

# CHILD CENTERED PLAY THERAPY

## What is Play Therapy?

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in 2021, 14.9% of children between the ages of 5-17 received mental health care in the last 12 months (Center for Disease Control, 2023). How about those children who do not receive the care, or whose symptoms are expressed through various behaviors, such as inattention, or disassociation, to name a few.

Similarly, adverse childhood experiences can lead to the many harmful affects of one's wellbeing, also being a contributor to the mental health crisis our society currently faces. There is a need for child therapeutic support and play therapy has been the change we need to see in child welfare for the last 60+ years. (Ray et al., 2021).



## Evolution

From as early as the 1700s, play has been identified as an essential piece of child development. Later, in the 1900s, it was introduced as a therapeutic approach for the child as a method of self expression. This utilization of play grew tremendously during the 1900s, with many therapists developing various methods of play therapy based upon factors such as theory, personal style, and environmental contributions (Bratton et al., 2005).

Through numerous pioneers of play therapy, many have contributed to what is now known as Child-Centered Play Therapy (Landreth, 2002).



## Why play?

Play therapy is an empirically based method of mental health intervention used when working with children (Russ, 2023). Child Centered Play Therapy (CCPT) provides a holistic lense when viewing the child and meets them where they are at in terms of developmental needs. Since children are not yet able to verbalize their concrete thoughts and emotions, play therapists speak their language to understand them; Play (Lin & Bratton, 2015)

According to Landreth (2012), the nonverbal communication provided by play allows the therapist to understand the child, while also giving them the space to be in control and make decisions with a safe adult. Simultaneously, they are acknowledging the child's capabilities for self directed healing. CCPT has been used and empirically supported up by data since the 1940s, and proven effective amongst various demographics (Landreth, 2012).



## Effectiveness of Play Therapy

In a recent study by Bratton and colleagues, researchers assessed the validity of play therapy. Findings concluded that for clients to experience the best outcome, there needs to be enough sessions for the child to feel safe and build trust in addition to parental involvement (Bratton et al., 2005). The element of trust allows the child to explore their thoughts and feelings at their own pace.

When looking at the child, a similar study found that play therapy improves self regulation, aggression and empathy, concluded by a study looking at 36 different elementary schools (Wilson and Ray, 2017).

