

COMPERIO COUNSELING PLLC :: PLAY THERAPY & WHAT TO EXPECT

Christy Mellen, MEd, LPC • 3560 Delaware, Suite 104 Beaumont, TX 77706 • p.409.899.4600/f.409.899.4606

Child-centered play therapy is based on a belief in the capacity and resiliency of children to be constructively self-directing. Children are the best sources of information about themselves. They are quite capable of directing their own growth, and they are granted the freedom in the play therapy relationship to be themselves in the process of playing out feelings and experiences.

In the process of growing up, most children experience difficulty adjusting at one time or another. During this time, some children may need more help than others. Children have a hard time sitting in a big chair in an office and talking about what bothers them; they just don't know the words to describe what they are thinking or feeling inside. Most often times children act out, or show others how they feel.

In play therapy, we provide toys for children to use, to say with the toys what they have difficulty saying with words. When children can communicate, or play out how they feel, with someone who understands, they feel better because the feelings have been released. You have probably experienced the same thing when you were bothered or worried about something and then told someone who understood; you may have felt better and could handle the problem better. Play therapy is like that for children. They can use the dolls, puppets, paints or other toys to say what they think or how they feel. Therefore, how children play or what they do in the playroom is very important, just like what you say in a private session is very important. In play therapy children learn how to express their thoughts and feelings in constructive ways, to control their behavior to make decisions and to accept responsibility.

After the play therapy session, if you were to ask your child what he/she did, they would probably say that the 'just played' in the same way that if someone asked you what you did in therapy you would probably say that we 'just talked'. Children are sometimes unaware at the moment that something important has happened. On occasion, it is easier for children to explore feelings, especially their fears or anger, with someone who can be objective and accepting, than it is with parents or teachers. Therefore it is best that you refrain from quizzing your child about what he/ she did, what happened in the playroom, or if he/she had fun.

The time in the playroom is a special, private time for children. They should not feel they have to give a report to anyone, even parents. Play therapy sessions with children are confidential, just like counseling sessions with adults. I want to respect your child just as much as I respect you as an adult. Therefore I will be happy to share with you my general impressions and to offer suggestions, but I am not free to tell you the specifics of what your child may say or do in the playroom. When your child comes out of the playroom, it would be best if you didn't ask, "how did things go?" or "Did you have fun?"; just say something like, "Hi, we can go home now."

Sometimes your child may bring a painting or a drawing home. If you praise the painting, he/she may feel they should make other paintings for you. It would be best to just make comments about what you see in the painting: "You used a lot of colors. There is some blue and green and a lot of brown all along the bottom". The playroom can sometimes be messy, but all the paint is washable. Please do not reprimand your child or be surprised if he/she has paint smeared on him/her; some children really enjoy the freedom to be messy with paint.

When children come here for the first time, they may show some reluctance to go with me to the playroom since this is a strange place and they have never seen me before. However, most children are quite eager to go and see the playroom. When I come into the waiting room and introduce myself to your child, I will say "We can go to the playroom now". It would be helpful if you would say something like, "Fine. I'll wait here and I will be here when you are finished in the playroom". If your child is reluctant to go to the playroom, I may ask you to walk to the door with us. When we get to the door, I will let you know if I think you need to come in.

You may hear your child yelling or throwing things and you shouldn't be alarmed, children play hard when in the playroom. You may even hear your child crying because they want to leave the playroom. This behavior is also acceptable. Loud noises and crying do not mean anything is wrong. Often times you may want to tell me something about your child as soon as you see me walk into the waiting room, but I want to give my full attention to your child, so it will be best for us to set up a separate meeting time without your child.