

Introduction to play therapy?

Welcome to the world of play therapy, a transformative approach that enables children and young people to explore their emotions, express themselves and heal through the power of play.

In this comprehensive guide for parents and carers, provided by the British Association of Play Therapists (BAPT) and adapted by Ella Manning (BAPT Registered Play Therapist®), we shed light on the effectiveness of play therapy and how it can positively impact your young person's emotional well-being and growth. As a leading authority on play therapy in the UK, BAPT is committed to providing valuable insights and support to parents and carers seeking the best service for their children and young people.

As a parent/carers, you naturally want to nurture the well-being and happiness of your child or young person. So, when they face emotional challenges or difficulties, you inevitably seek the most appropriate and effective solutions to help them cope and thrive. This guide introduces you to play therapy, a unique and powerful therapeutic approach that draws on children's natural tendency to play to bring about their emotional growth and healing. With the support and guidance of a qualified play therapist from the British Association of Play Therapists (BAPT), your child or young person can embark on a journey of self-discovery, emotional expression and resilience-building.

How to support your child or young person through play therapy

Your supportive involvement and encouragement are essential throughout your child or young person's play therapy journey. It will help if you can:

- Support them to attend their sessions regularly.
- Resist the urge to ask your child or young person about their sessions. They can tell you if they want to, but should not feel under pressure to do so. Allow your child or young person to share their feelings and experiences if they choose to, without judgment.
- Avoid suggesting that they must 'be good' in sessions. They need to feel free to express themselves in any way they choose.
- Try not to use phrases like 'Have fun'. Play therapy is usually an enjoyable experience but can occasionally give rise to difficult feelings.
- Avoid asking your child or young person to tell their therapist certain things. It is their time to use as they choose. If there is anything you would like the therapist to know please tell them on a separate occasion or via other methods for instance email.
- Be patient with the process. During any therapeutic intervention, things can appear to get worse before they get better. This is normal as emotional growth takes time.
- Trust in the knowledge of the play therapist and maintain open communication with them. If you have any worries or concerns, please feel free to talk to them about it and arrange a time to discuss this away from your child.



Understanding Play Therapy

A guide for parents and carers

For more information about play therapy, please email ella@futuresinmind.org

For more information about BAPT, visit www.bapt.info or email info@bapt.uk.com

Leaflet created by BAPT and adapted by Ella Manning, BAPT Registered Play Therapist®

What is play therapy?

Play therapy is a well-recognised, age-appropriate therapeutic approach, for children and young people. Play therapy harnesses the therapeutic potential of play to create a safe, supportive and non-threatening space for children and young people to explore their feelings, experiences and challenges. By engaging in play activities, children and young people can express things that may be too difficult to put into words. Sometimes the child or young person may re-enact aspects of their life through interacting with toys and creative activities in ways that feel manageable, perhaps ‘playing out’ specific traumatic events or difficult experiences. This can help them to process these experiences, enabling healing and developing the skills to cope. Play therapy is child-centred, allowing the child or young person to take an active role in their therapeutic journey. In play therapy, a qualified play therapist guides your child or young person through the process, providing support and understanding.

The power of play

Play is the language of children, and it is through play that they make sense of their world and emotions. Children tell us about their inner world through play long before they can link words to their experiences through language. In play, children and young people can safely experiment, process and master different skills and experiences. They form a sense of who they are, whilst learning to understand that other people can be different from them. Relationship skills, such as being able to trust, respect, empathise, share and co-operate with people, can be developed through play.

Play therapy recognises the profound impact of play on children and young people’s emotional well-being and uses it as a tool for healing and growth. Rather than children or young people having to explain what is troubling them, as adult therapy usually expects, they use play to communicate at their own level and pace, without feeling threatened or overwhelmed.

Benefits of play therapy

Play therapy offers numerous benefits for children and young people, addressing a wide range of emotional, behavioural and social difficulties. It can help your child and young people in general or specific ways, including:

- Enabling them to gain a deeper understanding and release of pent-up emotions, helping them to find their way back to a calm state, known as emotional regulation.
- Helping them to process and make sense of difficult life experiences, such as trauma or loss, at their own pace, promoting healing and recovery.
- Enhancing their critical thinking, decision-making and problem-solving skills, so that they can face challenges with greater confidence and resilience.
- Fostering a sense of accomplishment and success, building their self-esteem and self-worth. Play therapy can help them discover their strengths and abilities, promoting a positive self-image and improved confidence.
- Improving verbal and non-verbal communication skills, leading to healthier interactions with peers, parents/carers and other significant individuals in their lives.

- Facilitating deeper insight into their own behaviours, providing them with tools and strategies to manage their behaviours positively and make healthier choices.
- Supporting the development of good sensory processing through movement and sensory play.

Recognising when your child or young person may benefit from play therapy

As a parent/carer, you may have observed signs of emotional struggles or behavioural challenges in your child or young person. Emotional struggles may manifest as changes in behaviour, difficulty expressing feelings, or withdrawal from social interactions. Traumatic experiences or losses may leave lasting emotional imprints that play therapy can help address. Behavioural challenges, such as aggression or anxiety, may be an indication of underlying emotions that play therapy can also deal with. Recognising these signs may have prompted you to consider play therapy as a supportive option for your child or young person.

However, there are times when it may not be helpful to start play therapy. Since play therapy gives children and young people the opportunity to explore their deepest and most traumatic feelings and experiences, it is not appropriate to expose them to this if they are not physically and emotionally safe enough or if there are lots of ongoing changes, for example moving school or home.