

## The Art of Play: Making Playful Therapeutic Interactions

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## Guided Meditation

Bubble blowing activity to teach deep breathing.  
Imagine what it's like as a young child coming into your office for the first time. Imagine the parent who might feel judged, criticized, like a failure. You're here to help that family, to provide a safe, non-judgmental environment. This is not about us as therapists, our egos, and how we can perform. The parent and child are suffering. Focus on what they need. We need to be a safe attachment figure for the family and provide a bridge between the child and parent. Provide support for the parent so that they can provide support for the child. Teach the parent how to do this for their child.

## Theoretical Framework

- A child's language is the language of play
  - Children connect with others and express their feelings through play
  - We adults understand them through play and build a connection
  - Play therapy is on a continuum from non-directive to structured play
- Family systems
  - Work with the child in his/her environment
  - Involvement of family, school, community
- Education and resource building for parents regarding developmental stages and age-appropriate play and discipline
- Non-judgmental manner with parents
- The developing brain: hand demo of the brain stem, amygdala (fight, flight, or freeze), frontal cortex (coping skills)
- Teach this to parents, soothing to parents

## Why Young Children Come to Therapy

- Trauma
  - Birth to age 3 is the worst time in a child's life to experience trauma
  - Domestic violence in utero or after the baby is born
  - Birth trauma/NICU
  - Parent's medical issues or depression
  - Audience prompt: experience working with these types of trauma?
- Attachment issues
- Disruptive behavior
- Change in family life
  - Environment
  - Moves
  - Loss
  - Parent's deployment
- Developmental issues
  - Speech and motor delays
  - Developmentally or physically disabled
- Diagnosis of ADHD, OCD, MDD, GAD
- Audience prompt: talk about your experience with little ones

## Parent & Child Together

- Attachment-based play therapy, treating the parent and the child
- Helping child to identify and express his/her feelings in a safe and healthy manner
- Helping parent respond to the child's feelings and behaviors
- Parent helping child to regulate his/her emotions
  - Children learn by experience
  - Regulation Cycle
- Practice playing together
  - Explore parent's history of play, being a child, beliefs about play
  - Benefit of building healthy relationship
  - Builds safety, security, trust
  - Playful, Loving, Accepting, Curious, Empathic (PLACE)
  - Soothing before consequences

## Theraplay Interventions

- Theraplay activities are organized around:
  - ✓ **Structure:** organization and safety  
Pillow dance, "Mother, May I?" game
  - ✓ **Engagement:** connection, joy, regulation of strong emotions  
Mirror activity, putting stickers on each others' faces
  - ✓ **Nurture:** calming, emotional nourishment, secure base  
Rocking, feeding, feather tracing activity, lotion activity
  - ✓ **Challenge:** recognition, celebration of self  
Measure child with fruit roll-up strips  
Matchbox cars against the wall
- Video clip on Theraplay

## Let's Play!

- Bubble blowing activity
- Cotton ball blowing activity
- Music and drawing your feelings
- Baby doll with blanket swing - demo
- Hand painting activity

## Play Therapy Interventions

- Feelings games
- Puppets
- Therapeutic stories/books, narrative therapy
- Music
- EMDR
  - Start with bad memory
  - Identify negative cognition
  - Identify feelings
  - Rate disturbance
  - Identify where it's felt in the body
  - Left/right sounds or eye movements helps limbic system calm down

## Case Presentation

- Background
  - Tim was 3 years old
  - Mom had high-risk pregnancy, traumatic birth
  - Twins were born when Tim was 1 year old
  - Twins hospitalized in NICU for 3 weeks
  - Dad in military, gone 6 weeks out of every 3 mths, many moves
- Symptoms
  - Regressed behavior, aggressive, resisted potty training, sleep issues, speech
  - Sensory issues, resisted being touched, arched his back when parents held him
- Goals
  - Assist mom in helping Tim process loss of attention
  - Re-do 0-3 nurturing that Tim missed out on due to family trauma & twins' needs
- Intervention: Theraplay
  - Nurturing: rocking, singing, lotion activity, feeding
  - Structure: mom as the one in charge, Tim to practice following direction
  - Unstructured play therapy with baby doll and puppets
  - Progress: loving toward doll, decrease in aggression, allowed mom to soothe him
  - Referral to occupational therapy early in treatment for sensory issues