

# How **Play Therapy** Works



## Why Play?

All young children naturally engage in play. Play is our way of learning about ourselves and the world around us, connecting positively with others, building emotional self-regulation and learning or trying out new skills.

## What is Play Therapy?

Play Therapy is a developmentally-appropriate therapeutic service provided by a trained mental health professional. Children have not yet developed the language or mental skills to talk about what impacts them, so play is their language! Therapy is therefore conducted through play itself as the therapist helps a child to address and resolve their concerns.

## Why use Play Therapy?

Play Therapy is effective.

- Play Therapy has demonstrated effectiveness in multiple studies for children between the ages of 3 and 12-years-old. However, adults, adolescents and toddlers have even benefited from Play Therapy!
- Play Therapy has shown to be helpful for a large number of concerns, including: exposure to trauma, behavioral problems, grief and loss, attention problems, emotional regulation, anxiety, attachment concerns, improving relationships, autism, developmental delays and more.

## What can I expect?

- Therapy can be a slow, gradual process as children may not simply walk into the room and disclose information and concerns. Typically, children gradually process experiences and emotions in non-verbal ways, meaning healing and growth will come slowly and naturally.
- Every child is different! The therapist will intentionally structure the format of Play Therapy to best meet a child's individual needs. The therapist will have an initial consultation where you will review together what to expect in your specific situation.
- Often, parents or guardians can be expected to be involved in treatment in multiple ways. The therapist may see your child once per week, but you may see them much more than that.
- Whether by parent consults, brief updates before or after the session, joining the actual play sessions or collaborating to build specific ways to reinforce appropriate behaviors at home, parents and guardians play an important role in treatment.

Sources:

Association for Play Therapy, [www.a4pt.org](http://www.a4pt.org)

Kottman, T. (2011). *Play therapy: basics and beyond*. 2nd ed. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

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