

# WHY CHOOSE PLAY THERAPY?

Children are not mini adults - they're different from adults in significant ways. Kids explore for understanding physically, so play therapy is the most developmentally-appropriate way to approach child therapy. It allows the therapist to meet the child at their level, helping with cognitive, emotional, and behavioral challenges.

Play therapy's effectiveness as a mental health approach is supported by empirical research. Play therapists are rigorously trained through a certification process that ensures a competent use of play as a healing agent.

# WHAT IS PLAY THERAPY?

Play therapy is a type of therapy where a therapist uses play, toys, and games to help the child explore, express, and safely experience the difficulties they are working through. Using play, the therapist uncovers insights otherwise **unable to be heard and recognized through normal dialogue.**

Play therapy is a safe arena for a therapist to witness what a child is exploring and the solutions the child attempts during play. The goal of play therapy is to help children behave more adaptively and learn new ways to solve problems or process past trauma.

# HOW DOES PLAY THERAPY WORK?

Play therapy's focus on relationship and experience creates positive changes in the brain. While kids explore their concerns, the therapeutic relationship helps regulate their emotions, which permits the brain to make structural changes. These changes lead to better understanding and more adaptive behaviors.

The brain is plastic - meaning that it's constantly changing. Disconfirming experiences (experiences which do not match what was expected from the body) open our brain synapses to new understandings and new learning. Brain circuits are open to being rewired when confronted with a disconfirming experience while the body is in a regulated emotional state.

**In other words, the experiences the child directs in play therapy are met with new and different outcomes inside a safe relationship - rewiring the child's brain.** This rewiring is the healing of pain and the promotion of better behaviors, and it's not possible through talk!



# FAQ

Q: How can I help my child be successful in play therapy?

A: The best thing to do is to honor your child's process in therapy - in your child's time. Be sure to provide your child with plenty of downtime after a session, given that play therapy sometimes triggers emotions. Ask few, if any, questions - or the child might change how they act in play therapy so they have something to report back to you.

Q: When will I see results from play therapy?

A: It depends on the child. The process of therapy is generally slower for children than it is for adults. Play therapy is an evidence-based therapeutic process, but like all therapy, kids often get worse before they get better. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to ask your play therapist.

Q: What will the play therapist do to check in with me about my child's progress?

A: The play therapist won't be telling you everything that happens in the playroom to respect the child's process. However, they will talk about themes & patterns seen in the play room - and use these to help you learn new ways of working through your child's behavior, motivations, and emotions.

# PLAY THERAPY WITH ROB

Play therapy with me helps kids heal pain. This pain creates problematic behaviors, or what I have come to know as embodied memories, directing the child to fight or flight. We need to awaken these embodied memories in an experience met with a calm presence in order to rewire the body to be able to choose behaviors born of safety, not panic.

I start by building a safe foundation with all clients. I work hard to demonstrate myself as a secure place for kids to disclose, explore, and evaluate difficult issues. I spend the first few sessions mostly listening to my clients, giving the child an opportunity to lead.

I then give invitations on top of the foundation that I've built. With older kids, the goal is to show them how to choose their behavior (they already know how to do the behavior). Only experience can teach the choosing of behavior. I use activities which can prompt, demonstrate, and teach clients how to choose their behavior.

Older children, adolescents, and even adults still need to access embodied information because words often can't elicit embodied information. Play therapy is able to access unconscious or embodied information that words & talk therapy simply can't access. In other words, play therapy can be useful for all ages of people!



## ROB WINKLER

MA, LP, RPT

**As a licensed psychologist and registered play therapist, I enjoy the opportunity to help clients find what they need through a creative & playful experience in addition to conventional talk therapy. I have supervised 50+ students finishing their Master's degrees in psychology and marriage and family therapy. I continue to work as a supervisor for Master's level interns, as well as utilizing an apprentice intern with my own client case load. I am passionate about advancing the field of counseling and play therapy! I think it is extremely important to be informing our work with the best research and to support therapists to learn and grow to be the best therapist they can be.**

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