

Play Therapy Techniques in Early Childhood Settings

Supporting Social-Emotional Learning and Self-Regulation

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“You don’t need to be a
therapist to be therapeutic.”

Neal Warren, MD
Georgetown University Hospital

The play therapy skills presented today, when used with consistency, can help a child:

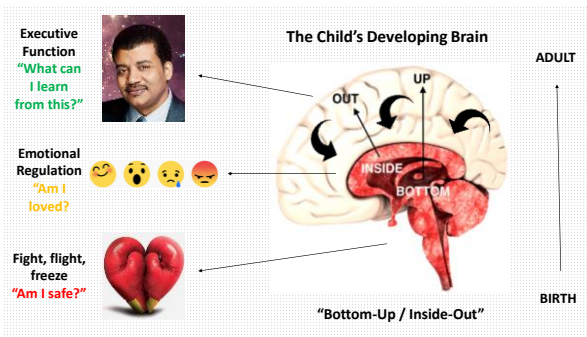
- develop a secure relationship with adults
- develop emotional regulation skills
- express thoughts and feelings in developmentally appropriate ways
- develop internal locus of control
- attain developmentally appropriate self-help skills
- Become more confident and empowered

Overview

The impact of early adversity on young children.

Play Therapy techniques for teachers to use in the early childhood classroom.

The basics of brain development



80%



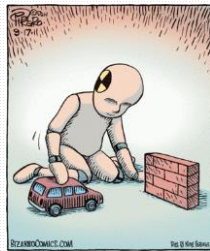
By age 4, 80% of the brain's structures responsible for future emotional, behavioral, social, and physiological functioning, are developed.

Bruce Perry, MD
www.childtrauma.org

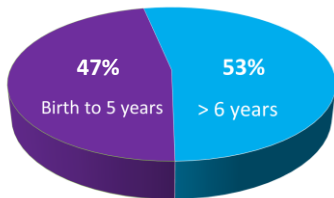
Trauma and Children

One in four children witness or experience a traumatic event before the age of 4, and more than two-thirds by age 16.

neaToday, Winter 2017

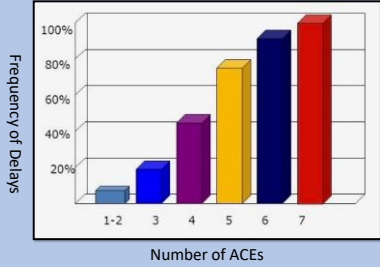


Abuse and Neglect by Age: United States, 2015



www.acf.hhs.gov

ACE Score and Developmental Delays at Three



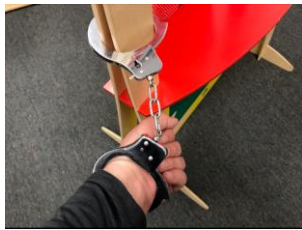
<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-the-impact-of-early-adversity-on-childrens-development/>



POLL



Domestic Violence



Domestic Violence



Video 1

Play Therapy and Early Adversity

Play in Preschool Children: What to Look For

Symbolic Play

Goal-direction

Enjoyable

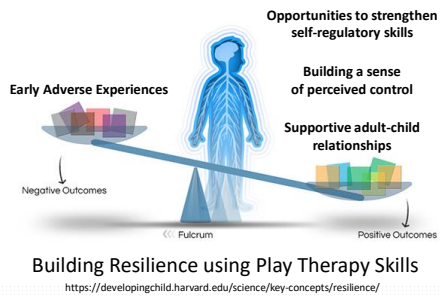
Frustration tolerance

POLL

Using play to support children's emotional development

The parallels between Play Therapy and Early Childhood

"You don't need to be a therapist to be therapeutic."

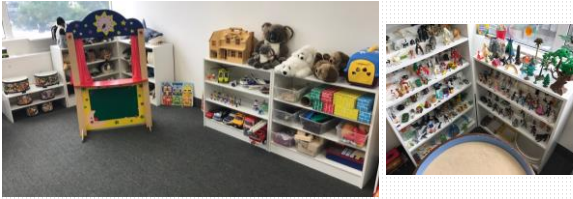


Using play to support children's emotional development

The Environment

"You don't need to be a therapist to be therapeutic."

Play Therapy Room



Early Childhood Classroom



Using play to support children's emotional development

The Relationship

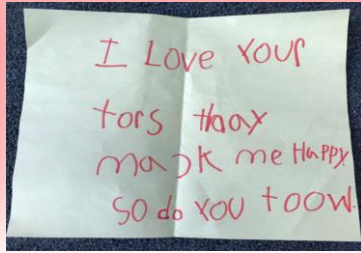
"You don't need to be a therapist to be therapeutic."

The Principles of Child-Centered Play Therapy

1. The therapist accepts the child exactly as her or she is.
2. The therapist must develop a warm, friendly relationship with the child, in which good rapport is established as soon as possible.

Axline (1976). Play Therapy, Ballantine Books, New York, NY

Play Skill Number One: Build a Relationship



Play Skill Number One: Build a Relationship

Body Language

Down on the child's level

Open, relaxed posture

Maintain arm's length



Play Skill Number One: Build a Relationship

Body Language: Benefits

- Helps build a rapport and supports attachment
- Actively addresses boundaries

The Principles of Child-Centered Play Therapy

3. The therapist does not attempt to direct the child's actions or conversation. The child leads, the therapist follows.

Axline (1976). Play Therapy. Ballantine Books, New York, NY

Play Skill Number Two: Allow the Child to Lead While Describing Play

Allow the child to self-initiate the play.

Describe the child's play while avoiding asking questions.

**Play Skill Number Two:
Allow the Child to Lead and Describe Play**

Allow the Child to Lead: Benefits

- Supports developmentally appropriate expression of thoughts and feelings

Describe the Child's Play: Benefits

- "Attunement"
- Speech, language, and vocabulary modeling

**Play Skill Number Two:
Allow the Child to Lead While Describing Play**

Cooperative role play: What to do

When a child invites you to participate in their play:

- Seek their direction. Ask what you should do or say.

Video 2

**Allow the Child to Lead and Describe Play
(Sea Animals)**

**Seeking the Child's Direction
(Pretend Eating)**

The Principles of Child-Centered Play Therapy

4. The therapist is alert to recognize the feelings the child is expressing and reflects those feelings back to him in such a manner that he gains insight into his behavior.



Axline (1976). Play Therapy, Ballantine Books, New York, NY

Play Skill Number Three: Name the Child's Feelings

While playing with the child, name the feelings the child expresses verbally and non-verbally.

Play Skill Number Three: Name the Child's Feelings

Name the Child's Feelings: Benefits

- Child learns feelings vocabulary
- Child learns that feelings are experienced in the body
- Child learns to recognize feelings in self and others
- Co-regulation

Video 3

Name the Child's Feelings
(Body Language, Frustration, ID through Play)

The Principles of Child-Centered Play Therapy



5. The child is given the responsibility to make choices.

Axline (1976). Play Therapy. Ballantine Books, New York, NY

**Play Skill Number Four:
Frame the Child's Play as a Choice or Decision**

When the child selects an activity, or an item or action within an activity, acknowledge their choices.

Play Skill Number Four: Frame the Child's Play as a Choice or Decision

Benefits

- Supports internal locus of control
- Facilitates free expression of thoughts and feelings
- Supports limit setting

The Principles of Child-Centered Play Therapy

6. The therapist establishes limitations to make the child aware of their responsibility in the relationship.

Axline (1976). Play Therapy. Ballantine Books, New York, NY

Play Skill Number Five: Limit Setting



When the child engages in a prohibited behavior, set a limit utilizing choice giving and a natural consequence.

Play Skill Number Five: Limit Setting

Benefits

- Limits provide safety and emotional security
- Supports internal locus of control
- Reduces power struggles
- Supports problem solving
- Supports self-regulation

Play Skill Number Five: Limit Setting

Procedure

- Acknowledge the child's motivation or feeling
- State the limit
- Provide an alternative (if necessary)
- State the consequence
- Praise the child's choice to self-correct, or enforce the limit

Landreth (1991). Play Therapy, The Art of the Relationship; Accelerated Development, Bristol, PA

Video 4

Framing Behavior as a Choice, Limit Setting (Markers, Hand, Sand)

Play Skill Number Five: Limit Setting

Tips

- Modulate voice and maintain proximity
- Allow the child to self-correct
- Avoid “we” and “ok?”
- Consequence should involve loss of toy being used or current activity
- Follow through!

Limit Setting Tip:

Be preventative!

Establish expectations and reinforce often through specific praise.



POLL

The Principles of Child-Centered Play Therapy

7. The therapist maintains a deep respect for the child's ability to solve their own problems if given the opportunity to do so.

Axline (1976). Play Therapy, Ballantine Books, New York, NY

Play Skill Number Six: Support Independence and Self- Regulation through Challenging Tasks

When the child is presented with a challenging task:

- Name the child's feeling (co-regulation)
- Return responsibility
- Acknowledge effort
- Help just enough
- Praise perseverance

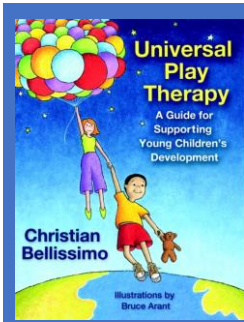
Play Skill Number Six: Support Independence and Self- Regulation through Challenging Tasks

Benefits

- Builds frustration tolerance
- Lengthens attention span
- Supports problem solving
- Co-regulation
- Supports developmentally appropriate autonomy
- Empowering

Video 5

Support Independence and Self-Regulation through Challenging Tasks
(Markers, Shoes, Tying)



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