

BAPT



British Association of
Play Therapists

Play Therapy in Schools



What is Play Therapy?

Play Therapy is an effective therapy that helps children modify their behaviours, clarify their self-concept and build healthy relationships. In Play Therapy, children enter into a dynamic relationship with the therapist that enables them to express, explore and make sense of their difficult and painful experiences. Play Therapy helps children find healthier ways of communicating, develop fulfilling relationships, increase resiliency and facilitate emotional literacy.

Children use play as a form of communication, play is their natural form of expression. Often children referred to Play Therapy have limited words to describe their thoughts, feelings and perceptions of their internal and external world.

Play Therapy is an effective treatment for a variety of emotional and/or behavioural difficulties that children may present after experiencing trauma, abuse, neglect, loss, etc.



Why Play Therapy in Schools?

In Britain, an estimated 2 in 10 children have a mental health problem in any given year (Mental Health Foundation 2005). All of these children will have had contact with schools and teaching staff are often the first to spot when children have difficulties. Schools frequently have to cope with children who have complex emotional and behavioural difficulties, which lead to them not being able to benefit fully from the educational system.

Play Therapy not only helps children to recover from difficult life experiences, but in doing so, also helps children to be more receptive to learning and therefore enables their educational needs to be better met.



Play Therapy in Schools

- Helps children and young people to build healthier relationships with teaching staff and peers;
- Reduces emotional, behavioural and social obstacles to learning;
- Improves adaptation in the classroom;
- Enhances communication and play skills as well as emotional literacy;
- Addresses the needs of at-risk children;
- Supports and advises teaching staff.

Play Therapy in Schools is effective because ...

- It is a familiar and safe environment for both children and their parents/carers;
- It is accessible for all children;
- It provides consistency and reliability;
- School staff often have a unique perspective on children in their care and can identify difficulties and changes early on;
- School staff interact closely with children in their care and therefore can help modify their development, learning and behaviour.



Provision of Play Therapy in Schools



In order to provide school-based Play Therapy, schools will need the following:

- A dedicated, private room that is accessible every week at the same period of time;
- Regular time slots for relevant teaching staff to meet and discuss referrals, Play Therapy cases and other issues;
- Regular liaison between the Play Therapist and SENCO and teacher with responsibility for behaviour, or another member of the teaching staff to discuss child protection issues, parent/carer contact, teaching staff support etc.;
- An understanding of the Play Therapy rules and requirements.

The Five Essential 'C's of Play Therapy

It is important for school staff to be familiarised with the five essential "C's" of Play Therapy:

Confidentiality: That the Play Therapy has to be private to allow the child to feel safe enough to express and explore difficult and painful experiences.



Consistency: That the Play Therapy takes place at the same time, in the same space each week. It is important that no changes to attendance occur, even when the child is disruptive or difficult.

Commitment: That the Play Therapist, teaching staff and parents/carers are committed to helping the child. This requires patience, trust and dedication to the Play Therapy process.

Consent: Before Play Therapy can start, the parent/carer (or the person holding legal responsibility for the child) must give written consent to Play Therapy. The child must also give verbal assent prior to starting.

Child Protection: Play Therapists adhere to the School's Child Protection procedures, the Children Act (2004) and Local Authority Child Protection procedures.

School-based Play Therapy may be funded from various sources, including social services, LEA's, schools, charitable bodies etc.

How Play Therapy works in Schools

Play Therapy generally follows a standard procedure. This includes:

1. Referral;
2. Referral discussion and liaison;
3. Consultation with parent/carer;
4. Assessment of child;
5. Play Therapy;
6. Regular review sessions with parent/carer;
7. Regular review sessions with teaching staff;
8. Endings;
9. Discussion with teaching staff to pass on strategies to help the child in class.



Play Therapy needs both teaching staff and parents/carers to be involved in the Play Therapy process. The Play Therapist will want to hold regular meetings with the teaching staff in order to review the Play Therapy and the child's progress.

It is also important to note that ending Play Therapy needs to be done sensitively over several weeks. Premature or unplanned endings are detrimental to the child.

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

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



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
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