

Beginners Guide to Becoming a Registered Play Therapist By Anne Koenig

Visit a bookstore and you'll find numerous "how to for dummies" book titles that include topics such as algebra, Italian, networking, poker, taxes, and wine making. Now that the field of play therapy is a growing one, I think it's time for a guide for beginners (not dummies) interested in becoming Registered Play Therapists. I can provide such a guide based on my recent experiences in taking that same journey. I have a great passion for the practice of play therapy and I wish to extend a helping hand to professionals that might be considering joining this dynamic area of psychotherapy.

First of all, may I suggest you become a member of the Association for Play Therapists? This is a simple process. Simply visit www.a4pt.org, fill out the online form, pay your dues, and voila, you are a member. At the same time you can sign up to become a member of your State's APT chapter.

Next move towards becoming a Registered Play Therapist is to print out the application for certification guide downloadable from the same APT website. The guide is pretty clear and helpful, but if you are intimidated, here's where I can provide some steps to help avoid "common painful oversights" to getting your credentials.

Step One: Go find your transcripts. This is a critical step. I know... your transcripts are probably buried in a file cabinet or shoe box somewhere, so go get yourself a double vanilla, skim milk, sugar-free, over-priced latte and begin the search. Those with OCD, of course, have the transcripts stored in color-coded files marked "Education" and can skip the agony of this first step. Those with attachment disorder have already thrown their transcripts away, so you may need to contact your school's registrar for copies.

Now take a close look at the courses you took in graduate school. You will need to demonstrate that you have graduate education in five core areas: Child Development; Theories of Personality; Principles of Psychotherapy; Child & Adolescent Psychopathology; and Legal, Ethical, & Professional Issues. You are in great shape if your transcripts reflect successful completion of these core areas. You get to pass "go" and collect \$200 (in Monopoly money).

If you are not so fortunate, the course titles on your transcript may not exactly reflect the five core areas of study. Don't panic. Your next step is to find your syllabus from the course you took which most closely resembles the required course of study. If you recently graduated, you may still have them around somewhere. If you are like me and save only tax records and proof of your continuing education for license requirements,

your recourse is to refer to the graduate catalog. You can usually find it on-line at your alumni website. See if the description of the course you took included the required core topic. Is there a chance you still have the textbook from the class? Look at the table of contents. Often, the information is embedded there.

If you still have any uncertainty, make a copy of the transcripts with any documentation you have around exactly what you think you learned about those five core areas. Forward that to Carol Guerrero, Credentials Coordinator, Association for Play Therapy, 2060 N. Winery Avenue, #102, Fresno, CA, 93703, along with a check in the amount of \$50 for processing (which includes a \$25 credit towards your application fee, so go on and get out that check book).

Now take a nice break. You have done enough for one day. "Tomorrow is a new day, Scarlett."

Ok, a new day is here, your transcripts have been reviewed, and you are ready to take more action towards getting your RPT certification. The worst case is that you'll need to take a course or two. Everything we do is play, so go play school. There are any numbers of distance-learning programs that offer courses that would fulfill a core requirement or you may want to check out the offerings of your local university. It can be a great way to meet new friends, learn, and gain empathy for your clients who struggle around school issues.

If you are on track with your academic credentials, then you are ready for **Step Two, make a copy of your state counseling license**. The put the copy in the file folder you created with the title "RPT Application." Now wasn't that just a piece of cake?

OK, time to move on to **Step Three: take 150 hours of continuing education in the area of play therapy**. The course must have the word "play" in it and must be approved by APT. The content area should include Play Therapy History, Play Therapy Theories, Play Therapy Techniques, and Play Therapy Applications. Because you have joined APT earlier, you will be receiving a publication that lists many wonderful course offerings that meet these required areas. And if you have joined your State chapter, you will probably be notified of course offerings.

If you are close to Philadelphia or can afford to travel, I would suggest you start with the Concepts Course offered by the Family and Play Therapy Center. It includes the history requirement, some sandtray application, and lots of valuable training in the area of working with the family. The instructor, Dottie Higgins Klien, is a masterful teacher and you don't want to miss spending time with her. The required reading also includes the text: [Linking Parents to Play Therapy](#), a book that was useful to me in setting up my play

practice. Another great training experience I had was at The National Institute of Relationship Enhancement in Bethesda, Maryland, with Dr. William Nordling, an expert in the area of Child-Centered Play Therapy. If you can't travel, up to 30 hours can be taken on-line and I recommend courses at Psychceu.com. They offer a nice variety of courses approved by APT.

If you have interest in sandtray, anything offered by Dr. Gisela Schubach De Domenico is worth your while. Check out her website: www.vision-quest.us. She also offers distance learning, though I would tell you that some of my most powerful insights came from processing my sandtray worlds with her help in person.

Dr. Eliana Gil is another masterful teacher in the area of sandtray, working with families and abused children. Check out her course offerings at the Starbright Institute in Virginia.

Another way to get your credits is to attend the national conference hosted by APT. I was exposed to masters such as Helen Benedict (attachment disorders), Sue Bratton (client-centered), David Crenshaw (aggressive children), Diane Frey, (history and techniques) Louise Guerney, (client-centered) Garry Landreth, (client-centered) Kevin O'Connor, (techniques), and Scott Riviere, (techniques). You still have time to sign up for the national conference in Hollywood so check it out. You can fulfill up to 40 hours of the 150 required and see Hollywood at the same time! Have fun and start picking what you want to learn.

NOTE: When you register, be sure you pay the extra fee for the certificate (I probably didn't need to say that, but did just in case). You will receive the certificate sometime at the end of the training or it may be mailed to you. Remember that file I suggested you open? Make a copy of the certificate and store it in the file.

It took me about 18 months to fulfill the 150 hour requirement and I started at zero. Chances are, you may have already taken some approved courses and, before you know it, you'll have that requirement met.

Now you are at **Step Four, the supervision requirement**. The most efficient method is to find a supervisor that has RPT-S credentials. That supervisor needs to review 35 hours of your work, including an observed session, which can be videotaped if necessary. Again, go to APT website and you will find a list of approved supervisors. If that is not possible, then you will need 50 hours of supervision from a licensed counselor, marriage and family therapist, or licensed social worker. This supervision covers 2000 hours of clinical experience. If you are licensed, you have probably already met 1000 hours of that requirement. Breath deep! You can do this. If you have a position with a clinic, you

are probably seeing many patients each day. Just do the math and see how quickly it adds up. If you are like me and in private practice, it's the same process, only your clinical supervisor attests to the work done in your practice.

This really isn't difficult so c'mon and get ready to move forward because you are now at the very exciting stage of filling out your application. Get ready for **Step Five, the application process:**

Go back to APT website and curser down to application; print and voila, you are almost there.

Clear your desk. Get out a pen that works and look at the checklist that is at the top of the application. Fill out the application (much easier than filing taxes. I know because I got the tax book for dummies but a little harder than ordering a book on-line.)

- Fill out the application and sign; make copies
- Attach that copy of your professional license
- Attach your transcripts for your mental health graduate degree
- Attach the Form A that your supervisor has signed (make a copy for your file)
- Get out that file with certificates and compile all the copies of play instruction
- Write a check for \$75 if you followed my first suggestion. Otherwise, you write out the check for \$125. (I won't lead you astray. It is a good deal for your money to join APT at the beginning. Besides the financial deal, you get to list the membership on your resume!)
- Now put all this in a nice envelope, add the correct postage and put in the mailbox

Remember all the money you have saved because you joined APT, go get yourself another one of those expensive lattes and enjoy. Wait four to six weeks for approval and then pat yourself on the back. You did it. It really was not that difficult. Feel free to pass that on to your colleagues. The association is looking for the brightest and best to join the field. You did it and you're no dummy. Congratulations!