



Play Therapy



Information Leaflet
for Professionals

What is Play Therapy?

Play therapy is a psycho-dynamic therapy that helps children modify their behaviours, clarify their self-concept and build healthy relationships. In play therapy, children enter into a dynamic relationship with the therapist that enables them to express, explore and make sense of their difficult and painful life experiences. Play therapy helps children find healthier ways of communicating, developing fulfilling relationships, building resilience and facilitating emotional literacy. Children become smarter, stronger and often kinder.

Children use play as a form of communication and a natural form of expression. Often children/ young people have limited words to describe their thoughts, feelings and perceptions of their internal and external world and this is why play is used in therapy.

Play therapy is an effective treatment for a variety of emotional and/ or behavioural difficulties that children may present with after experiencing trauma, abuse, neglect, loss, etc.



Why do some Children Need Play Therapy?

At any one time, one in 10 children and young people have a diagnosable mental health problem and two in 10 are struggling with mental health difficulties. It is well established that most adolescents and adult mental health can be traced back to childhood. Children/ Young people with learning difficulties are at higher risk of developing mental health difficulties, in fact, 36% will develop mental health problems (*mental health foundation 2018*). All of these children/ young people will have had contact with schools and other organisations. Professionals such as teaching staff are often the first to spot when children/ young people have difficulties. Schools frequently have to cope with children who have complex emotional and behavioural difficulties, which lead to them not being able to benefit fully from the educational system and social relationships.

Play therapy not only helps children/ young people to recover from difficult life experiences, but in doing so, play therapy also helps children/ young people to be more receptive to learning and therefore enables their educational needs to be better met.



How Horizon Play Therapy works in Schools and other Organisations

Play Therapy generally follows a standard procedure.

This usually includes:

1. Referral from parent/ guardian or educational /other professional;
2. Consultation with parent(s)/carer(s);
3. Liaison with school/organisation regarding suitability for undertaking the play therapy intervention in that setting;
4. If consent, information gathering with professionals;
5. Block of play therapy including;
 - An initial 50minute meeting with parent(s)/carer(s);
 - A block of 12 individual 50minute play therapy sessions with the child (some children will require more than 12 therapy sessions in total);
 - A mid-way and final parent/carers meeting;
 - Additional meetings or contact with parent(s)/ carer(s) and/or professionals to gather information or pass on strategies for home and/or school as required;
 - Mid and/or final written report, if requested.

It is important to note that ending play therapy needs to be done sensitively over several weeks. Premature or unplanned endings are detrimental to the child. This is why professionals and parents/carers need to be involved in the play therapy process in order to review the child's process.

The Five 'C's of Play Therapy

It is important for professionals to be familiar with the five "C's" of Play Therapy:

Confidentiality: Play therapy has to be private to allow the child to feel safe enough to express and explore difficult and painful experiences. Safeguarding policies are always adhered to.

Consistency: Play therapy takes place at the same time, in the same space each week. It is important that no changes in consistency occur, even if the child has been disruptive or difficult in school or for a member of staff.

Commitment: The play therapist, professionals and parents/ carers need to be committed to helping the child. This requires patience, trust and dedication to the play therapy process and the child.

Consent: Before play therapy can start, the parent/carer (or the person holding legal responsibility for the child) must give written consent for play therapy. The child must also give verbal assent prior to starting and throughout the process.

Child Protection: The Horizon Play Therapist adheres to their and the school/ organisation's child protection procedures.



Play Therapy in Schools

Horizon Play Therapy accepts referrals from parent/ guardian, education and other professionals. If a family or organisation would like therapy to be undertaken in school, Horizon Play therapy will work with the school/ other organisations and family to try to make this happen. In school play therapy can:

- Help children and young people to build healthier relationships;
- Reduce emotional, behavioural, social obstacles to learning;
- Improve adaptation in the classroom;
- Enhance communication, emotional literacy and play skills;
- Address the needs of at-risk children;
- Support and advise teaching staff.

Play Therapy in Schools is effective because ...

- It is a familiar and safe environment for both children and their parents/carers;
- School is accessible for the majority of children;
- It provides consistency and reliability;
- School staff often have a unique perspective on children in their care and can identify difficulties and changes early on;
- School staff interact closely with children in their care and therefore can help modify their development, learning and behaviour.

In order to provide school-based Play Therapy, schools will need the following:

- An understanding of the play therapy guidelines and requirements;
- A dedicated, private room that is accessible every week at the same period of time;
- Availability for relevant teaching staff to meet and discuss the child and other issues at agreed times if consent is given by the parents/carers;
- Regular liaison between the play therapist, SENCO and/or other identified staff who may have responsibility for behaviour, child protection and parent/carer contact.





Horizon Play Therapy



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Howden Insurance