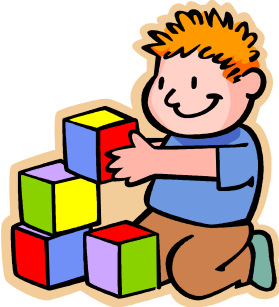


Play Therapy for Children

By [Sheryl Isaacs](#), MS



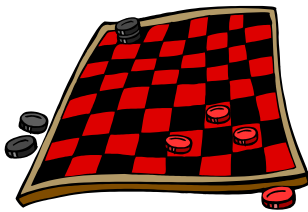
Play Therapy with children is a very important therapeutic tool because it utilizes the child's natural language, the language of play. Children naturally seek to express themselves through play. Stories, metaphors, problem solving, fears and experimenting with new roles occur when a child plays. The Play therapist engages the child in this natural language of childhood to help the child process strong emotions, trauma and role play difficult situations that the child may face. Every day through play children are working out a myriad of problems that occur in their world.

When participating with a child in their play, the therapist enters into the world of the child, accepting the play and the child unconditionally. The therapist follows the child's lead, allowing them a sense of control that they might not otherwise feel. This integration into the child's world allows the therapist to deeply connect with the child. The child can act out any situation that needs attention in their lives without fear of the therapist rejecting them. When scenarios are acted out that are difficult, it gives the therapist the opportunity to empathize with the child's experience through play and gently mix into play therapeutic concepts and tools. Utilizing the play format makes disclosure of severe experiences and strong emotions easier for the child to express to the therapist.

The therapist can then help the child make sense of their world by finding metaphors that relate to the child's life hidden within their play. Through this process the therapist can eventually help the child "restory" their play, which enables a child to move through difficult situations in their life. As play therapy continues, one can see a normalization of play. The child's play becomes more typical developmentally and the child's play becomes more reciprocal in nature with the therapist. Often the themes that had been so important in play are abandoned. The child does not feel the need to work out through play the metaphors that he had been. For now, the issue has been resolved.



However, it is important to note that when children experience a trauma they will continue to process this trauma throughout their development. This occurs due to the changes that occur developmentally. The trauma will most likely need to be processed again at key developmental stages or changes in their life, such as when a child begins Kindergarten, enters into puberty, or becomes a teenager. The child that processed trauma through play may need to verbally process this trauma as a teenager. A young child will not feel the same feelings or have the same questions that a teenager might have in regard to their trauma experience.



This of course, is just a general overview of the play therapy experience. There are many theories and developmental models that are utilized as well as different models of play therapy. Play therapists engage in many different varieties of play as well, again following the child's lead. Expressive arts, lego play, doll house play, imaginary play, active play, puppet play...any type of play that you can imagine is utilized in the play therapy room. The key is to allow the child to be who is, express his story the way he needs to express it and follow his lead.