

**BAPT**



British Association of  
**Play Therapists**

# PLAY THERAPY AND YOUR CHILD



# Is something troubling my child?



Parents and carers often worry when a child has a problem that causes them to be sad, disruptive, rebellious, unable to cope or inattentive. You may be concerned about your child's development, eating or sleeping patterns and how they are getting along with family, friends and at school.

Every child is unique and special but sometimes they experience problems with feelings or behaviours that cause disruption to their lives and the lives of those around them.

Some parents and carers may delay getting help because they worry that they will be blamed for their children's behaviour. Feeling concerned and taking responsibility for a child's distress or problems is a normal part of caring. The fact that you have the commitment to start addressing the difficulty is a significant part of helping your child.

# What is Play Therapy?

Play Therapy helps children understand muddled feelings and upsetting events that they haven't had the chance to sort out properly. Rather than having to explain what is troubling them, as adult therapy usually expects, children use play to communicate at their own level and at their own pace, without feeling interrogated or threatened. Play Therapy generally happens every week at the same time and in the same room. This is important for developing the trusting relationship.

## How can Play Therapy help my child?

Play is vital to every child's social, emotional, cognitive, physical, creative and language development. It helps make learning concrete for all children and young people including those for whom verbal communication may be difficult.

Play Therapy helps children in a variety of ways. Children receive emotional support and can learn to understand more about their own feelings and thoughts. Sometimes they may re-enact or play out traumatic or difficult life experiences in order to make sense of their past and cope better with their future. Children may also learn to manage relationships and conflicts in more appropriate ways.

The outcomes of Play Therapy may be general e.g. a reduction in anxiety and raised self-esteem, or more specific such as a change in behaviour and improved relations with family and friends.

# What will happen in my child's Play Therapy sessions?



Your child's Play Therapist will have a large selection of play materials from which your child may choose. These may include art and craft materials, dressing up props, sand and water, clay, small figures and

animals, musical instruments, puppets and books. The Play Therapist will encourage your child to use these resources to express him or herself without having to provide verbal explanations.

## What does a Play Therapist do?

Play Therapists receive extensive training in subjects such as child development and attachment (the bonding process). They are also trained to use play, a child's natural form of expression, as a means for understanding and communicating with children about feelings, thoughts and behaviour.

A Play Therapist will begin by carefully listening to your concerns about your child and family. They will review their history and find out about the stresses the family have been through so that they can help your child make sense of it. They may ask to seek information from school and other significant adults in their lives. An assessment is made of your child's strengths as well as their difficulties.

Your child's Play Therapist will talk with you about what to tell your child about their Play Therapy and how to anticipate and answer your child's questions.

They may work as part of a team of other professionals or independently and may suggest a referral for other professional intervention as part of the support. This might include support for you. Play Therapists sometimes work with parents in the playroom with their child.

## **How long does Play Therapy take?**

Some children will respond to a short term intervention (for example up to 12 sessions). However, when problems have persisted for a long time or are complicated a longer-term intervention may be required. In these circumstances some Play Therapists have worked with children for two years or more. Sessions are usually once a week and the consistency of the same day, time and place is very important for developing a trusting relationship. Unplanned missed sessions may disrupt the progress.

# Why is the therapeutic relationship so important?

The therapeutic relationship that develops between your child and their Play Therapist is very important. Your child must feel comfortable, safe and understood. This type of trusting environment makes it easier for the child to express his/her thoughts and feelings and to gain the most benefit from the therapy. It is also crucial that your child knows you are supporting the process.



## Will it be confidential?

Information that you divulge about your child and family will usually be kept confidential. A Play Therapist may pass on information with other colleagues and professionals for the benefit of your child with your permission, including their clinical supervisor. A Play Therapist must share information with other professionals if they are concerned that a child is being harmed, hurting others or themselves. They will usually talk to you about this first.

Your child's Play Therapist will meet with you at regular intervals to discuss progress in therapy sessions and any changes and developments you have witnessed or experienced at home. However the Play Therapist will not disclose specific details of what your child has played. This is important in order to maintain your child's trust and feelings of safety with the therapist.

## What can I do to help?

You are very important in supporting your child through the process.

- Be consistent and encouraging to your child about attending sessions regularly.
- Resist the urge to ask your child what they did, as this will put pressure on them to comment on something they may have difficulty understanding themselves.
- Please don't ask your child to 'be good' or check they have been. Therapy is not about being 'good' or 'bad' and your child must feel free to express 'bad' feelings in an uncensored way.
- Don't insist that your child tell certain things: it is their time and they must feel free to express themselves at their own pace. Instead tell your concerns to the Play Therapist on a separate occasion.
- Play can be messy and it is helpful if your child can wear old clothes to minimise their anxiety about this.
- During any therapeutic intervention behaviour may appear to get worse before it gets better - please tell your child's Play Therapist if you have any concerns. Please also feel free to ask your child's Play Therapist any questions throughout the process.

# How do I find a Play Therapist?

To find a qualified Play Therapist, please telephone, email or go to the BAPT website to access the on-line register at [www.bapt.info/findaqualifiedplaytherapist.asp](http://www.bapt.info/findaqualifiedplaytherapist.asp)

It is important that you choose a qualified Play Therapist for your child. You can check whether a person is a registered full member of BAPT by using the on-line registration check at [www.bapt.info/playtherapyregister.asp](http://www.bapt.info/playtherapyregister.asp)



The photographs of children used in this booklet are models.

If you have a complaint, we would like to hear from you. Please contact BAPT on the contact details below.

## Further information contact BAPT

For further information, please contact BAPT at:

**Tel:** 01932 828638  
**Fax:** 01932 820100  
**Email:** [info@bapt.uk.com](mailto:info@bapt.uk.com)  
**Internet:** [www.bapt.info](http://www.bapt.info)

Written by the Communications and Public Relations Sub-Committee (BAPT). Redesigned by Sonia Murray from leaflet first published 2007

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