

PLAY THERAPY PARENT/TEACHER INFORMATION

In the process of growing up most children experience difficulty adjusting at some time. Some children may need more help in certain areas. Children have a hard time sitting in a big chair, like grownups do and talking about what bothers them. They just don't know the words to describe what they are feeling inside or what they are thinking, so sometimes they act out or show how they feel.

In play therapy we provide toys for children to use so they can say with toys what they have difficulty saying with words. When children can communicate or play out how they feel to 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 really cared about you and understood, then you 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 might say in a therapy 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 sessions, if you were to ask your child what she did, she would probably say she just played in the same way that if someone asked you what you did in a therapy session, you would say we just talked. But what we have talked about is very important. Also, children are sometimes unaware at the moment that something important has happened. Sometimes 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 (asking) your child about what she did, what happened, or if 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 adults. 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 says or does in the playroom. If you came to see me for counseling and shared something you were concerned about, I would not later tell your spouse or your employer. Our time together would be confidential. When your child and I come out of the playroom, it would be best if you didn't ask, "How did things go?" or, "Did you have fun?" Just say, "Hi, I see you are back." Or, "I guess it's time for Ms. Peggy to go for today."

Sometimes your child may take a painting or drawing from the play session. If you praise the painting, she may feel she should make other paintings for you. It would be best just to make comments about what you see in the painting. "You used lots of colors. There's some blue, and green, and a lot of brown all the way across the bottom of the picture" or, if the child gives the painting to you, "You made this just for me." Please don't reprimand your child or be surprised if she has paint smeared on her. All paints and markers used in the play session are washable. Some children really enjoy the freedom to be messy with paints.

You may be wondering what to tell your child about being in therapy. You may tell your child he or she will be with Ms. Peggy for special play time where there are lots of toys and art supplies for her or him to play with. If your child wants to know why she is going to the play sessions, you can tell her or him something general like, "Things don't seem to be going very well for you at home (or other general statement related to the identified problem), and sometimes it helps to have a special time just for yourself to share with a special person."

Please feel free to ask me any questions you may have about the play therapy process.