141

- Let's Talk About Touching. Card game. Effective with children who act out sexually or are at extreme risk for sexual abuse. Ages seven-adolescence. \$14.95.
- The Storytelling Game. Effective tool for eliciting self-created stories from children. Ages four-eleven. \$27.95.
- Conversations. Powerful projective tool within a card game. Motivates players to reveal their inner feelings. \$32.50.
- The Ungame. Popular non-competitive game, excellent for facilitating communication while teaching sharing and listening skills. Ages five+. \$15.95.
- Family Happenings. Powerful tool for therapists to find out how children perceive their families. Board game with cards. \$36.50.
- The Self-Esteem Game. Players pick cards related to the things that make us feel good about ourselves in family, school, and friendship situations. Elicits conversations; allows inhibited children to speak via the game. \$24.95.