

PLAY THERAPY

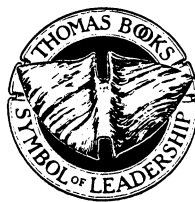
PLAY THERAPY

Dynamics of the Process of Counseling with Children

Edited by

GARRY L. LANDRETH, Ed.D.

*Professor of Counselor Education
North Texas State University
Denton, Texas*



CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER

Springfield • Illinois • U.S.A.

Published and Distributed Throughout the World by

CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER
2600 South First Street
Springfield, Illinois, 62717, U.S.A.

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ISBN 0-398-04716-2 (cloth)
ISBN 0-398-06221-8 (paper)
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 82-5798

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*Printed in the United States of America
CU-RX-1*

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Main entry under title:

Play therapy.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. Play therapy. 2. Children--Counseling of.

I. Landreth, Garry L.

RJ505.P6P53 618'.92'89165 82-5798

AACR2

ISBN 0-398-04716-2. — ISBN 0-398-06221-8 (pbk.)

**To Kimberly, Karla, and Craig,
who continue to reaffirm my
belief in the process of
applying play therapy procedures
at home.**

CONTRIBUTORS

Margaret A. Adams	Peter L. Kranz
Eugene D. Alexander	Garry L. Landreth
Frederick H. Allen	Dell Lebo
Louise Allen	Henry Leland
Fanny Amster	David M. Levy
Virginia M. Axline	John F. McDermott, Jr.
Ray H. Bixler	Clark E. Moustakas
Lawrence K. Frank	Richard C. Nelson
Merna D. Galassi	Ibrahim N. Orgun
Haim G. Ginott	Alan O. Ross
Bernard Guerney, Jr.	Salvatore Russo
Gove Hambidge, Jr.	Dan I. Slobin
Mary R. Haworth	Dan Smith
Peter A. In	Margaret Verhalen
Willard S. Jacquot	Michael T. Yura
Melanie Klein	

PREFACE

IN the process of growing up, children's problems are often compounded by the inability of adults in their lives to understand or to respond effectively to what children are feeling and attempting to communicate. This "communication gap" is widened as a result of adults' insistence that children adopt that means of expression commonly used by adults. Efforts to communicate with children on an exclusive verbal level assume the presence of a well-developed facility for expression through speech and thus confine children to a medium that is often awkward and unnecessarily restrictive. Play is to the child what verbalization is to the adult. It is a medium for expressing feelings, exploring relationships, describing experiences, disclosing wishes, and self-fulfillment. The process of play is viewed as the child's effort to gain control in the environment in which he/she finds self and of the perceived world. The problems children experience do not exist apart from the persons they are. Therefore, play therapy matches the dynamic inner structure of the child with an equally dynamic approach.

My intent in this book is to help a special kind of adult in the lives of children, the child therapist, to become more deeply aware of and sensitive to children to the extent that the therapist can communicate accurately and in a facilitative manner with greater responsiveness. Although most children are quite adaptable and resilient, they are often in need of assistance in their attempts to understand self, to express feelings and reactions, and to adjust to the situation or experience in which they find themselves.

This book is an outgrowth of my experiences in teaching master's and doctoral level courses in play therapy. I felt it was important to provide students with training and experience in many issues typically not presented in most play therapist texts. Therefore, my objective in this book has been to bring together clear and definitive writings dealing with those issues as well as the basic information

needed to conduct effective play therapy sessions. To that end, unlike most play therapy texts, which either exclude or present only a cursory explanation, the unique features of this book are that it presents the following:

- in-depth exploration of the significance of play in children's development
- an exploration of the child's view and perception of his/her world
- original writings of a variety of authors noted for their contribution in establishing the major approaches to play therapy
- a thorough analysis of several techniques of limit setting
- a discussion of the stages of emotional adjustment in the play therapy process
- practical suggestions on explaining play therapy to parents
- guidelines for assessment of children's progress in play therapy and to help the play therapist focus on the difficult issues involved in termination
- an exploration of the issues of maintaining confidentiality when working with children
- a description of the process of transferring a child in play therapy to a new play therapist
- information on the utilization of play therapy with a variety of children including the learning disabled, child abuse victims, seriously ill children, and the mentally retarded in such diverse settings as schools, agencies, and hospitals
- information on the training of parents and teachers to be play therapists

This book is designed for the student and practitioner in elementary school counseling, clinical psychology, counseling psychology, child psychiatry, social work, and related disciplines such as special education, early childhood education, child welfare and Child Life Programs in hospital settings. From my experience as director of a children's diagnostic and therapy center which has developed an interdisciplinary team approach to working with children who have learning difficulties, I have found a basic understanding of the various approaches and therapeutic procedures in play therapy to be an extremely valuable asset also to the speech therapist and the person providing reading therapy. Utilizing some of the procedures em-

ployed in play therapy, these specialists have found that they are much more effective in helping children to profit from the learning experiences provided.

Therapy does not occur automatically as a result of placing a child or small group of children with an adult in a room containing a variety of toys, with which the child may already be acquainted. The therapeutic encounter results from the play therapist's understanding of self, children, the rationale for play therapy, basic theories of play therapy, the therapeutic process, and his/her own unique contribution to the relationship. Although the first and last of these prerequisites are outside the scope of this volume and lie within the individual, they are indirectly affected by the other areas. The child therapist must be deeply involved in and committed to a thorough understanding of what he/she believes, what he/she is doing, and why. The effectiveness of an individual whose behavior in a play therapy session is governed by an inadequate understanding of theory is questionable. There is no one best theoretical model. The play therapist must select that approach which seems to be most congruent with his/her total personality. While the basic approaches to play therapy differ in their theoretical rationale and procedure, they have a common goal — optimal social development and personal growth by the child.

I want to express my appreciation to the journal editors and authors of the thirty-six selections for their permission to reprint their writings. I am also indebted to the graduate students in my play therapy courses for their eagerness to learn how to be helpful to children and for their willingness to question and share their ideas.

GARRY L. LANDRETH

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PLAY THERAPY

PART I

UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN'S PLAY

