

# UTILIZING THEMES IN PLAY THERAPY AND EMDR



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**APT Approved Provider #22-661**

**EMDRIA Credit Approval #21021-03**

**\*3 Contact Hours-Foundational Level**

**This workshop meets the requirement of Contact Training**

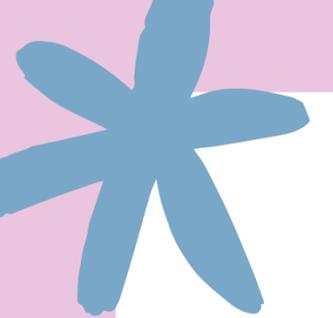


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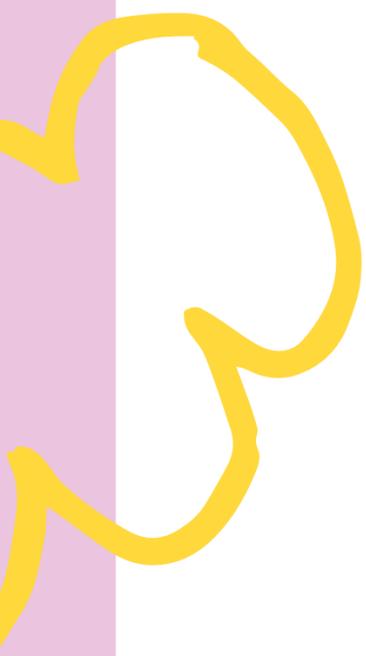
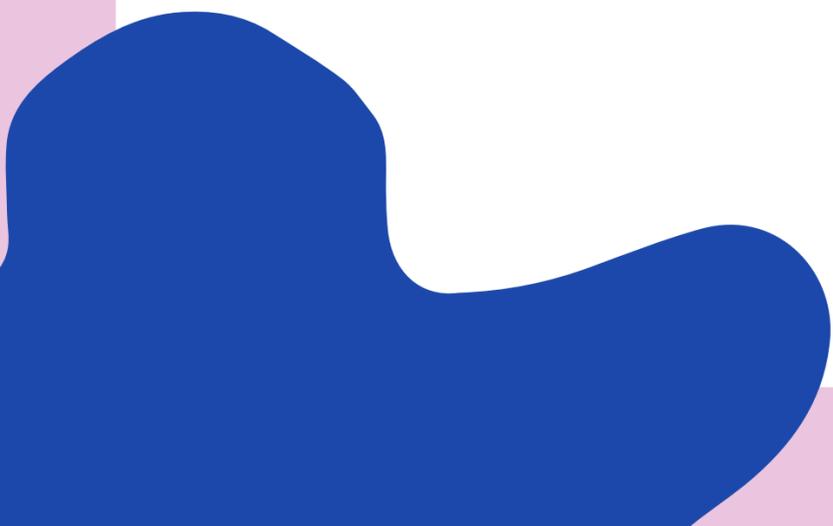
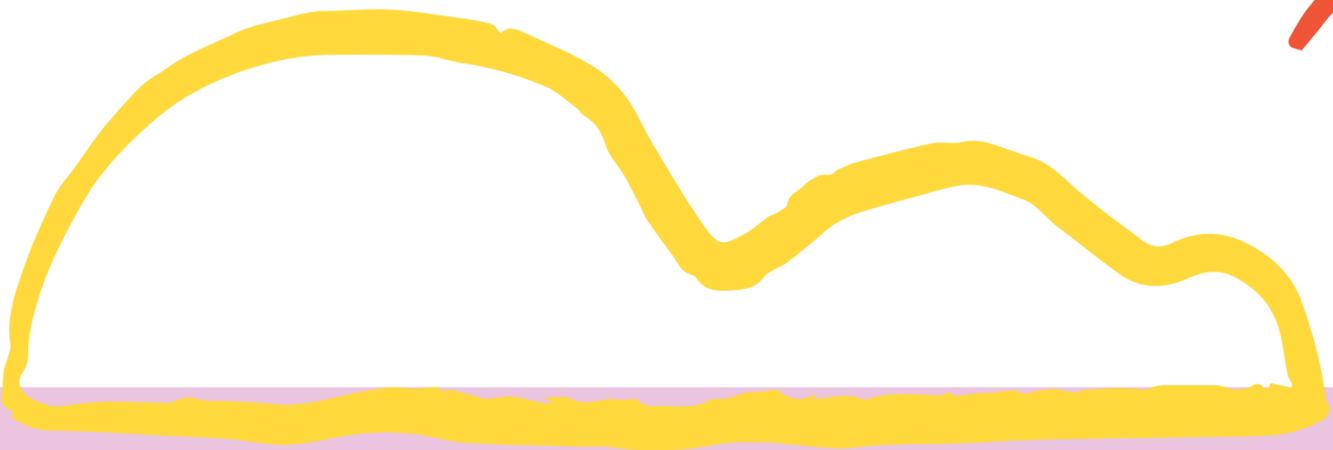
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# OBJECTIVES

**Participants will be able to:**

- **describe the importance of themes in play therapy and understanding the child's perspective**
  - **name three themes commonly used in play therapy and their relation to common childhood experiences**
  - **discuss three ways to integrate negative cognitions and themes when working with young children**
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# Key Points about Themes

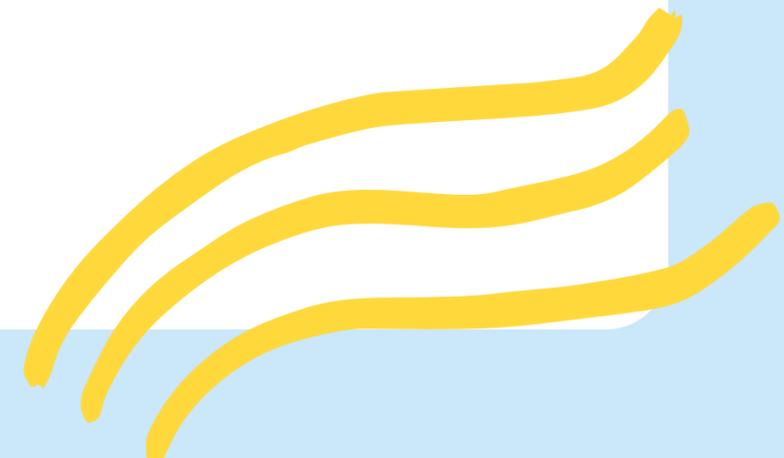
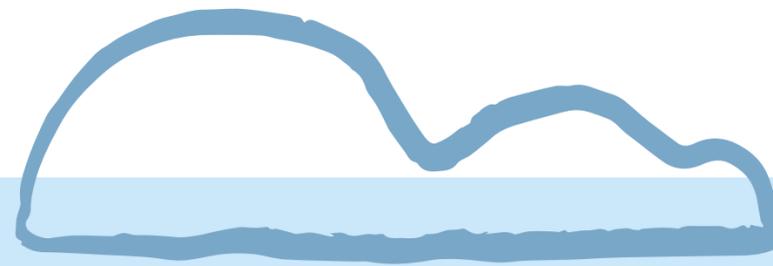
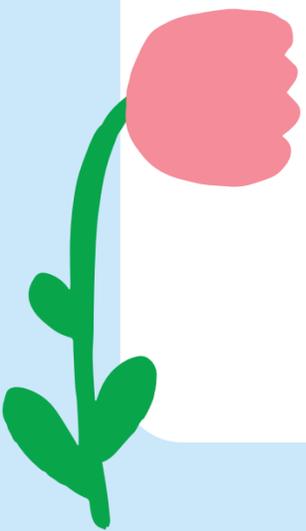
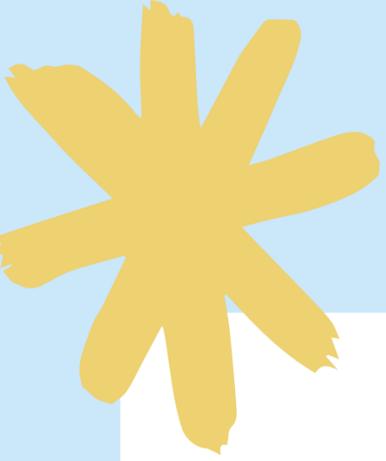
**The identification of themes in children's therapy:**

- **is a common practice and widely used in play therapy.**
- **helps the therapist get a better understanding of the child's experience and perspective.**
- **assists therapists in consolidating the contents of children's therapy sessions into broader categories (themes).**
- **helps capture the main issues children express in their therapy.**

# Key Points about Themes



- **In the beginning of therapy and while the therapist is getting familiar with the child, the therapist is simply participating in the session.**
- **Therapists make notes and reflect after the session. This is when experiences and observations are converted into themes.**



# Key Points about Themes

- **Play therapists then begin to develop a working hypotheses of the issues that brought the child to therapy.**
- **Themes are not facts. They are conclusions that have been reached based on reasoning and evidence, but can be further strengthened or weakened by what is demonstrated in or out of session.**

# Key Points about Themes

- **An important role for themes in non-directive play therapy practice is that they allow therapists to maintain session confidentiality.**
- **By using themes when discussing therapy with parents/caregivers, it usually is not necessary (or beneficial) to reveal the more intimate details of the child's therapy.**

# What are Themes?

## Play Themes:

### Power and Aggression

- Good Guy vs. Bad Guy
- Aggressor-Victim
- Power/Authority/Wisdom
- Generalized Aggression
- Dying/Death
- Devouring
- Power Overcoming Weakness

### Family Relationship/Nurturance

- Constancy/Togetherness/Separation
- Nurturing Others/Self-Nurturance
- Failed Nurturance/Self-Neglect/Punishment
- Lack of Attachment/Detachment
- Regression
- Exits and Entrances to Family System

### Control and Safety

- Danger/Rescue/Escape
- Fire/Disasters
- Burying/Drowning
- Broken/Sick/Hurt
- Fixing/Repairing/Doctoring
- Cleaning/Messing
- Sorting/Containing
- Protecting/Controlling
- Refusal/Inaction/Manipulate

### Exploration and Mastery Themes

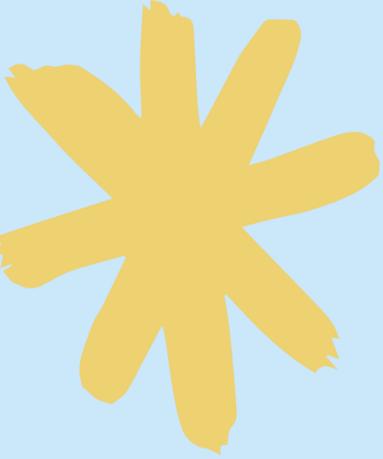
- Sensory/Environment
- Mastery/Competence
- Cheating/Winning/Creativity

### Interaction Themes

- Building Relationship
- General Positive Interactions
- General Negative Interactions
- Boredom
- Acceptance/Rejection

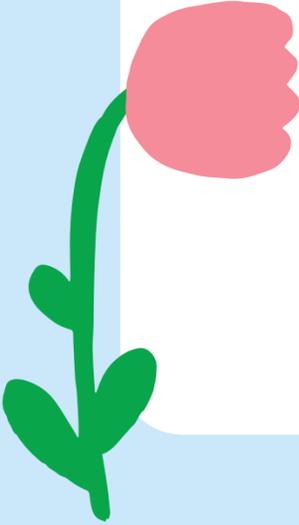
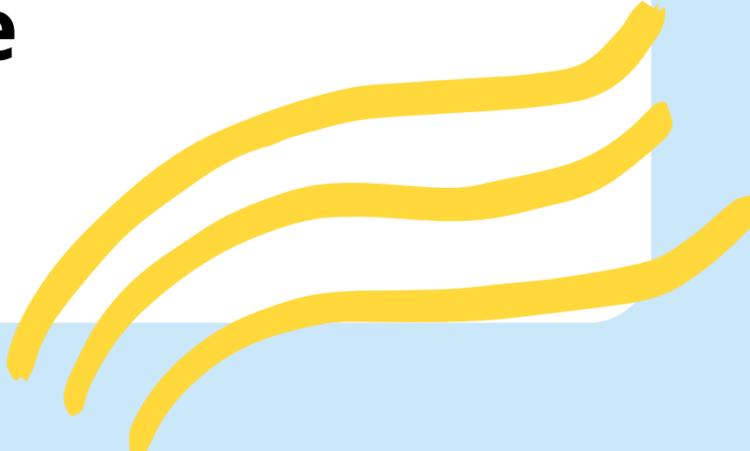
### Sexualized Play

- Sexual Activities
- Sexual Behaviors Directed at Adult
- Sexual Curiosity



# Key Points about Negative Cognitions (NC)



- **Therapists should begin looking for negative cognitions (NC) at intake.**
  - **NC's are the things our traumas have taught us about ourselves, others and what we can expect.**
  - **NC's should be client focused, apply to present situations and be broad enough to allow for generalization.**
  - **Make sure it is an irrational belief and not a true statement.**
- 
- 

# What are Negative Cognitions

## Bad Thoughts(NC)

I'm bad  
I'm in a fog  
I'm going to blow  
I'm going to explode  
I'm hot  
I don't belong  
I am stupid  
I am dumb  
I'm sick  
I can't do it  
I'm hurt  
I don't understand  
I can't get help  
I messed up  
I don't know nothing  
I'm dying  
I'm hungry  
I'm not lovable  
I'm fat  
I'm lost

I almost drowned and I got very scared  
and that made me hold my breath.  
I couldn't come out from under the water.  
I didn't get to go the hospital with dad.  
I'm not comfortable  
I am uncomfortable in my skin

## Basic/Common Cognitions:

I'm not safe  
I can't protect myself  
I don't have control  
I can't trust

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Carolyn Settle, MSW, Robbie Adler-Tapia, Ph.D.

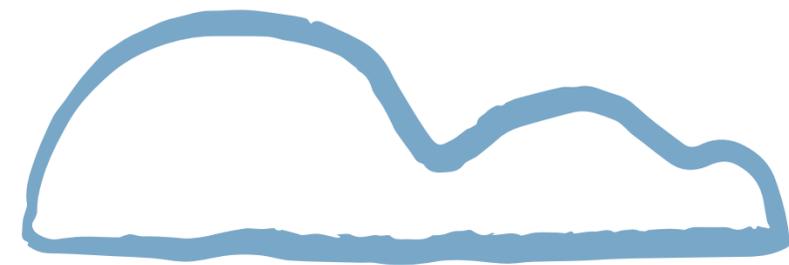
# Themes and Negative Cognitions

## Themes:

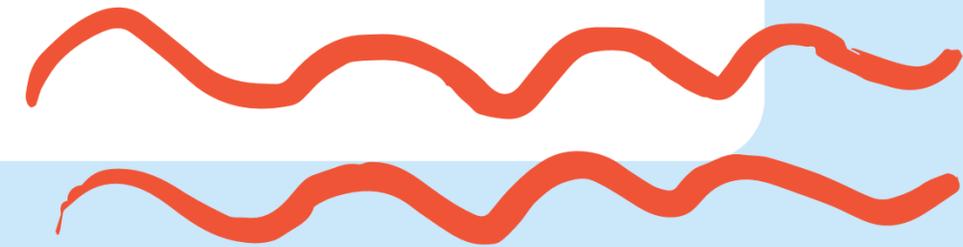
- Power and Aggression
- Family Relationship/Nurturance
- Control/Safety
- Exploration/Mastery
- Interaction
- Sexualized play

## 3 Categories of Negative Cognitions:

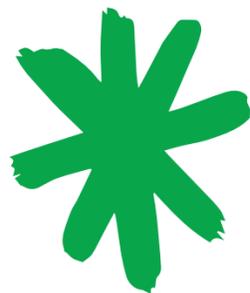
- Responsibility
- Safety and Vulnerability
- Control and Choice



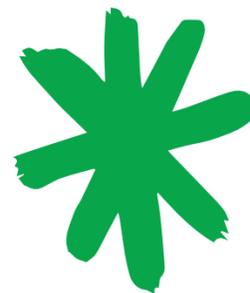
# Why Themes Are Important ?



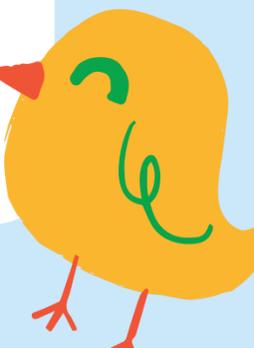
**Understand the  
child's perspective  
and experiences**



**Tailor responses to  
child's issue and  
facilitate change**



**Helps guide  
conceptualization,  
interactions with  
parents and case  
notes**



# Case Example

5 year old boy has just started kindergarten and is being aggressive with teachers and peers. He is not aggressive at home with parents or younger sister. Prior to kindergarten he was in 4 different child care centers in the past two years. One was due to a move and the other three he was "kicked out" for aggressive behaviors.

In session, he repeatedly puts people in the house (no furniture) and then has a two headed wolf come into the house. The wolf goes from room to room and all of the people run from the room or the wolf battles with them and throws them out of the house. When therapist makes statements about this play, he will often throw some of the people at her and tell her to stop talking.

At times during this play with the house, he will leave and go get playdough and playdough cutters. He will quietly make shapes for a few minutes and then go back to the house. He does not become aggressive when the therapist comments about this play. He repeats this at some levels for the first five sessions.

# Case Example

**What could be the theme?**

**What could be the negative cognition?**

# Behaviors VS Themes

## Play Behavior

- What the child is actually doing
- May not have meaning
- Might repeat

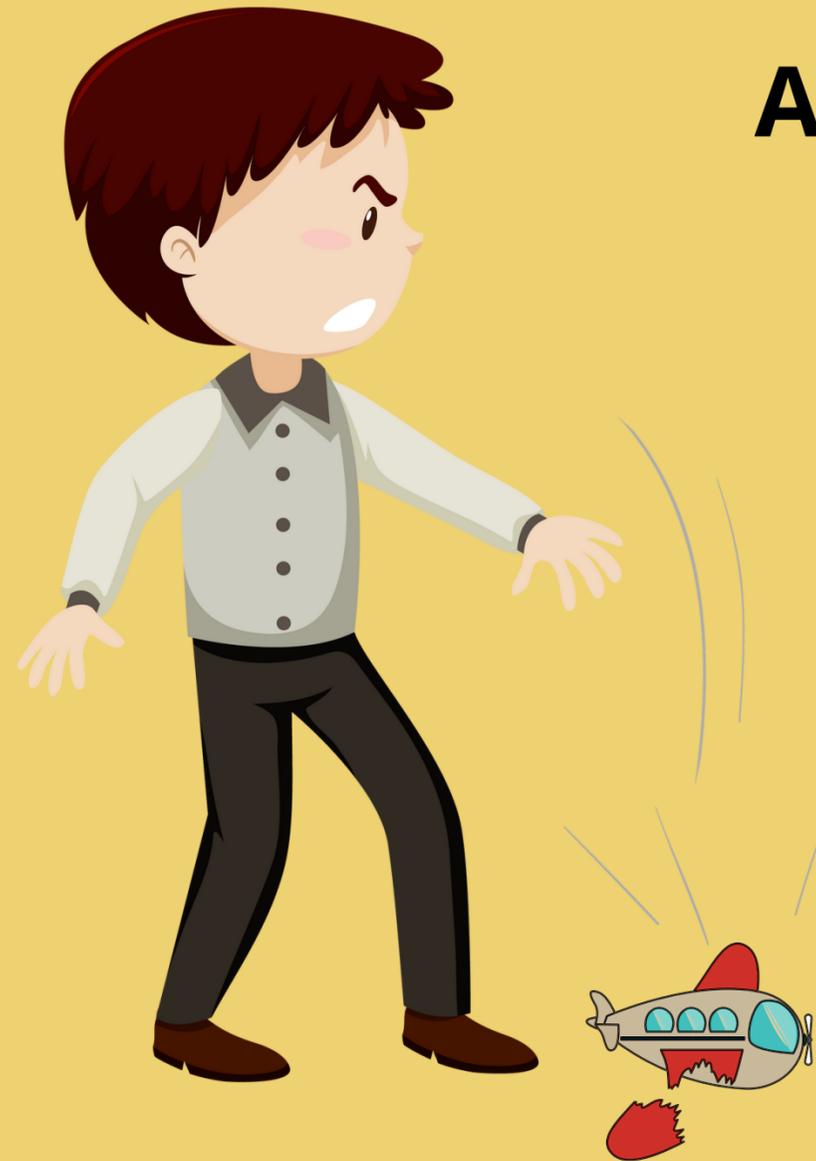
## Play Theme

- Has meaning
- Will repeat
- Intensity- low or high
- Has context in relation background information

# Behavior VS Themes

A child throws a toy...

**Behavior**  
**or**  
**Theme?**



# How to Tell the Difference

- **Repetition**-In the same session or over time
- **Intensity**- energy and focus
  - can be intense quiet or intense volume
  - can be no movements or constant motion
- **Context**- Knowing the history and presenting problem, what does the behavior tell you?

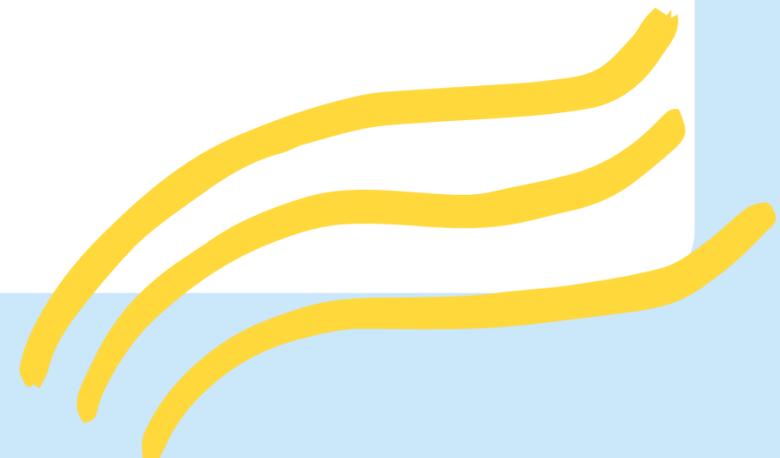
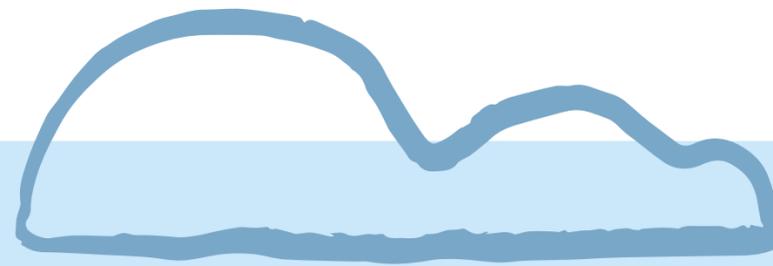
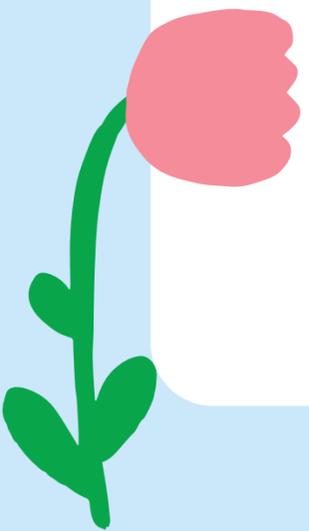
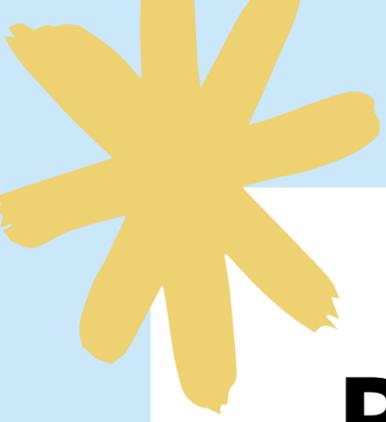
How does it  
make you  
feel?

# Case Example

**Repetition-**\_\_\_\_\_

**Intensity-**\_\_\_\_\_

**Context-**\_\_\_\_\_



# Behavior VS Theme

## Aggression

### Behavior

### Theme?

- \_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_\_\_

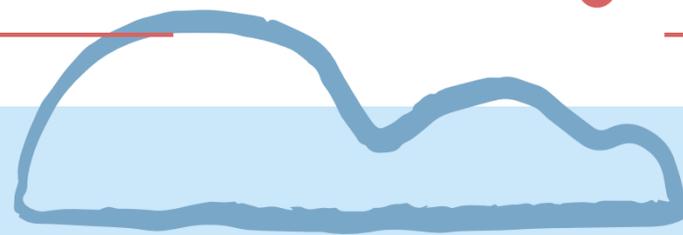
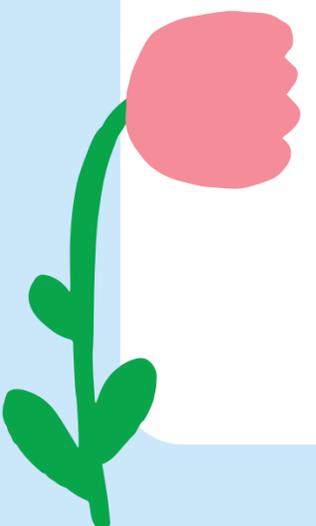
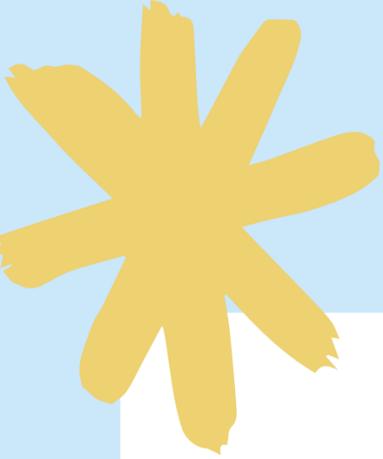
- \_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_\_\_



# Behavior VS Theme

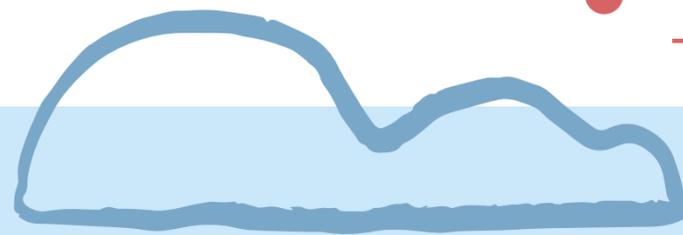
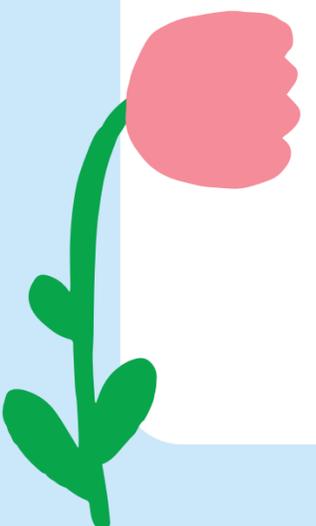
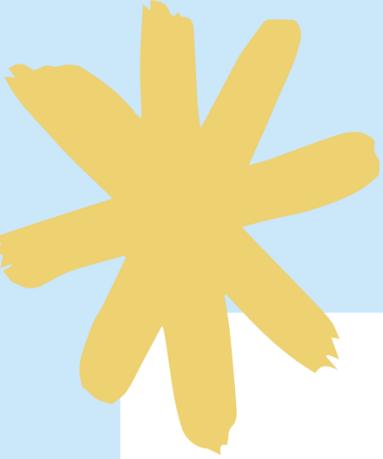
## Aggression

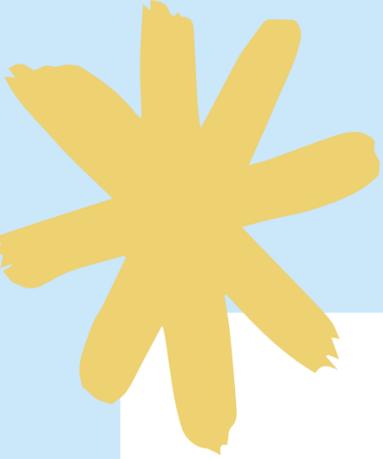
### Theme

- **Power/Aggression**
- **Family Relationship**
- **Control/Safety**
- **Sexualized Play**

### Subtheme

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_





# Theme and Negative Cognition



## Aggression

### Theme

### Negative Cognition

- **Power/Aggression**

• \_\_\_\_\_

- **Family Relationship**

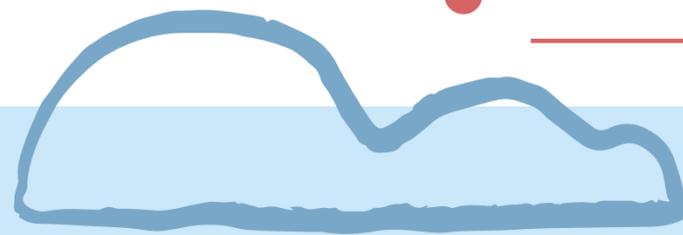
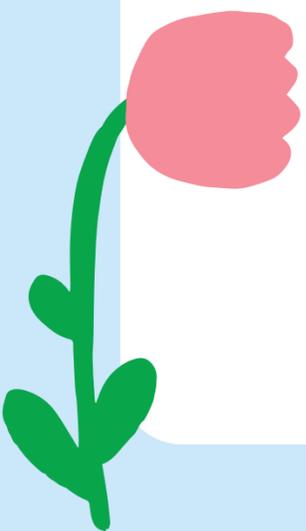
• \_\_\_\_\_

- **Control/Safety**

• \_\_\_\_\_

- **Sexualized Play**

• \_\_\_\_\_



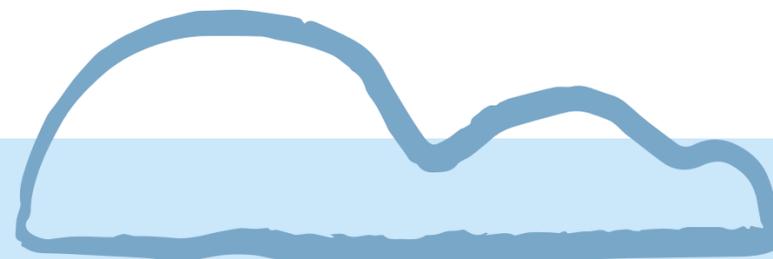
# Understanding the Child's Perspective

Themes can help the therapist get a better understanding of how the child views the issues.

What would change how a child views:

- Covid
- Storms
- Leaving a school
- Divorce
- Having a new sibling

What possible behaviors could be observed with each of these?



# Therapeutic Responses

Therapeutic responses are considered basic verbal skills in CCPT and are used to demonstrate the therapist's belief in, acceptance, and understanding of the child.

Examples of thematic responses include:

- Reflecting Content
- Reflecting Feeling
- Facilitating Decision making/ Returning Responsibility
- Facilitating Creativity
- Esteem Building
- Relational
- Reflecting Larger Meaning

# Therapeutic Responses

*Think of examples of what a therapeutic response could be based on the case example.*

**Examples of thematic responses include:**

- **Reflecting Content**
- **Reflecting Feeling**
- **Facilitating Decision making/ Returning Responsibility**
- **Facilitating Creativity**
- **Esteem Building**
- **Relational**
- **Reflecting Larger Meaning**

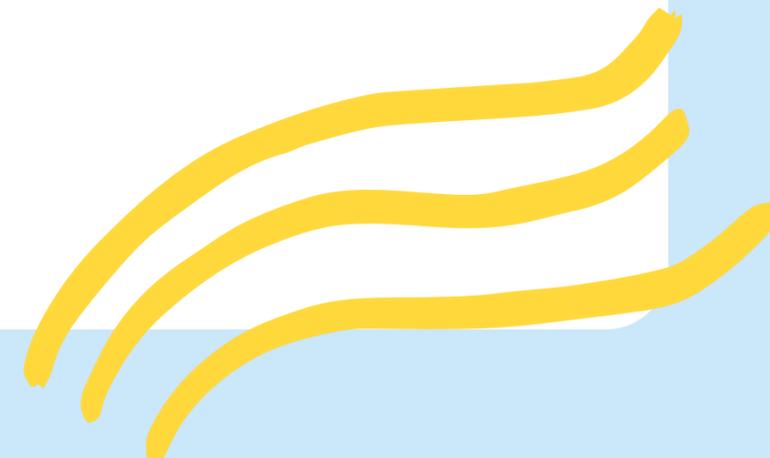
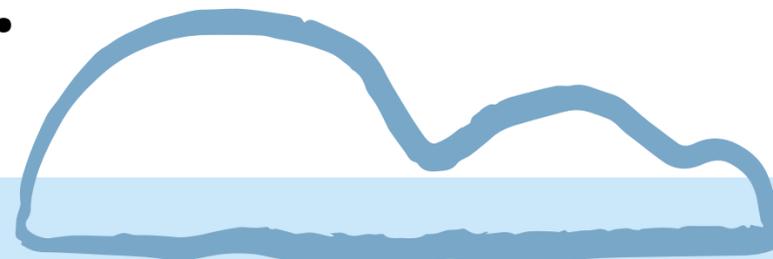
# Conceptualization

**Identifying a theme can help the therapist develop a focused plan of action.**

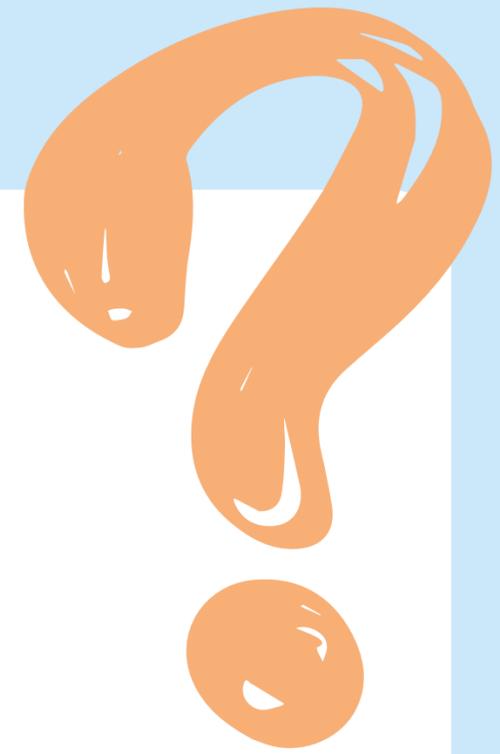
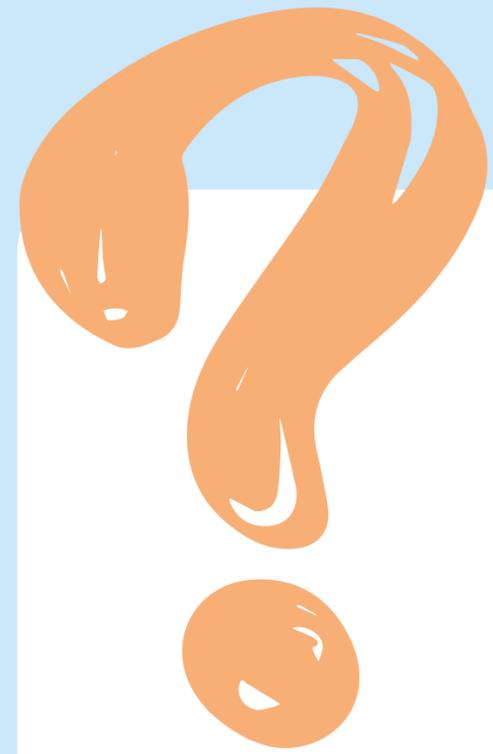
**The theme helps create the map of therapy.**

**Goals, objectives, interventions are done through therapeutic responses in play therapy.**

**The responses is guided by the theme and the negative cognition.**

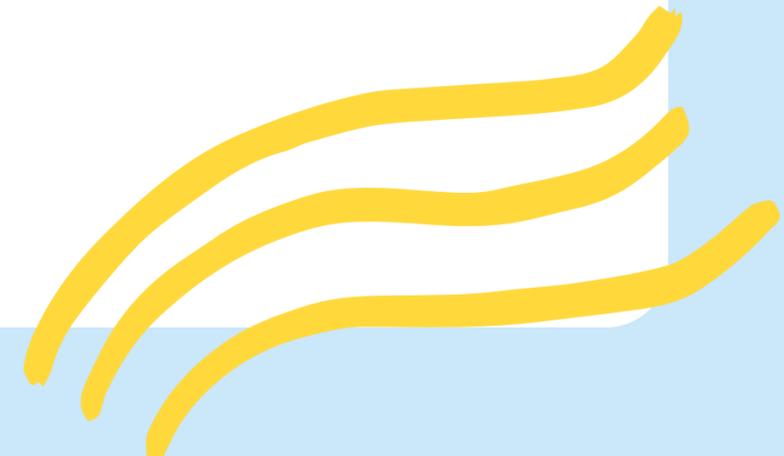
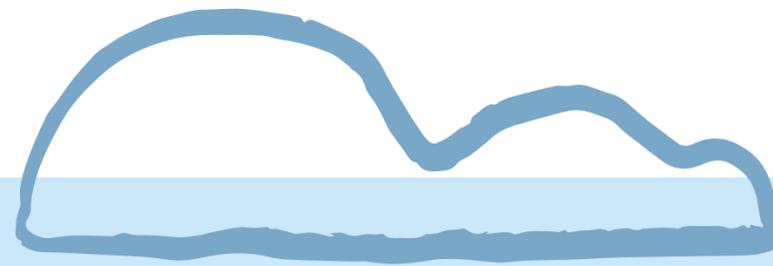
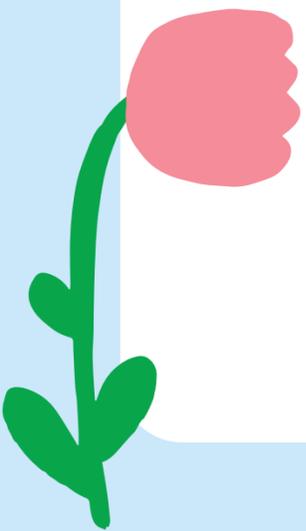


# Conceptualization



**What makes a response  
therapeutic?**

**The same thing that makes a  
question therapeutic with adults.**



# Interactions with Parents

**By identifying themes, therapists can help parents:**

- **increase understanding of the issue**
- **gain insight into the child's perspective**
- **deepen the understanding of the the therapeutic process**
- **feel involved without violating confidentiality**

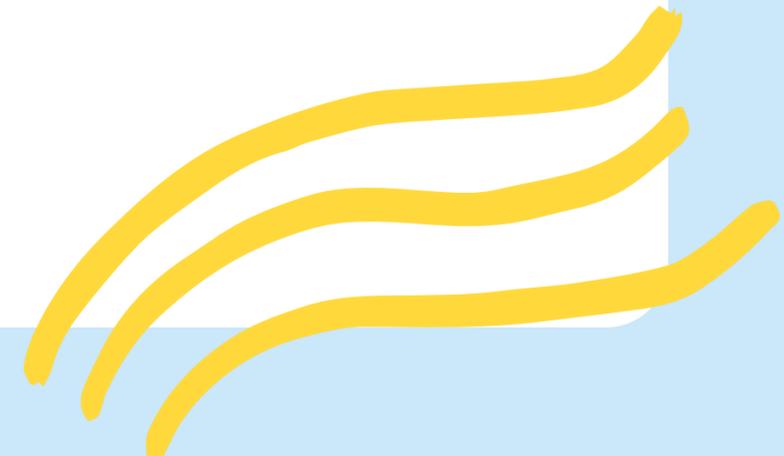
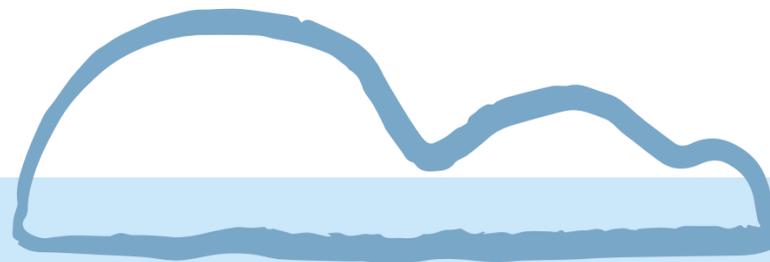
***Using the case example, how could you work with the parent regarding any of the above issues?***

# Writing Notes

**"Identifying themes and then observing the child's behavior through the theme helps determine progress in play therapy."**

Dee Ray

**Advanced play therapy: Essential conditions, knowledge, and Skills for Child Practice.**



# Writing Notes

## Sample note showing progress

Session 3: Child continued to utilize people and two headed wolf. . Child displayed intensity in his use of the materials. Child appears to be relating not feeling accepted or safe at new schools. He appears to be calming himself with the use of the playdough.

Session 5: Child continued to utilize people, house and two headed wolf. He demonstrates aggression when feelings are mentioned by therapist.

# Writing Notes

## Sample note showing progress

Session 7: Child continued to use similar materials, but is beginning to utilize materials which are protective. He also brought other animals into the house and created a "team" for himself. Aggression towards therapist and people in house is reduced. He has begun to use other art materials.

Session 9: Child is using "teams" in his play with the house, but has also had some of the people join his "team." He has begun to explore other materials in the room.

# Writing Notes

## Play Themes:

### Power and Aggression

- Good Guy vs. Bad Guy
- Aggressor-Victim
- Power/Authority/Wisdom

- Generalized Aggression
- Dying/Death

- Devouring
- Power Overcoming Weakness

### Family Relationship/Nurturance

- Constancy/Togetherness/Separation
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### Control and Safety

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- Protecting/Controlling
- Refusal/Inaction/Manipulate

### -Exploration and Mastery Themes

- Sensory/Environment

- Mastery/Competence

- Cheating/Winning/Creativity

### -Interaction Themes

- Building Relationship
- General Positive Interactions

- General Negative Interactions
- Boredom

- Acceptance/Rejection

### -Sexualized Play

- Sexual Activities
- Sexual Behaviors Directed at Adult

- Sexual Curiosity

# Writing Notes

## Overall behavior:

Maladaptive/Non coping	1 2 3 4 5	Adaptive/Coping
Sad/Depressed/Angry/Anxious	1 2 3 4 5	Confident/secure
Immature/Regressed/Hypermature	1 2 3 4 5	Age Appropriate
Low Frustration Tolerance	1 2 3 4 5	High Frustration Tolerance
External Locus of control	1 2 3 4 5	Internal (self-controlled)
Impulsive/Easily distracted	1 2 3 4 5	Purposeful/focused
Inhibited/Constricted/Not free	1 2 3 4 5	Creative/Expressive/Spontaneous
Isolated/Detached	1 2 3 4 5	Connected/Sense of Belonging

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

## Dynamics of Session: Rate child's overall play behavior:

Child's activity Level (low)	1 2 3 4 5	Child's Activity Level (high)
Intensity of Play (low)	1 2 3 4 5	Intensity of Play (high)
Inclusion of Therapist (low)	1 2 3 4 5	Inclusion of Therapist (high)
Destructive	1 2 3 4 5	constructive
Messy/Chaotic/Disorganized	1 2 3 4 5	Neat/Orderly

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

# Writing Notes

## Intervention:

- Directive play therapy
- Non-Directive play therapy
- EMDR/Trauma Focused
- other \_\_\_\_\_

## Toys/Play/Behavior (short description):

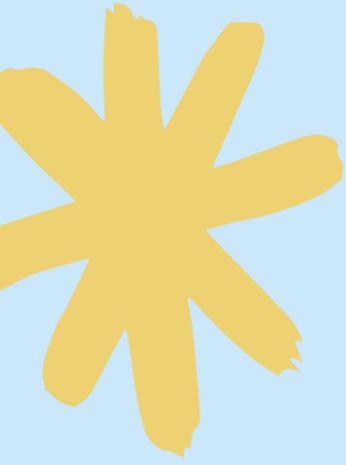
\_\_\_\_\_ **Real-life and Nurturing** Doll family, doll house, baby bottle, variety of puppets, animal families, cars, money, cash, register, kitchen food, medical kit, phone, etc.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Acting-out, Aggressive, Scary Toys** Bop bag, toy soldiers, guns (colored plastic-not real looking!), scary/aggressive puppets and animals (alligator, shark, etc.), rubber knife, foam sword, handcuffs, etc.

## \_\_\_\_\_ **Creative expression and emotional release:**

Sand, water, paints, craft materials, clay, musical instruments, magic wand, dress-up clothes, etc.

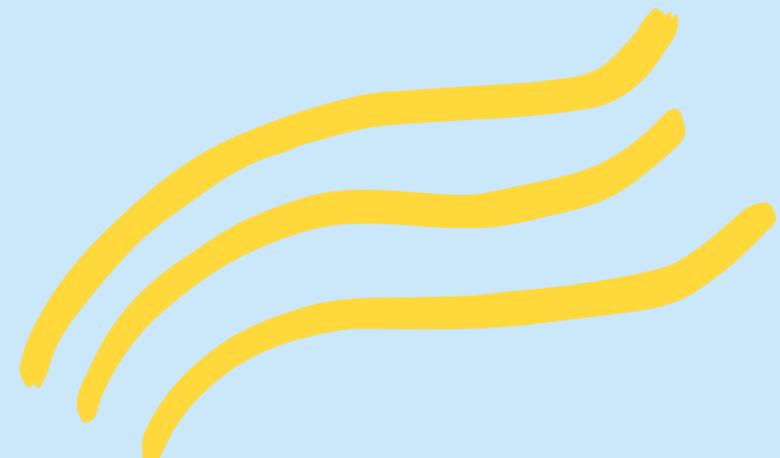
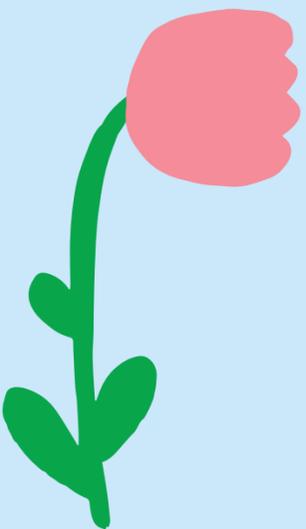
\_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_



**Questions?**

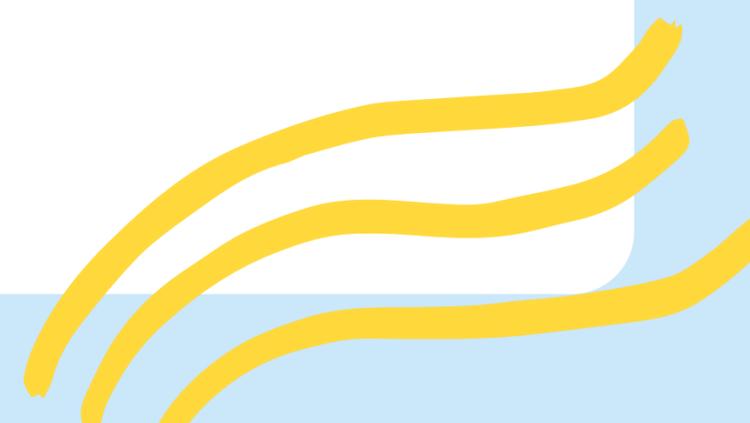
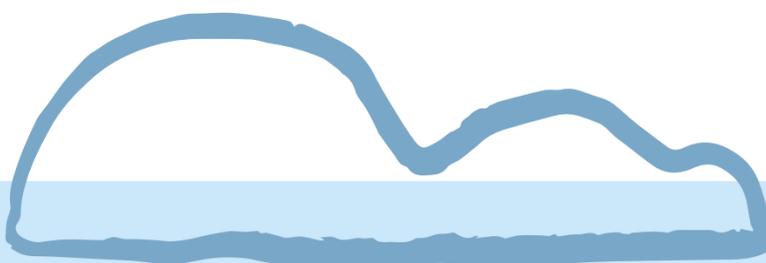
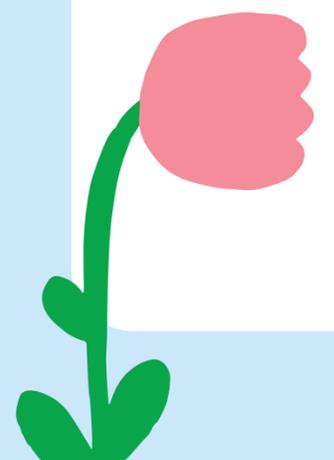
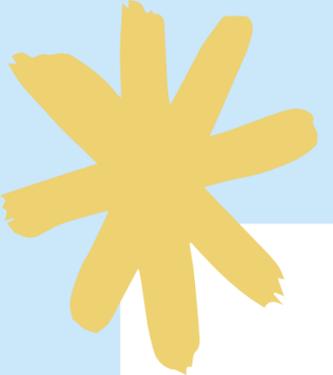


**Comments?**



# Questions/Comments

**Thank you**



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