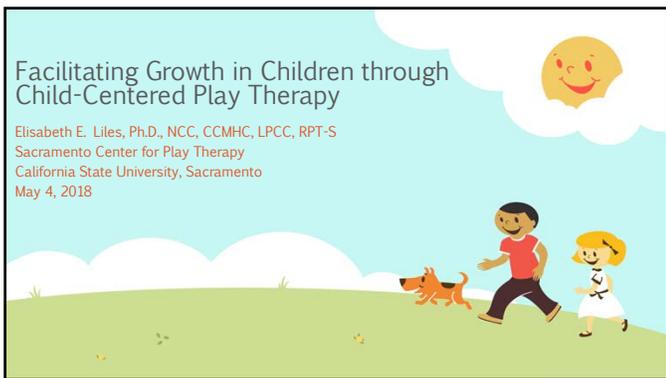


Facilitating Growth in Children through Child-Centered Play Therapy

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Objectives

- Learn to respond therapeutically to young children using the specific play therapy language
- Learn to implement therapeutic limit-setting using the ACT method
- Learn to identify therapeutic themes in children's play and use this information to enlarge meaning and monitor progress

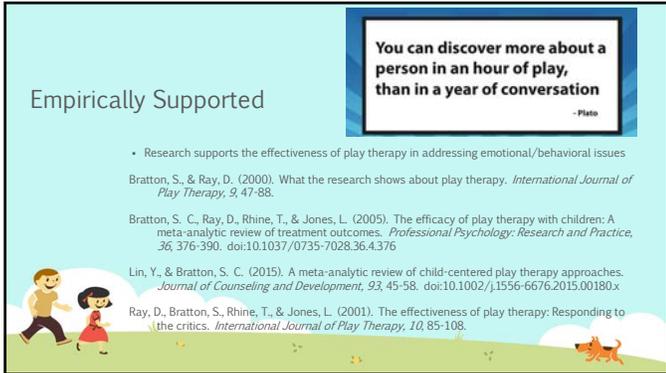


Empirically Supported

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

- Plato

- Research supports the effectiveness of play therapy in addressing emotional/behavioral issues
- Bratton, S., & Ray, D. (2000). What the research shows about play therapy. *International Journal of Play Therapy, 9*, 47-88.
- Bratton, S. C., Ray, D., Rhine, T., & Jones, L. (2005). The efficacy of play therapy with children: A meta-analytic review of treatment outcomes. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 36*, 376-390. doi:10.1037/0735-7028.36.4.376
- Lin, Y., & Bratton, S. C. (2015). A meta-analytic review of child-centered play therapy approaches. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 93*, 45-58. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6676.2015.00180.x
- Ray, D., Bratton, S., Rhine, T., & Jones, L. (2001). The effectiveness of play therapy: Responding to the critics. *International Journal of Play Therapy, 10*, 85-108.



This isn't how kids communicate.

Introducing Andrew

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=veJpG-GaopM>

What is Play Therapy?

"A dynamic interpersonal relationship between a child (or person of any age) and a therapist trained in play therapy procedures who provides selected play materials and facilitates the development of a safe relationship for the child (or person of any age) to fully express and explore self (feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviors) through play, the child's natural medium of communication, for optimal growth and development" (Landreth, 2002, p. 16).

"Toys are children's words,
and play is their language"
(Landreth, 2012)

Toys = words
Play = language

Children use toys to say what they cannot say with words

- What they have experienced
- Reactions to those experiences
- Feelings about those experiences
- What they want or need
- Their self-perception




- Words = abstract; not enough to express a person's world
- Toys = words; Play = language
- All children play.
- Play is natural and spontaneous.
- When children **don't** play, there is a problem

Child's Natural Means of Communication




Allows the Child to Lead

- Play therapy is not as directive as other approaches
 - Children decide when they are successful
- Toys allow children to express themselves using their own language (does not require verbal ability)
 - Children have more difficulty expressing emotions and higher-level thinking verbally
- Play therapy eliminates thinking and focuses on **experiencing**
 - Bridges the gap between experience (concrete) and thinking (abstract)
- Children must act on their environment in order to derive meaning
- Provides children the opportunity to make choices and learn how to make decisions for themselves
- Allows children to struggle and experience challenges in a way that fosters feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy





1. The therapist is genuinely interested in the child and develops a warm, caring relationship.

2. The therapist experiences unqualified acceptance of the child and does not wish that the child were different in some way.

3. The therapist creates a feeling of safety and permissiveness in the relationship so the child feels free to explore and express self completely.

4. The therapist is always sensitive to the child's feelings and gently reflects those feelings in such a manner that the child develops self-understanding.

5. The therapist believes deeply in the child's capacity to act responsibly, unwaveringly respects the child's ability to solve personal problems, and allows the child to do so.

6. The therapist trusts the child's inner direction, allows the child to lead in all areas of the relationship and resists any urge to direct the child's play or conversation.

7. The therapist appreciates the gradual nature of the therapeutic process and does not attempt to hurry the process.

8. The therapist establishes only those therapeutic limits which help the child accept personal and appropriate relationship responsibility.

Eight Basic Principles of the Therapeutic Relationship
Axline, 1947



Through Play, Children Learn

- To accept and respect themselves
- Self-control
- Self-reliance
- To be creative and resourceful in confronting problems
- Mastery over challenges
- About the world and their environment
- Social Skills
- Self-responsibility
- Self-direction
- Coping Skills
- To trust themselves
- To make choices and be responsible for their choices
- That their feelings are okay
- To develop an internal source of evaluation
- To develop a more positive self-concept
- A sense of control over their environment



1. Children are not miniature adults
2. Children are people
3. Children are unique and worthy of respect
4. Children are resilient
5. Children have an inherent tendency toward growth and maturity
6. Children are capable of positive self-direction
7. Children's natural language is play
8. Children have a right to remain silent (or to not play)
9. Children will take the therapeutic experience to where they need to be
10. Children's growth cannot be speeded up (or slowed down)

Tenets for Relating to Children (Landreth, 2012)

Conducting the Play Therapy Session



Rules of Thumb

- The session is 100% focused on the child
 - All statements begin with "you" (leave "I" out of it)
- Statements should be concise and clear (no more than 10 words)
- Responses should be frequent and consistent (about once every 10 seconds)
- Do not label things (use pronouns)
- Do not rush to assist the child
 - Allow the child to struggle and experience challenges
- Never praise
 - Validate through encouragement
- Do not ask questions
- Nose follows your toes
- Do not ask the child to clean up after the session
- The playroom does not include books, board games, or electronic toys (remove batteries from toys that use them)



The way
we talk to
our children
becomes their
inner
voice.

— Peter O'Meara

Adults can respond to children in ways that help them develop specific skills and understanding



Communicating with Young Children

Important Guidelines for ALL ADULTS in Children's Lives



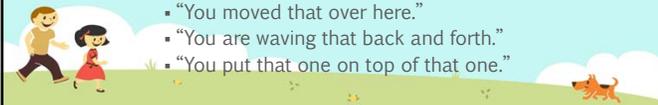
Types of Facilitative Responses

- Tracking Play
- Reflecting why/how the child is behaving/ playing
- Reflecting Feelings
- Facilitating Creativity
- Returning Responsibility
- Encouraging
- Enlarging the Meaning



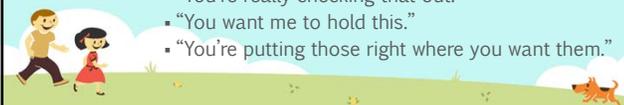
Tracking

- Play-by-Play (very specific)
- Provides immediacy
- Avoid labels
- Examples:
 - "You're putting that in there."
 - "You moved that over here."
 - "You are waving that back and forth."
 - "You put that one on top of that one."



Reflecting Content

- What is the child trying to communicate?
- What are the child's goals?
- Examples:
 - "It's important to you to put that where you think it goes."
 - "You're really checking that out."
 - "You want me to hold this."
 - "You're putting those right where you want them."



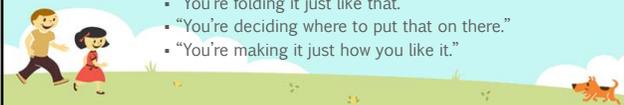
Reflecting Feelings

- Helps the child learn to accept feelings
- Helps child gain insight and self-awareness
- Examples:
 - "You're excited."
 - "You frustrated with that."
 - "You're disappointed."
 - "You're feeling creative."



Facilitating Creativity

- Encouraging the child to be creative without hindrance or direction
- Creativity = better problem-solvers
- Examples:
 - "You're painting up and down, back and forth."
 - "You're using lots of colors on that."
 - "You're folding it just like that."
 - "You're deciding where to put that on there."
 - "You're making it just how you like it."



Returning Responsibility

- Allow the child to lead the play
 - Examples:
 - “You decided to play with that now.”
 - “You chose to put that there.”
 - “You chose to use that color.”
 - “You’re thinking about what to do now.”
 - “You have a plan.”
 - “You have an idea.”



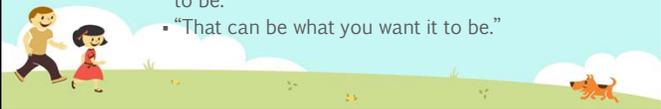
Returning Responsibility Continued

- Allow the child to lead you
 - Examples:
 - “You want me to be the customer. What should I do?”
 - (Child hands you a toy): “Show me how you want me to use this.”
 - (Child pretends to call you): “What do you want me to say?”



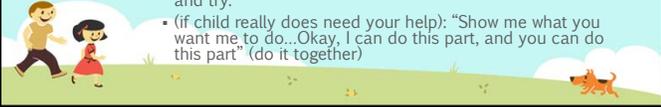
Returning Responsibility Continued

- Encourage the child to make decisions on their own
 - Examples:
 - “You can choose what color to use.”
 - “You can decide what to draw.”
 - “You can make that clay into whatever you want it to be.”
 - “That can be what you want it to be.”



Returning Responsibility Continued

- Allow children to try
 - Encourage children to be self-reliant
 - Gives them a sense of control and facilitates self-esteem, problem-solving, and decision-making skills
 - Examples:
 - "You want me to do that for you, but that is something you can try."
 - (If you have seen the child do it before): "You aren't sure if you can do that, but you have done it before. Go ahead and try."
 - (if child really does need your help): "Show me what you want me to do...Okay, I can do this part, and you can do this part" (do it together)



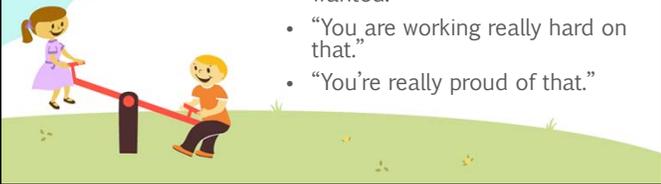
Encouraging

- Focus on the process rather than the product
- Reward the effort
- Give credit to the child
- Avoid judgement



Encouraging - Examples

- "You did it!"
- "You got it all by yourself."
- "You made it do just what you wanted."
- "You are working really hard on that."
- "You're really proud of that."





Therapeutic Responses: An Example

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ck7QbQwM3oU&t=136s>

Practice

- Reflect Feeling
 - Marco (age 8) has been building a structure with tinker toys and it has just toppled over. He gives a deep sigh as he looks at it with his eyebrows tightened.
 - "You're frustrated."
 - "You're sad that fell over."
 - "You're disappointed."
 - "You're feeling discouraged."
- Track Child's Play
 - Adam (age 5) is pushing a car around the floor.
 - "You're moving that around."
 - "You're pushing that back and forth."
 - "You are rolling that along there."

Practice

- Reflect Encouragement
 - Hamod (age 7) has sculpted a figure from clay, which looks like a boat. He runs over to you excitedly bringing the boat and holding it out in front with a big smile on his face.
 - "You are proud of what you made!"
 - "You're excited to show me your creation!"
 - "You worked really hard on that!"
 - "You made that just the way you wanted!"
- Return Responsibility
 - Jessica (age 4) asks you what something is.
 - "Hmm..." (give child time to answer own question)
 - "You're curious about that."
 - "That can be whatever you want it to be."
 - "You can decide what that is."

Practice

- Return Responsibility
 - Angélica (age 6) asks you to open the lid on a plastic container.
 - "That's something you can do."
 - "You can try opening that."
 - "Show me how." (if she really can't do it on her own)
- Facilitate Creativity
 - David (age 3) is working very quietly and diligently on a painting using a variety of water colors.
 - "You are using lots of colors."
 - "You are moving that up and down."
 - "You are making that look exactly the way you want it."
 - "You are working hard on that."
 - "You are focused."



- A – Acknowledge the child’s feelings and desire
- C – Communicate the limit
- T – Target acceptable alternatives

Therapeutic Limit-Setting



Limit-Setting Practice

- Kim (age 5) picks up some play scissors, walks over to a mirror that is hanging on the wall and tells you she is going to cut her hair.
 - A – "I know you're curious."
 - C – "But your hair isn't for cutting here."
 - T – "You can choose to cut this piece of paper, or you can choose to cut the pipe cleaner."
- Anthony (age 7) is aiming a toy car to throw at you.
 - A – "I know you're mad."
 - C – "But I'm not for throwing things at."
 - T – "You can choose to throw it over there (point at spot on floor), or you can choose to throw it over here (point at another spot on floor)."



Limit-Setting Practice

- Carly (age 6) starts to hit her head against the wall.
 - A - "I know you're frustrated."
 - C - "But your head is not for hitting against walls."
 - T - "You can choose to rip up this paper, or you can choose to punch this teddy bear."
- Brian (age 3) begins throwing sand across the room.
 - A - "I know you're having fun."
 - C - "But the sand is for staying in the sandbox."
 - T - "You can choose to shovel the sand, or you can choose to pile the sand."



Understanding Play Behavior and Themes



Fundamentals

- Play is highly variable across situations and children
- Four Messages Revealed in Play Therapy
 - Child's experiences
 - Child's feelings or reactions about those experiences
 - Child's needs
 - Child's self-concept
- Trust in the child's wisdom to take us where they need to be
- As children play, they reorient themselves in the present experience
- Play freely organizes the personal world to be what the child wants it to be
- There is great meaning in children's play



- Theme – something the child addresses several times in the same session or across different sessions
- This is what the child is working on
- In play therapy, the child is able to work through problems and then move on with life
- Be cautious of overanalyzing isolated incidents

Themes in Children's Play



Examples of Possible Themes

Exploratory	Nurturing
Helpless/Inadequate	Mastery
Power/Control	Perfectionism
Sexualized	Safety/Security
Aggression/Revenge	Chaos
	Death/Loss/Grieving



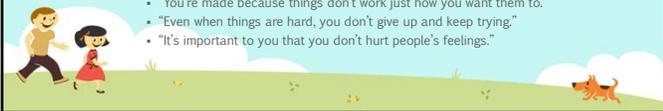


Example of Safety/Security



Enlarging the Meaning

- Helps child organize and understand the meaning of their play
- Generalizes specific play events to child's overall experience and understanding of the world
- Helps child grapple with problems by gaining insight, awareness, and acceptance
- Provides child opportunity to make changes if desired
- Examples
 - "You're frustrated because you feel helpless/powerless."
 - "You're made because things don't work just how you want them to."
 - "Even when things are hard, you don't give up and keep trying."
 - "It's important to you that you don't hurt people's feelings."



Monitoring Progress



Additional Resources

- [Association for Play Therapy](#)
- [Center for Play Therapy](#)
- [Sacramento Center for Play Therapy](#)
 - Follow the [Sacramento Center for Play Therapy on Facebook!](#)
- [California Association for Play Therapy](#)
- Landreth, G. L. (2012). *Play therapy: The art of the relationship* (3rd ed.). New York: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Choices, Cookies, & Kids: A Creative Approach to Discipline (DVD available from Center for Play Therapy)
- Axline, V. M. (1964). *Dibs in search of self*. New York: Random House.

