

Play Therapy Reference Guide

Thanks for choosing me as your play therapy provider. I feel honored and privileged to be able to start this journey with you and your family. As “partners in play,” our ultimate goal is to use various play mediums as a means for facilitating change, growth, and healing. As a Registered Play Therapist, I believe that play is a child’s natural language and is an effective means for exploring the inner world of clients. I do not expect that most people know a lot about play therapy so I prepared this guide to provide my “partners in play” with valuable information about the play therapy process and what to expect during our partnership.

A Different Kind of Play...But Not Really

The play that we will engage in is somewhat different from the play that you may observe on the playground, at school, or in your community. For example, in the play room, siblings and friends are typically not invited into the playroom unless there is a specific reason for it. Although, for the most part, partners in play engage in spontaneous, non-directive play, I may from time to time select specific activities and types of play for the purposes of accomplishing certain therapeutic goals. Partners in play are allowed to play with any items they choose in any manner they decide as long as their play does not pose a risk to their safety or wellbeing.

First Things First

Eliminate distractions. Please be sure that all partners in play are free of all distracting devices such as tablets and cell phones prior to entering the play room. Time in the play room is like time with a therapist in the office, so it is important to minimize any distractions when possible.

Address personal needs. Because time in the play room is limited, it is important that all matters of personal importance such as using the restroom and eating are taken care of prior to the start of the play therapy session. Leaving the playroom to use the restroom isn’t ideal, but is understandably necessary in certain situations. Whenever possible however, I like to keep partners in play engaged in play for the duration of our time together so I discourage any activity that will disrupt the play session.

I occasionally provide snacks for partners, but would like to encourage you to prepare snacks in advance in the event of specific dietary needs and/or allergies.

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Speaking of allergies, please be sure to communicate with me concerning specific allergies or potential reactions to substances in advance, so that I can make appropriate modifications.

Next, let's visit some additional tid-bits regarding the process of play and what to do after sessions have concluded.

Play therapy is a slow process. There are times when progress will appear to have stalled, or when progress does not seem to be moving at a fast pace. This is a common phenomenon in play therapy. Many people do not possess the verbal ability or skills to process complex, strong emotions without some guidance and support. With that said, it may require more time to provide the means and support necessary for those skills to develop. The length of time in play therapy varies from individual to individual based on presenting needs. Rest assured though, that play therapy is effective and has been proven to be so with the treatment of various issues such as anxiety, phobias, and behavior disorders to name a few.

Stick around. In addition to “toughing it out” when you don't feel that you are seeing the progress you'd like, I would also ask that you stick around in another sense too. I can imagine that there are a million and one things that anyone can get accomplished between the time period of 30-50 minutes. Although time occupied in the waiting room may appear idle, there are times when a quick consult is needed or when the play therapy must end early (e.g. if the partner becomes ill or if the session must end early for safety reasons). With that in mind, I would like to ask that you remain seated in the waiting area until the conclusion of the session. (Note: There are times when I may ask you to join the play therapy session. When those times arise, I will notify you in advance).

Dress not to impress. Things can get a little messy in the playroom. The playroom has a variety of activities that partners can choose from which range from playing with board games, Play Doh, blocks, sand, and paint. While the playroom is equipped with paper towels and smocks, we know that these items are often defenseless against the perils of play. For this reason, I ask that partners dress in comfortable clothing that can withstand stains and/or gooey matter.

Partners do not clean up. For me, one can learn a lot about a person's inner world through the observation of play. To have an individual undergo the process of

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cleaning up the play room after a session is much like asking the individual to “clean up” their inner world. When compared to regular “talk therapy,” asking someone to clean up after themselves in the playroom is like asking someone to take back the words stated during therapy. Giving that rationale, I do not ask that play partners clean up after themselves in the playroom. I typically reserve time between sessions to tidy up the play room as needed. I must insert a disclaimer here, which is this: “I DO NOT advocate for this behavior outside of the playroom. I only encourage this behavior as a unique way of engaging in the process of play therapy here at the office.”

Limit question asking. Once the play session has ended, I know that you may be tempted to ask about the details regarding the session. Try not to be alarmed if when asking questions about the session’s content, the play partner simply responds with, “we played.” Remember, play is a method that we use to work out problems and emotional struggles, so it is reasonable to expect that the play partner may not wish to “hash” this out again with you outside of the session.

Consultation. A cornerstone of any counseling relationship is confidentiality. You may recall a discussion about confidentiality and its importance in helping clients feel that they can discuss issues of their leisure without any undue sharing of what was discussed in session with others. It’s hard to establish trust (which is another important cornerstone of the therapeutic relationship) with a client when there are some doubts about confidentiality. Frequent inquiries by parents, for example, may make the play partner question the quality of that confidentiality, thereby posing a challenge to the therapeutic relationship.

At a minimum of once per month, I will consult with you regarding therapeutic goal progress as well as any other concerns you may have. If you would like to communicate concerns or provide updates regarding changes at school, home, etc., you may do so by submitting the “Weekly Caregiver Report.” This report can be accessed from the client portal. Your participation will provide valuable insights to the therapeutic process.

Thanks for taking the time to read the “Play Therapy Reference Guide.” Please be sure to share any questions or concerns you may have.