

In depth explanation how play therapy works.

A child's language is play.

While an adult usually can verbalise their experiences, a child, unless very articulate, will do so in play and thus shows what motivates and hinders them.

A child who experiences adversity is hardly ever able to verbalise this in a coherent way. It will predominately process it through play, such as acting out in the playground, classroom or at home. Doing this without appropriate boundaries can create problems and conflicting situations, in social settings, their relationships, and often compromises their learning.

In Therapeutic Play we offer a safe place for the child to explore and process their feelings and traumas through play. They can choose their own activity from a great variety of toys and art material. The only limits are that nothing ought to be intentionally broken and both child and therapist have to stay safe.

I work within a person/child centred frame of reference and use the three core conditions of Carl Roger's humanistic approach. These are empathy, unconditional positive regards or non-judgement, and congruence.

Using empathic reflection about their play and communication gives the child a sense of being seen, as well as growing self awareness and better understanding of themselves, their situation and what motivates them.

Unconditional positive regard or non-judgement is mainly shown by not evaluating what they are bringing to the room. In many situations praise is used to motivate a child, however this can have also a negative effect as it can create a sense of failure every time the child is not praised. There will be no 'well done' nor stated that something might not be good enough.

Knowing the therapist will not tap into their feelings of guilt and shame gives the child the trust that the therapist is on their side and eventually the child can find the courage to relate things they have done or experienced, and might weigh heavy on their mind. The freedom to express themselves allows traumatic experiences to come to the surface and as a consequence can be processed, healed and integrated.

The third aspect is congruence which creates a transparent relationship between therapeutic play worker and the child client. With this the child can gain a new blue print of how a relationship can be and hopefully allow them to translate this into other relationships and social settings outside of the therapeutic setting.

In recent decades the profession has gained more and more of an understanding that the biggest healing agent (in any modality/therapeutic approach) is in fact the therapeutic relationship itself. In one case I have supervised a therapist whose child client eventually grew in confidence and changed their countertransference (the way we relate to others as well as the way we expect others to relate to us) so fundamentally that in turn their family too was effected in a positive way.

In summery, in the safe space of play therapy feelings that might have been repressed and shown themselves as anger and frustration can be brought to the surface, they can be understood and processed and the experiences integrated into ones emotional make up and therefore will not control unconsciously the behaviour of the child/client.

Unlike other organisations we aim to work open ended, meaning have no limit on session numbers and give the child continued support for as long as is needed.

Books that inspire and inform our work and style and are a must read for volunteers who train for Therapeutic Play with us are:

- *"Play therapy: The Art of relationship" by Dr. Garry Landreth,
- *"Dibs in search of self" by Virginia Axline and
- *"Play Therapy" by the same author

Another very inspirational book in this field is "The Healing Power of Play" by Eliana Gil.

Sessions are weekly for 45-50 minutes at the same time each week. The reliability of a regular time table adds to a sense of security and trust in the relationship.

I do this work for a charitable organisation called Carefree Kids 2020, which I helped to re-establish after the original charity Carefree Kids had to close for financial reasons.

Please visit our website: <https://www.carefreekids2020.co.uk>

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