

# HOW PLAY THERAPY HELPS ANXIETY & BEHAVIOR

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# Introducing Andrew

“Introducing Andrew” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=reJpo-GaopM>  
a YouTube Video created by the Association of Play Therapy

# What is Play Therapy?

Play therapy is the systematic use of a theoretical model to establish an interpersonal process wherein trained play therapists use the therapeutic powers of play to help clients prevent or resolve psychosocial difficulties and achieve optimal growth and development.

(The Association of Play Therapy, 1997)

# A Simplified Definition:

Play Therapy is where Licensed Mental Health professionals utilize play therapeutically to help children process stressors in life by developing and implementing effective techniques to manage their lives.





“You can discover more  
about a person in an hour of  
play than in a year of  
conversation”

Plato

# Who is play therapy for?

- Play Therapy is most often utilized with children ages 3-year-old to 12-year-old. (The Association for Play Therapy)
- Research suggests Play Therapy is an effective mental health approach, regardless of age, gender, or the nature of the problem, and works best when a parent, family member, or caretaker is actively involved in the treatment process. (The Association for Play Therapy)

# Play therapy is utilized with children who are experiencing

- Behavioral problems, such as anger management, grief and loss, divorce and abandonment, and crisis and trauma. (Association of Play Therapy)
- Behavioral disorders, such as anxiety, depression, attention deficit hyperactivity (ADHD), autism or pervasive developmental, academic and social developmental, physical and learning disabilities, and conduct disorders. (Association of Play Therapy)

# Play Therapy can be broken down into two types:

- **Non-Directive**: This type of therapy is lead by the child and the therapist takes the child's lead. The premise is that if the child is given the opportunity to play in a safe, caring and non-judgmental environment, the child will be able to resolve his/her own issues by finding a solution through the use of their play.
- **Directive**: This type of therapy is lead by the therapist and the focus is on the problem (thoughts, feelings and behaviors).



## Types of Non-Direct Play Therapy:

- Child Centered Play Therapy (CCPT)
- Filial Therapy

## Types of Direct Play Therapy:

- Cognitive Behavioral Play Therapy (CBPT)
- Theraplay

# Phases in Play Therapy

- **Initial Phase or Early Phase**: Establishing rapport and trust is being established at this phase. The child is becoming familiar with both the therapist and the environment. Both the child and the therapist are learning about one another. The child is learning the process and expectations of therapy.
- **Resistance Phase or Acting Out Phase**: This can be a difficult, scary or uncomfortable time for the child as they are trying to figure out if they can handle and process the difficulties in their life. The Child may act out behaviorally and/or emotionally at home and/or in session.

# Phases in Play Therapy continued

- **Work Phase**: During this phase the child is accepting of the process of change. It is during this phase that the child is developing and progressing in their behaviors, communication skills, emotional regulation and interacting with others.
- **Termination Phase**: During this phase the child is being prepared for terminating therapy. The therapist and child process what has been worked on during therapy. A very important part about this phase is helping the child process the good bye. Often times children do not get the opportunity to prepare for the good bye and they experience the good bye in a negative way.
- Each child who engages in play therapy will transition through each of these phases. How it is done will look differently because each child is unique and develops, heals and learns differently.

# The Benefits of Play Therapy:

## **Promotes Social skills and Positive Relationships:**

- Children learn sharing and turn-taking
- Children learn the skill of negotiation
- Children learn how to compromise
- Children learn how to communicate
- Children learn empathy for others

## **Promotes Self-Awareness and Self-Control:**

- Children discover their strengths and weaknesses
- Children learn boundaries and limits
- Children learn to control their impulses
- Children develop problem solving skills

## **Promotes Emotional Health:**

- Children learn to identify and verbalize their emotions
- Children learn to identify triggers of their emotions
- Children develop positive coping skills to regulate their emotions
- Children express more joy and peace when they are playing

# The Benefits of Play Therapy continued:

## **Promotes language skills:**

- Children learn the language of their emotions
- Children learn and express both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication

## **Promotes physical health:**

- Children learn balance, coordination and flexibility
- Children develop their large motor skills through jumping, playing, running and hopping
- Children develop their fine motor skills through writing, drawing, coloring and painting



# How Play Therapy Helps Anxiety & Behavior

## Common Symptoms of Anxiety in Children

- Excessive worry or fear
- Inability to control the worry or fear
- Difficulty with focus and concentration
- Irritability
- Sleep Disturbance
- Fatigue
- Somatic complaints (stomachaches, headaches, etc.)

## Common Behavioral Concerns in Children

- Not listening and following directions
- Temper tantrums (falling on the ground, refusing to do what is ask)
- Anger and Aggression (hitting, kicking, biting, breaking and destroying things)
- Difficulty with focus and concentration
- Not respecting others boundaries

# Through Play Therapy Symptoms of Anxiety Decrease :

- A child learns to identify and express his/her worries and fears in the presence of a caring adult.
- The child is provided an opportunity to gain control over his/her fears and worries by developing, practicing and implementing positive coping skills, relaxation techniques and problem-solving skills
- Focus and concentration are increased when a child has developed and is utilizing the positive coping skills they have gained.
- Irritability is reduced when the child feels that they have better control over their fears and worries.
- Sleep Disturbance and fatigue are lessened as the child learns to relax and resolve his or her own fears and worries.
- Somatic complaints (stomachaches, headaches, etc.) decrease or lessens as the child begins to have better control over the fears and worries.

# Through Play Therapy Behavioral Problems are decreased:

- Children learn to listen and follow directions when they feel that they to are valued and care for. Play Therapy provides an environment where children feel valued and respected and in turn they value and respect others.
- Temper tantrums decrease as children learn to understand limits and develop self control.
- Anger and Aggression decrease as children learn positive coping and social skills to manage and express their thoughts and feelings.
- Children learn to set and respect others boundaries as he/she develop positive social skills and begin understand where they and others begin and end. Play therapy provide the child an environment in which to practice his/her social skills and self-control.

# Practical Things Parents Can Do To Help Their Children

## Helping the Child Who Suffers with Anxiety:

**Be calm:** When you are calm it helps your child to relax. If you are anxious your child will pick up on your anxiety and it will reinforce their fear/worry.

**Structure your Child:** When you have an idea of what is going to take place let your child know. Many times, children can adjust if they are made aware or have some expectation of what is going to take place.

**Learn the coping skills that your child is being taught in counseling and help them practice the skill(s).** By learning the coping skills your child is being taught will enable you to help your child by practicing the skills outside of their counseling session. When a person practices and utilizes the coping skills they learn in counseling outside of session they have better results with decreasing the anxiety when situations that cause anxiety come about.

**Do not help your child avoid things because of their anxiety:** Avoiding things reinforces the anxiety. It may help in the short term, but the long-term effects will not pay off, the child will continue to be anxious. Remember anxiety is an avoidance disorder so help your child by gently encouraging them to approach the situation(s) that causes them to fear. Take small steps to help them become overcomers.

# Practical Things Parents Can Do To Help Their Children

**Do not dismiss your child's feelings but validate his/her feelings.** You may not agree with how your child is feeling but just by validating his or her feelings will help them feel that you understand. We all want our feelings to be validated, and children are no different. When validating your child's feelings be very sure to encourage your child that they can face the fear and overcome it.

**Help your child develop an action plan to overcome their fear and help him or her practice their plan.** By helping your child develop a plan of action and practice it will help him or her feel invested and build confidence to overcome their fear. It communicates to your child that you are present with them and that you want to help them. It is also teaching him or her how to work through a situation by utilizing problem solving skills.

**Educate yourself on anxiety and seek professional help when needed.** Learn about the signs and symptoms of anxiety and talk with a licensed professional if your child is showing signs symptoms of anxiety. Remember everyone experiences some anxiety. Seeking professional help is necessary when the anxiety is controlling your child's life.

**Be sure to keep a record of the sign and symptoms:** If your child is suffering with anxiety be sure to write down if possible, the signs and symptom. How often these signs and symptoms are taking place. How long have the signs and symptoms been happening. Where the signs and symptoms are taking place. Take this with you when you take your child to seek professional help or to his or her ongoing clinician.



# Practical Things Parents Can Do To Help Their Children

## Helping the Child Who Has Behavioral Problems

**Give clear expectations:** When you are clear with your expectations it helps your child know what you are expecting and they are able to follow through. Be sure to spell out in simple terms your expectations. Example: Don't say clean your room. Say I need you to pick up your toys right now and put them in the toy box. Remember your cleaning is not going to look like your child's cleaning. For younger children model for them what you want them to do.

**Provide Structure for your child:** Provide routine for your child. When a child is provided a routine it helps your child develop organizational skills. You do not want to be rigid in the routine. You will want to help your child adjust to any changes as they arise.

**Be Prepared:** Many times children have temper tantrums or "Melt Downs" when they are hungry, tired, not feeling well or bored. Be sure when going places to pack a bag that has the following items: something to eat, something to drink, coloring book and crayons or something to write on and something to write with, and 2-3 small handheld toys. Be sure to bring a light jacket or sweater just in case the building is called. For infant and toddlers be sure to have a change of clothes.

**Keep calm, do not yell:** When you use a calm firm voice your child is more likely to listen to you. When you yell, children will tune you out or yell and scream along with you.

# Practical Things Parents Can Do To Help Their Children

**Model the behavior you want to see:** If I do not want my child yelling and screaming then I do not want to yell and scream. If I do not want my child breaking things or destroying things then I do not need to break or destroy things. Children do more of what you do than what you say. Your words and actions should line up. Example: If you become angry about something say I feel angry, I'm going to take a time out to calm down. And then go sit down at a table or something to calm down.

**Provide choices:** When children are given a choice they are more likely to cooperate because it helps them feel that they are in control. It also helps them take responsibility for their choices. Example: Would you like an apple or an orange? Do you want to pick up your toys off the floor first or do you want to make up your bed first?

**Be consistent:** If you tell your child you are going to do something be sure to follow through with it. Do not make promises that you do not intend to keep. Do not make threats. When you make promises and do not keep them or make threats children will not trust you. This will breed anger, disappointment and resentment and they will not listen to you and do what you ask them to do.



# QUESTIONS