



PLAY THERAPY

“Birds fly, fish swim, children play.” - Gary Landreth

As Therapists we often hear the questions, “*What is the difference between playing and Play Therapy?*” “*What do children learn from Play Therapy?*” and the infamous, “*Why should I bring my child to counseling so that he/she can just play?*”

For children, play is a rehearsal for life. Play is their language, toys are their words. In the same sense that adults are able to talk out their problems and feelings, children play them out. In Play Therapy, the child is able to bring feelings to the surface and face them. Through play, the child develops physically, mentally, emotionally and socially.

Play Therapy is a powerful technique used in counseling children. In therapy with adolescents and adults, the individual communicates with the therapist primarily through words. While adults and adolescents can put into words complex feelings they have, and think of things in the hypothetical and abstract; children have not yet reached the stage in their life when they can do this. Although some children are quite verbal, it is difficult for children who are under the age of 10 to express themselves in the same manner as adolescents or adults. They are simply just not ready developmentally!

Play Therapy philosophy believes that children will heal, grow, and change if they are provided with safe and therapeutic play activities. Many children are in great need of emotional support. Play Therapy has been proven to be an effective intervention for school success, as well as for the personal development of our children. Play combines action and thought and it gives children a sense of satisfaction and a feeling of achievement. Play Therapy has proven to be effective in helping children overcome trauma related to various forms of neglect as well as physical, sexual and psychological abuse.

For children, Play Therapy is a unique learning experience under the most favorable growth promoting conditions possible. Being viewed as such, the developmental objectives are in line with those of the school and home life. For example, children who carry a number of differing problems with them into the classroom are typically unable to achieve maximum learning even from the most masterful teacher.

Through Play Therapy, children learn:

1. Self-control and self-direction.
2. To respect themselves and others.
3. To express and control their feelings *appropriately*.
4. To assume responsibility for themselves and their behavior.
5. To be creative and resourceful in confronting and resolving problems.
6. To recognize that they are important, loved and accepted by others.
7. To make choices and be responsible for those choices, by being allowed to experience the process of making choices in a non-judgmental environment.
8. To take time out for themselves and recognize that it is safe and OK to be separated from their caregivers at times.