

Explaining Play Therapy to Children

18 DEC 2008

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Parents who seek counselling help for their children often ask how to explain play therapy to their children or even the idea of seeing a counsellor. We hope the following tips maybe able to help you if this is something you are struggling with:

DO'S (*Depending on the situation or the age of your child, some of the following may not apply*)

- Tell your child that she will come for a Play Time (or to see someone if your child is older) to help her:
 - feel better (about school, about...)
 - feel less sad
 - feel less angry, etc
- Tell your child she will come to a room with toys and sometimes they may play or they may talk.
- Tell your child that this Play Time is not “a test” or “an exam”, etc. She is not expected to do anything but to play or talk as she wishes.
- Explain that sometimes this person may talk to daddy or mommy before or after your play time. This person will meet parents to find out how you are and plan how to help you.
- Tell your child that this Play time will usually last about 45 minutes and may happen every week or every other week

DON'TS

- Tell your child that she is bad
- Tell your child that she is the problem
- Tell your child that she is sick
- Tell your child that someone will observe her in play and give advices
- Tell her to listen to the “play therapist” whatever she’s asked to do
- Tell her to behave in sessions
- Give your child any pressure about being good in session
- Put pressure on your child to talk about her problems, etc
- Tell your child how much the session costs or that it is expensive, etc. This may increase children’s worries or anxieties about their “performance” in sessions. This may also make children feel guilty or blamed.

Other information you may want to consider telling your child (*depending on their age and the nature of the issue*)

- Mommy takes you to play with this person / or see this therapist because sometimes it is hard to talk about your feelings.
- This person (Play Therapist) will try to help you feel better by playing. Children play about their feelings better than they talk about them.

- Mommy takes you to play with this person / or see this therapist because: (for example)
 - Sometimes you feel sad or angry, etc
 - You are scared about _____, you are worried about _____, etc
 - Something horrible has happened to you
 - Mommy wants you to sleep better, enjoy going to school, eat better, etc.
- This person (Therapist), most of the time, will try not tell other people (including mommy and daddy) about what you do or talk about during play time.
- Sometimes this person (Play Therapist) will have to tell other grown ups if they are really worried about you – it is really important that other people get to know if you are not safe but he or she will always try to talk to you first before telling other grown ups about this.
- Your play time is not a secret. You can talk about what you've been doing to anyone if you want to, but you don't have to. If you feel like keeping it to yourself, that's OK.

Other Do's & Don'ts between sessions

- Try not to force your child to come to play sessions. If there is a problem bringing your child to sessions, please call or email your therapist to consult
- Do not give consequences or any punishments if your child refuses to come to his or her play sessions
- Try not to bribe your child to go to play sessions. *I.e. if you go to see this person, I will take you to MacDonald's afterwards.*
- If your child shows you a painting or some of her sandplay after her sessions, try not to praise her or say anything along the lines of *"It's a beautiful picture", "Wow...you did good"*
- Before the session, don't tell your child "to behave" during his or her play time
- After the session, don't ask your child "Did you behave?" "Did you listen to _____?" "Did you help cleaning up?" "Did you do what he / she asked you to?"
- After the session, try not to ask your child "How do you like it?" Sometimes it is hard for children to articulate their experience in play therapy. Sometimes children are also afraid to upset parents. It is better for you to talk to your therapist about your child's progress.
- If your child shows you her sandplay in the sandbox:
 - Try not to touch any objects in the box
 - Try not to make guesses or interpretations about what she put in the box.
 - Thank her for showing you her play
 - You can say something neutral, " I see that there are a lot of things you put in there, I see different colors, I wonder if you have spent a lot of time working on this...etc".

*The Vancouver Wishing Wells Counselling Service provides counselling support for individuals, couples, children, and families in Greater Vancouver. Our office is located in the Vancouver West Side -Oakridge area, accessible by Canada Line. Our counselling services include **Children Counselling & Play Therapy**, **Parent-Child Relationship Support & Filial Therapy**, **Child Behaviour Consultation and Support**, and **Counselling for Adolescents**. Should you need to discuss with one of our therapists for consultation, please **Contact Us** for more information.*