



What Is Play Therapy?

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Children have troublesome thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, just like adults. Yet, unlike adults, children do not always readily use words to express themselves. Instead, children express themselves through play. Mental health professionals trained in [play therapy](#) are not merely 'playing with children.' On the contrary, by using specialized toys and games intended to help children demonstrate the issues that are bothering them, they help children face their difficulties and develop new ways to cope with them.

Play therapy is used with many different types of problems. It is of tremendous value for children who have witnessed or experienced violence. It helps eliminate fears and phobias. It helps resolve problems in families. And there are so many more applications. For example, much can be learned about a child's level of cognitive (or intellectual) functioning by observing him/her play. A professional trained in play therapy knows that children generate increasingly complex interactions among human figures as they progress through developmental stages. A play assessment is particularly well suited for nonverbal children or children with limited educational experience. When children complete a course of play therapy, they usually emerge with fewer behavior problems and a greater sense of self-confidence and trust in others, particularly their adult caregivers.

To get the most out of play therapy, [find a therapist with specialized training](#) in this area. Be as honest as you can with the therapist during the initial meeting and during subsequent check-ins about how your child is doing. Remember that the therapist isn't looking for ways to blame you for the child's problems; their focus is on what can help the child heal. This may require changes on your part as parents. Keep the therapist posted about any family issues that might be stressful for your child. Ask if there's anything you can do at home to supplement the treatment process. Play therapy works best when parents and therapist work together as partners throughout treatment.

Talk to someone who can help! To find a licensed psychologist near you, use PPA's Psychologist Locator at <https://www.papsy.org/locator>. For information on other mental health topics, go to <https://www.papsy.org>, then "Resources" and then "Public Resources". PPA offers these articles for informational purposes only; they are not a substitute for professional diagnosis and treatment.