

In depth explanation of how play therapy works.

A child's language is play.

While an adult usually can verbalise their experiences, a child, unless very articulate, will do so in play and thus shows what motivates and hinders them.

A child who experiences adversity is hardly ever able to verbalise this in a coherent way. It will predominately process it through play, such as acting out in the playground, classroom or at home. Doing this without appropriate boundaries can create problems and conflicting situations in social settings, their relationships, and often compromises their learning.

In Therapeutic Play we offer a safe place for the child to explore and process their feelings and traumas. They can choose their own activity from a great variety of toys and art material. There are very few limits like that nothing ought to be broken intentionally and both child and therapist have to stay safe.

I work within a person/child centred frame of reference and use the three core conditions of Carl Roger's humanistic approach. These are empathy, unconditional positive regards or non-judgement, and congruence.

Using empathic reflection about their play and communication gives the child a sense of being seen, as well as a greater sense of self awareness, and a better understanding of themselves and their situation.

Unconditional positive regard or non-judgement is mainly shown by not evaluating what they are bringing to the room. In many situations outside of Play therapy praise is used to motivate a child, however this can have also a negative impact as it can create a sense of failure every time the child is not praised. There will be no 'well done' nor any comment that things are either great or not good enough. (This is not to say that encouragement does not have it's place in child rearing or education, only that in play therapy it is not useful.)

Knowing the therapist will not tap into their feelings of guilt and shame gives the child the trust that the therapist is on their side. In this space they can find the courage to share things that might weigh heavy on their mind. The freedom to express themselves allows traumatic experiences to come to the surface and as a consequence can be processed, healed and integrated.

The third aspect is congruence which creates a transparent relationship between therapeutic play worker and the child client. With this the child can gain a new blue print of what a healthy relationship feels like. This hopefully allows them to translate this into social settings outside of the therapeutic setting and gives them the ability to choose healthy friendships over less favourable ones.

In recent decades the profession has gained more and more of an understanding that the biggest healing agent (in any modality) is in fact the therapeutic relationship itself. In one case I have supervised a therapist whose child client eventually grew in confidence, and their countertransference* altered so fundamentally that in turn their family too was effected in a positive way.

In summery, in the safe space of play therapy feelings that might have been repressed and shown themselves as anger and frustration can be brought to the surface, they can be understood and processed and the experiences integrated into ones emotional make up and therefore will not control unconsciously the behaviour of the child/client.

Unlike other organisations we aim to work open ended, meaning we have no limit on session numbers and give the child continued support for as long as they need it.

As well as that we are keeping waiting times to an absolute minimum and also see children who have not fulfilled the criteria to be seen by organisations like CAMHS.

Books that inspire and inform our work and style and are a must read for volunteers who train for Therapeutic Play with us are:

- *"Play therapy: The Art of relationship" by Dr. Garry Landreth,
- *"Dibs in search of self" by Virginia Axline and
- *"Play Therapy" by the same author

Another very inspirational book in this field is "The Healing Power of Play" by Eliana Gil.

Sessions are weekly for 45-50 minutes at the same time each week. The reliability of a regular time table adds to a sense of security and trust in the relationship.

I do this work for a charitable organisation called Carefree Kids 2020, which I helped to re-establish after the original charity Carefree Kids had to close for financial reasons.

Please visit our website: <https://www.carefreekids2020.co.uk>

or contact us on carefreekidscontact@gmail.com

*Transference - the way we relate to others as well as the way we expect others to relate to us.

Countertransference - the way people feel about us in particular, disregarding how they might act and feel about others, in fact the understanding is that with our transference we create that countertransference in others.