

## Child-Centred Play Therapy Information Form for Parents and Carers



### What is Child-Centred Play Therapy?

Play is a child's natural form of communication. Through play, children learn social skills, practise life skills, and explore their world. As a child plays, they access their unconscious and through playing they can act out, process, and make sense of difficulties they are experiencing. A child's play communicates to the therapist the child's fears and worries, things that have been distressing them and how they feel about themselves and the world around them.

In Child-Centred Play Therapy children play in the presence of a therapist who is trained to respond to them in particular ways that make the experience therapeutic for the child.

So what do I do?

- I reflect the verbal and behavioural content of the children's play.
  - The children feel seen, accepted and understood. They increase in self-esteem and self-understanding.
- I reflect the emotional content of the children's play.
  - The children learn that all emotions are accepted and again the children feel deeply understood and accepted. The children learn emotional vocabulary, healthy emotional expression and emotional regulation.
- I set limits, acknowledging the emotion behind the behaviour and redirect behaviour.
  - The children learn to make choices that are self-enhancing, learn self-control and self-regulation.
- I offer choices.
  - The children learn to be autonomous, to be independent, to be self-directed.
- I provide encouragement.
  - The children learn to be proud of themselves from within, they increase in self-esteem, determination and resilience.

Through these interactions the child increases in self-esteem, emotions are understood and regulated, they develop self-confidence, learn to self-regulate and develop self-control. These are some of the core principles and benefits of child-centred play therapy.

In addition, in Child-Centred Play Therapy, children can work through any difficult/upsetting emotions or experiences. Through playing symbolically, children can process trauma without being retraumatised. The beauty of Child-Centred Play Therapy is that the children don't even need to know

they are going to 'therapy'. They heal through their play in the company of a trained clinician, in a way that feels most natural to them.

Typical toys your child might play with are creative toys (paints, colouring, stickers, craft), tactile toys (sand tray, playdough, slime), role play (dressing up, baby/animal care, cooking, doctors, school) and mastery (lego, balls, hula hoop, jigsaws). The toys are specifically chosen with their therapeutic purpose in mind. For example, a child learns resilience, emotional regulation and competence when trying to throw and catch a ball, both failing and succeeding. Children use the sand tray for physical regulation, learn self-control (if sand is thrown out of the tray, it is no longer in use that session), or use it with the toy figures to role play, build imaginary worlds, recreate and process trauma etc.

An example -

If your child has difficulties with feeling jealous of a sibling and is hitting that sibling, someone trying to be helpful might offer to explain to the child how bad it is to hit and that their parents love them just as much as their sibling. They might give them a worksheet about anger and suggest alternative behaviour when angry. Will the explanation work, be lasting, make the child feel understood or any better about themselves? Probably not - in fact, I'd go so far as to say *definitely* not. In contrast, in Child-Centred Play Therapy, the child may act out siblings fighting with the toys, or compete with me, they will 'get out' their aggression and feel truly understood, they will act out the aggression until they shift and their play becomes cooperative, empathetic towards others, and they learn self-control. They will learn that "people are not for hitting, but you can hit the boxing bag" and they will learn to regulate themselves. The changes are internal, lasting and will transfer to all other related scenarios. Like I said, it's just magical and I've seen it work time and again.

Since the production of the film Inside Out 2, I can explain how the child develops a 'sense of self' and you will know what I mean. It's a bit of an ambiguous term, but that's what Child-Centred Play Therapy really does! They develop a sense of who they are and make sense of the world around them. All the while having fun and enjoying the process!

Research into Child-Centred Play Therapy (CCPT) has shown that it can be effective for a range of issues, including:

- **Behavioural problems:** A meta-analysis of 52 studies found that children who received CCPT had statistically significant improvements in behavioural problems.
- **Self-esteem:** CCPT has been shown to improve self-esteem.
- **Caregiver-child relationship stress:** CCPT has been shown to improve caregiver-child relationship stress.
- **Internalizing problems** (anxiety, low mood, social withdrawal, somatic complaints): CCPT has been shown to improve internalizing problems.
- **Externalizing problems** (aggression, defiance, lying, stealing): CCPT has been shown to improve externalizing problems.
- **Post-traumatic stress-related problems:** CCPT has been shown to improve post-traumatic stress-related problems.

- **Autism:** CCPT has been shown to have a significant positive effect on autistic children, as evidenced by improvements in social skills and social domain scores.
- Play therapy is **equally effective for mental illnesses and behavioural problems.**
- **Parental inclusion in therapy is strongly related to therapeutic effectiveness.**
- The maximum effect of treatment occurs after 30 sessions.
- Play therapy is beneficial for patients of any age or sex

As you can see above, parental involvement has been shown to increase the effectiveness of Child-Centred Play Therapy and that is why I work closely with parents throughout the process. In our 6-weekly consultations I share parenting tips for you to work on for the next month which support what I am doing with your child in play therapy. Not only does this mean that we are working together, and your child experiences consistent and therapeutic interactions with us both, but this will benefit all of your children and give you parenting strategies moving forwards once the play therapy has finished. I don't offer this because I think anyone is a 'bad' parent. I offer this because parenting is the hardest and most important job in the world, and I wish that I had known what I know now when my children were younger.

A word of caution, some people call themselves play therapists, or child therapists/counsellors, but their training has been primarily adult-based (level 4 in adult counselling) and their 'therapy' is more like what ELSA's may offer in school, talking about difficulties, offering worksheets, playing games etc. Please check their training and credentials to make sure they are a 'proper' play therapist. I personally believe that Child-Centred Play Therapy is the most effective and appropriate form of play therapy out there.

I hope that long explanation has been helpful. I am passionate about supporting children and families and hope that you can sense that from the information I have given you. If you would like to have a free 20-minute consultation where you can discuss how child-centred play therapy would be beneficial for your child, please get in touch using the contact referral form on the website.

Very best wishes,

Katie @ PATCH Therapy.