Instilling Hope Through Play: Integrating Play Therapy and Expressive Methods Within A Comprehensive School Counseling Program to Help Meet the Needs of Students and Their Families

R. Paul Maddox II, Ed.S., NCC, LPC (MO & WY)
Professional School Counselor (7-12) (MO)

Janice Ward, Ph.D., NCC, LPC

Traditional Play Therapy Definition

Play therapy is defined as a dynamic interpersonal relationship between a child and a therapist trained in play therapy procedures who provides selected play materials and facilitates the development of a safe relationship for the child to fully express and explore self through the child’s natural medium of expression, play.


Play Therapy Definition–Schools

I use a method of counseling with toys. Elementary-age children have difficulty working through problems with words so I facilitate the process by providing a play environment from which they can work through those issues that impede their academic progress. [Dee Ray, University of North Texas]
Rationale for Using Play

• Play is the natural medium of expression for children
• Play bridges the gap between concrete experience and abstract thought
• Play is children’s attempt to organize their experience
• Children gain a sense of control through play
• Through play, children learn coping skills
• Play integrates cognitive, emotional, and social elements into the child’s thinking and behavior


Four Messages the Child Sends Through Play

• This is what I have experienced
• This is my reaction/feeling toward the experiences
• This is what I need, want, or wish was true
• This is how I perceive myself


Four Healing Messages the Adult Sends to the Child

The “Be-With” Attitudes
• I am here
• I hear you
• I understand
• I care
If you convey the first three...the last one is AUTOMATIC!

**Important Beliefs about Children**

- Children are people
- Children are unique and worthy of respect
- Children are resilient
- Children have an inherent tendency toward growth and maturity.
- Children are capable of positive self-direction
- Children’s natural language is play
- Children have a right to remain silent
- Children will take the therapeutic experience where it needs to be
- Children’s growth cannot be speeded up


**Goals of Child Centered Play Therapy**

- Develop a more positive self-concept
- Assume greater responsibility
- Become more self-directing
- Become more self-reliant
- Engage in self-determined decision
- Experience a feeling of self-control
- Become sensitive to the process of coping
- Develop an internal source of evaluation
- Become more trusting of self

**Special Considerations for Play Therapy in Schools**

- Buy-In
  - Speak Their Language
    - Administrators
    - Parents
    - Teachers
  - Use of research/data to support intervention
- Comprehensive School Counseling Program
  - Responsive Services
  - IEP Mandated Counseling
  - Can be used as a Tier 2 or 3 Intervention for PBIS
- School-Wide Intervention
  - Integrated with CTRT & CPRT

Special Considerations for Play Therapy in Schools (con’t)

- Selection of Toys
  - Real Life Toys
  - Acting-out or Aggressive Release Toys
  - Toys for creative expression and emotional release

- Alternate ways to set up play room/mobile play kit(s)
  - Various figurines
  - Animal figurines
  - Categories of toys
  - Timing of sessions/Time Considerations
    - 20-30 minutes a week per child/group

- Location of sessions
  - Play Room vs. Mobile Play Kits

- Video recording equipment

- Building partnerships with the community/other organizations

- Open vs. Closed groups

Research Supporting Play Therapy in Schools

- High overall efficacy (Bratton et al., 2005; Bratton, 2010)
  - Meta-analysis conducted (Bratton et al., 2005)
  - ES (effects size) = 0.80, p < .001

- Improvements in Academic Scores (Blanco & Ray, 2011; Blanco, Ray, & Whitmire, 2012)

- Effective as an intervention for behavioral issues (Baggerly & Bratton, 2010; Cochran, Ephron, Halverson, McKinnon, & Miller, 2008; Bratton, 2008; Meany-Walen, et al., 2004; Ray et al., 2000; Schusslen, 2005)

- Decreases in Aggression & Attention Problems Within the Classroom Setting (Bratton et al., 2010)

- Improved Teacher-Student Relationships (Ray, 2007)

- Increased Self-Efficacy and Self-Esteem (Post, 1999; Fall et al., 1999)

When we focus on the problem, we lose sight of the child!!!
References


