

Therapeutic Responses in the Playroom



APT Approved Provider #22-661

***3 Contact Hours-Foundational Level**

This workshop meets the requirement of Contact Training

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OBJECTIVES



- **Participants will be able to verbalize two benefits of therapeutic play.**
- **Participants will be able to name three therapeutic skills associated with play therapy.**
- **Participants will be able to demonstrate three types of therapeutic responses.**
- **Participants will be able to verbalize the importance of being authentic in their therapeutic responses.**



What is the goal of therapy with a child?

How do most adults communicate with children?

What is different when doing therapy with a child?



**What do you think it means to
respond therapeutically?**



PLAY
IS THE
NATURAL
LANGUAGE
OF
CHILDREN



The Power of Play

- **Most children do not have complex verbal or reasoning skills.**
- **It can be very difficult for a child to fully understand and express an effective range of emotions relating to stressful/traumatic experiences.**
- **Play can be the common language between therapist and child within the relationship.**
- **Play is how the child contributes to the play therapy relationship and works through problems.**



The Power of Play

- A child is free to choose to play or not to play.
- Play is not directed or required by the therapist. It is the expressive tool for children to communicate their inner worlds.
- Within the play therapy relationship, the child engages in:
 - self-expression
 - building attachment and empathy with others
 - problem-solving
 - regulating emotions and behaviors
- The powers that evolve within the relationship cultivate positive self-concept and resiliency.

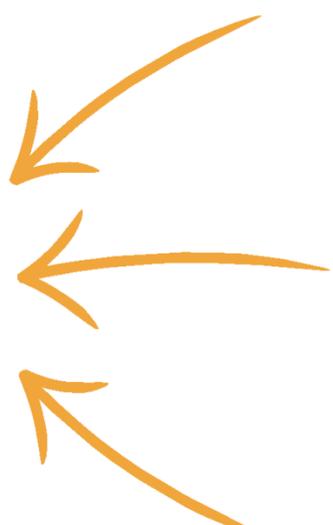


Benefits of Therapeutic Play

When participating in therapeutic play, children:

- Become more responsible for behaviors and develop more successful strategies
- Develop new and creative solutions to problems
- Develop respect and acceptance of self and others
- Learn to experience and express emotion
- Cultivate empathy and respect for thoughts and feelings of others
- Learn new social skills and relational skills with family
- Develop self-efficacy and thus a better assuredness about their abilities

**How does this happen
through play?**



Therapeutic Skills in Play Therapy



Listening

Actively listening to the verbal, non- verbal and emotional experiences of the child. Looking out for how the child understands and has interpreted their experiences. Therapists continuously communicate back to the child that they have heard and understood their perspective.

Responding

Reflecting the content and feeling of the child's actions/statements and offering opportunities to keep going. This also gives the child the opportunity to change the therapist's responses or their own internal view of their experience when they hear it reflected back to them.

Therapeutic Skills in Play Therapy

Attention-Giving

Therapist uses verbal responses, body language, facial expressions and eye contact to build respect and trust in the therapist–client relationship.

Observing

Observe the child's verbal and physical expressions to help more fully understand the child's experiences, perspective and relationships. This helps the therapist more fully understand the child and leads to deeper and more meaningful relationships.



Adlerian Play Therapy

The Adlerian play therapy process is comprised of four phases of treatment:

Phase 1- The first phase is focused on the therapist and child relationship. The focus is on building mutual trust and respect. The child learns that therapy will be a place where responsibility and power are shared.

Phase 2- In the second phase, the therapist will use play therapy techniques to gather more information about the child and the different aspects of the child's lifestyle.

Phase 3- The third phase uses play techniques to help the child gain insight and awareness into their lifestyle and to shift patterns of behavior within the playroom.

Phase 4- The final phase involves problem-solving and teaching the child ways to begin to practice skills to use outside of the playroom to help them to lead a more fulfilling and satisfying life.

Qualities of a Therapeutic Response

Adlerian Play Therapy.

Begins fairly non-directive and uses tracking, restatement of content, reflection of feelings, returning responsibility to the child, encouragement, limiting, answering questions, asking questions, and cleaning the room together to build a egalitarian and collaborative relationship.

As they move through the phases, Adlerian play therapists can become more directive and increase role as teacher/encourager. They can use things such as drawing techniques, questioning strategies, investigating goals of behavior, Crucial C's, family constellation/ atmosphere.



Adlerian Play Therapy

Kinetic Family Drawing (KFD) Lifestyle Questions

“Draw a picture of everyone in your family, DOING something. Try to draw whole people, not cartoons or stick people. Remember, make everyone DOING something—some kind of action.” When the child has finished drawing, ask the child the following questions about each of the figures:

1. Who is this person?
2. What is his/her relationship to you?
3. How old is he/she?
4. Can you tell me a little bit about this person?
5. What is this person doing?
6. How does this person feel?
7. What does this person need the most?
8. How do you feel about this person?
9. How does this person get along with other people?



Activity

Kinetic Family Drawing

“Draw a picture of everyone in your family, DOING something. Try to draw whole people, not cartoons or stick people. Remember, make everyone DOING something—some kind of action.”

Answer the questions on the previous page with your partner.



Adlerian Play Therapy

Therapeutic responses can include:

- **“Sometimes you feel alone.”**
- **“You feel sad about that.”**
- **“Wow, you look really proud of yourself!”**
- **“It is against the rules in the playroom to (state behavior).”**
- **“It sounds like you really don’t like people telling you what to do. You get mad when I tell you it is against the rules to do (state behavior).”**
- **“In here, people are not for hurting. I bet you can think of something else you can do with (name object) that wouldn’t hurt anything.”**
- **“What do you think should happen if you choose to do (state behavior) again?”**



Crucial C's and Goals of Misbehavior

Crucial C's	Unmet needs: How discouraged children think	Caregiver feels:	Encouraging Responses	When need is met, child believes
CONNECT	ATTENTION I only count when I'm noticed. I act out for attention.	Irritated Annoyed	Replace negative attention with positive attention. Plan activities together. Don't ignore child; Ignore unwanted behavior.	I belong.
CAPABLE	POWER My strength is in showing you that you can't make me.	Angry Challenged	Give choices so child can display power constructively. Maintain a friendly attitude.	I can do it.
COUNT	REVENGE I knew you were against me. I'll show you how it feels.	Hurt Wants to punish	Maintain appreciation in the relationship. Offer chances to help. Seek support and help in identifying positives. Don't give up.	I matter. I can make a difference.
COURAGE	GIVING UP I can't do anything right, so I won't try.	Despair Hopelessness	Notice strengths and ignore the negative. Set up steady exposure to manageable tasks that have a likelihood of success. Avoid criticism.	I can handle what comes.

Child Centered Play Therapy

"CCPT is a developmentally responsive, play-based mental health intervention for young children ages 3 to 10 who are experiencing social, emotional, behavioral and relational disorders."

CCPT uses play and therapeutic relationship:

- **to provide a safe, consistent therapeutic environment**
- **in which a child can experience full acceptance, empathy, and understanding from the counselor**
- **and process inner experiences and feelings through play and symbols.**

<https://cpt.unt.edu/child-centered-play-therapy>



Child Centered Play Therapy

MATERIALS

CCPT occurs in a playroom which contain carefully selected toys and materials that encourage the expression of a wide range of feelings, encourage the therapeutic use of the materials and help build relationships.

Playroom materials are grouped into categories:

- real-life
- acting-out/aggressive release
- creative/expressive



WORDS

Garry Landreth states that therapeutic responses to children in play therapy should be done "in a way that communicates sensitivity, understanding, and acceptance and conveys freedom and responsibility and is for many beginning play therapists like learning a foreign language."

Play Therapy: The Art of the Relationship

Qualities of a Therapeutic Response

Child Centered Play Therapy

- Brief and interactive
- Help the child go on
- Reflect non-verbal play behavior
- Reflect content
- Reflect feelings
- Build self-esteem
- Match child's level of affect
- Avoid asking questions
- Facilitate decision making
- Return responsibility
- Personalized
- Avoid labeling actions or materials
- Nonevaluative and not praise

CCPT Techniques

1. Tracking
2. Reflecting feeling
3. Esteem-building
4. Choice-giving



9 Verbal Therapeutic Responses

The nine types of responses are crucial in order to communicate unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding to children, as well as enhance self-concept and emotional regulation.

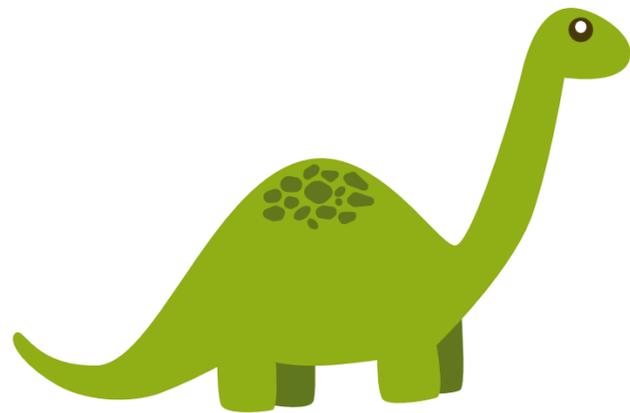
- Some of the responses help build relationships
- Some of the skills help facilitate self-concept, development of self-responsibility, creation of awareness and the building of the therapeutic relationship



9 Verbal Therapeutic Responses

Tracking behavior

Tracking behavior is the most basic of play therapist responses. The therapist tracks behavior when he/she verbally responds to the behavior of the child simply by stating what is seen or observed. Tracking behavior allows the child to know that the therapist is interested and accepting. It also helps the therapist immerse him/herself in the child's world.



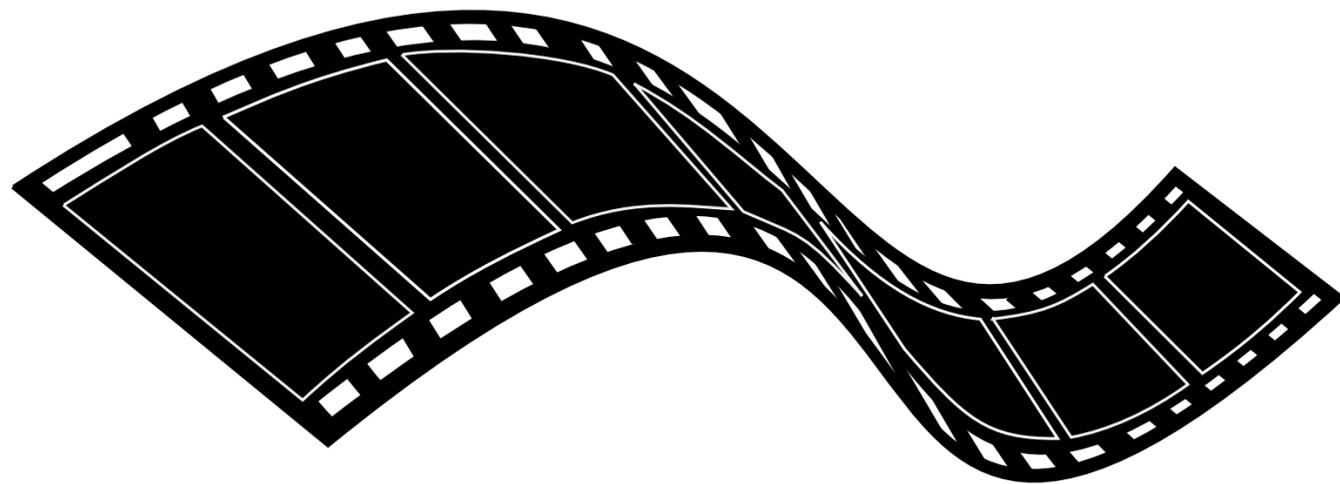
As a child picks up a dinosaur, the therapist might respond, “You are picking that up.” As the child rolls the car across the room, “You are running all the way over there.”



9 Verbal Therapeutic Responses

Reflecting content

Reflecting content in play therapy is identical to reflecting content in adult talk therapy. To reflect content, the play therapist paraphrases the verbal interactions of the child. Reflecting content validates children's perceptions of their experience and clarifies children's understanding of themselves.



As a child describes the movie that she saw over the weekend, the therapist responds, “You went to see James Bond and there was a lot of action.”

9 Verbal Therapeutic Responses

Reflecting feeling

Reflecting feeling is the verbal response to emotions expressed by children in play therapy. Reflecting feeling is considered a higher-level skill because children rarely communicate by verbally expressing emotion. However, they are quite emotive. In addition, the reflection of feeling can sometimes be threatening to children and should be presented carefully. Reflecting feeling helps children become aware of emotions, thereby leading to appropriate acceptance and expression of such emotions.



A child says, “This place is stupid, and I want to go home.” A therapist might respond, “You’re angry about being here and you would rather be at home.”

9 Verbal Therapeutic Responses

Facilitating decision making, returning responsibility

One of the play therapist goals is to help children experience a sense of their own capability and responsibility for it. The therapist does not do for children what children can do for themselves as able and empowered.



A child might ask, “What am I supposed to do in here?” Instead of replying with an answer which directs the child and places responsibility on the therapist, the therapist may respond with statements such as “In here, you get to decide.” If a child asks for a therapist to do something they can do themselves, the therapist may say “That looks like something you can do.”

9 Verbal Therapeutic Responses

Facilitating creativity, spontaneity.

Helping a child experience his own sense of creativity and freedom is another goal of play therapy. Acceptance and encouragement of creativity send a message to the child that she is unique and special in her own way. Maladjusted children are often trapped in rigid ways of acting and thinking. Experiencing freedom of expression allows them to develop flexibility in thought and action.

For example, if a child asks what color a flower should be, the therapist may respond “In here it can be whatever color you want it to be.”



9 Verbal Therapeutic Responses

Esteem-building, encouraging

Encouraging children to feel better about themselves is a constant objective for the play therapist. The use of esteem-building statements works to help children experience themselves as capable.



As a child proudly finishes a painting, a therapist might respond “You made that look just the way you wanted.” After a child spends several minutes trying to make the bullet fit in a gun and succeeds, the therapist might respond “You did it. You figured it out.”

9 Verbal Therapeutic Responses

Facilitating relationship

Responses that focus on building the relationship between the therapist and child help the child experience a positive relationship. Because the therapy relationship serves as a model for all intimate relationships, the therapist should respond to any attempts by the child to address the relationship. Relational responses help the child learn effective communication patterns and express the therapist's care for the child. Relational responses should always include a reference to the child and the therapist.

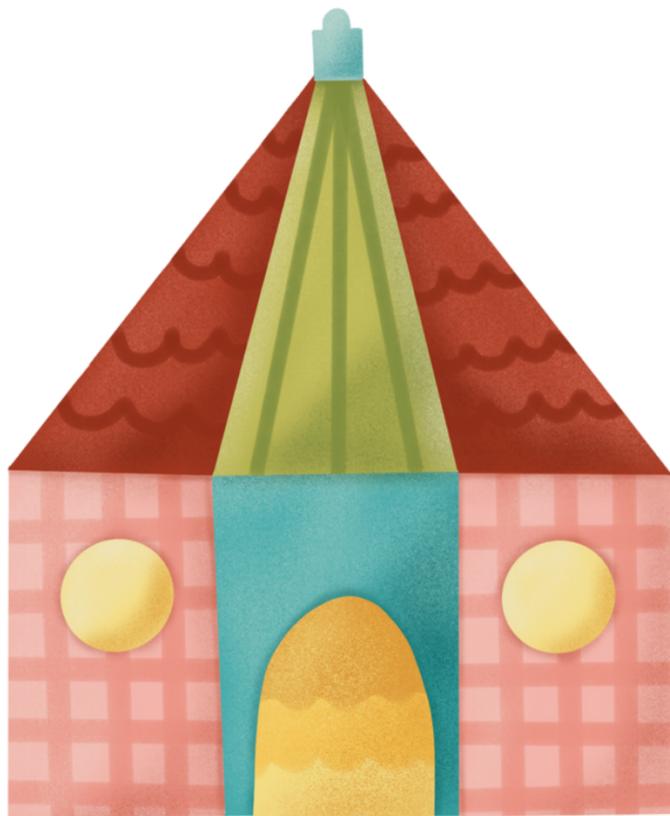


Example: A therapist sets a limit that she is not for shooting with the gun. The child responds, “I hate you! I’m going to put you in jail.” To facilitate the relationship, the therapist acknowledges the child’s anger and states “You are really mad at me and want to punish me.”

9 Verbal Therapeutic Responses

Reflecting larger meaning

Reflecting larger meaning is the most advanced of the play therapy verbal skills. A therapist may reflect larger meaning by noticing and verbalizing patterns, in the child's play.



“You always make sure you play with the mommy doll.” The therapist may also provide responses related to the child’s themes. “You like to keep things clean and organized.” “Sometimes when we come into the playroom, you like to be the one in charge.”

9 Verbal Therapeutic Responses

Limit setting

Limits are used to set realistic boundaries in the playroom that provide safety and consistency with the child. Limits can be simple short directives or they can develop into complicated battles between the therapist and the child.

"You are angry with me, but I am not for hitting. You can throw the ball at the bobo."

"You think it is funny to put paint on the floor, but the floor is not for paint. You can pour the paint in the sink."

"You are trying to keep the bad people out, but the sand is for staying in the sandbox. You can throw the sand in the sandbox."



8 Basic Principles of Child Centered Play Therapy

1. The therapist is genuinely interested in the child and develops a warm, caring relationship.
2. The therapist experiences unqualified acceptance of the child and does not wish that the child were different in some way.
3. The therapist creates a feeling of safety and permissiveness in the relationship so the child feels free to explore and express herself completely.



8 Basic Principles of Child Centered Play Therapy



4. The therapist is always sensitive to the child's feelings and gently reflects those feelings in such a manner that the child develops self-understanding.

5. The therapist believes deeply in the child's capacity to act responsibly, unwaveringly respects the child's ability to solve personal problems, and allows the child to do so.

8 Basic Principles of Child Centered Play Therapy

6. The therapist trusts the child's inner direction, allows the child to lead in all areas of the relationship, and resists any urge to direct the child's play or conversation.

7. The therapist appreciates the gradual nature of the therapeutic process and does not attempt to hurry the process.

8. The therapist establishes only those therapeutic limits necessary to anchor the session to reality and which help the child accept personal and appropriate relationship responsibility.





ACTIVITY



Acceptance Necklace

Genuine

Warm, Caring

Acceptance

Feeling of Safety

Always Sensitive

Trusts

Appreciates

Divide the froot loops in your cups into colors. Work with a partner(s) to add them to your string to create a candy necklace. As you add a color, name a way to promote the characteristic identified by the color.



Green = Genuine
Blue = Warm/Caring or Appreciates
Purple = Acceptance
Red = Always Sensitive
Orange = Trusts
Yellow = Feelings of Safety

Therapeutic Responses

Specific types of responses consistent with CCPT guidelines include:

- reflecting feelings (“You feel angry”)
- reflecting content (“You got in trouble at school”)
- tracking behavior (“You’re picking that up”)
- facilitating decision making (“You can decide”)
- facilitating creativity (“That can be whatever you want”)
- encouraging (“You figured it out”)
- facilitating relationship (“You want me to know that you like me”)
- limit setting



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

Therapeutic Responses 1

**Tracking
Behavior**

**Facilitating
Decision
Making**



Therapeutic Responses 2

Tracking Behavior

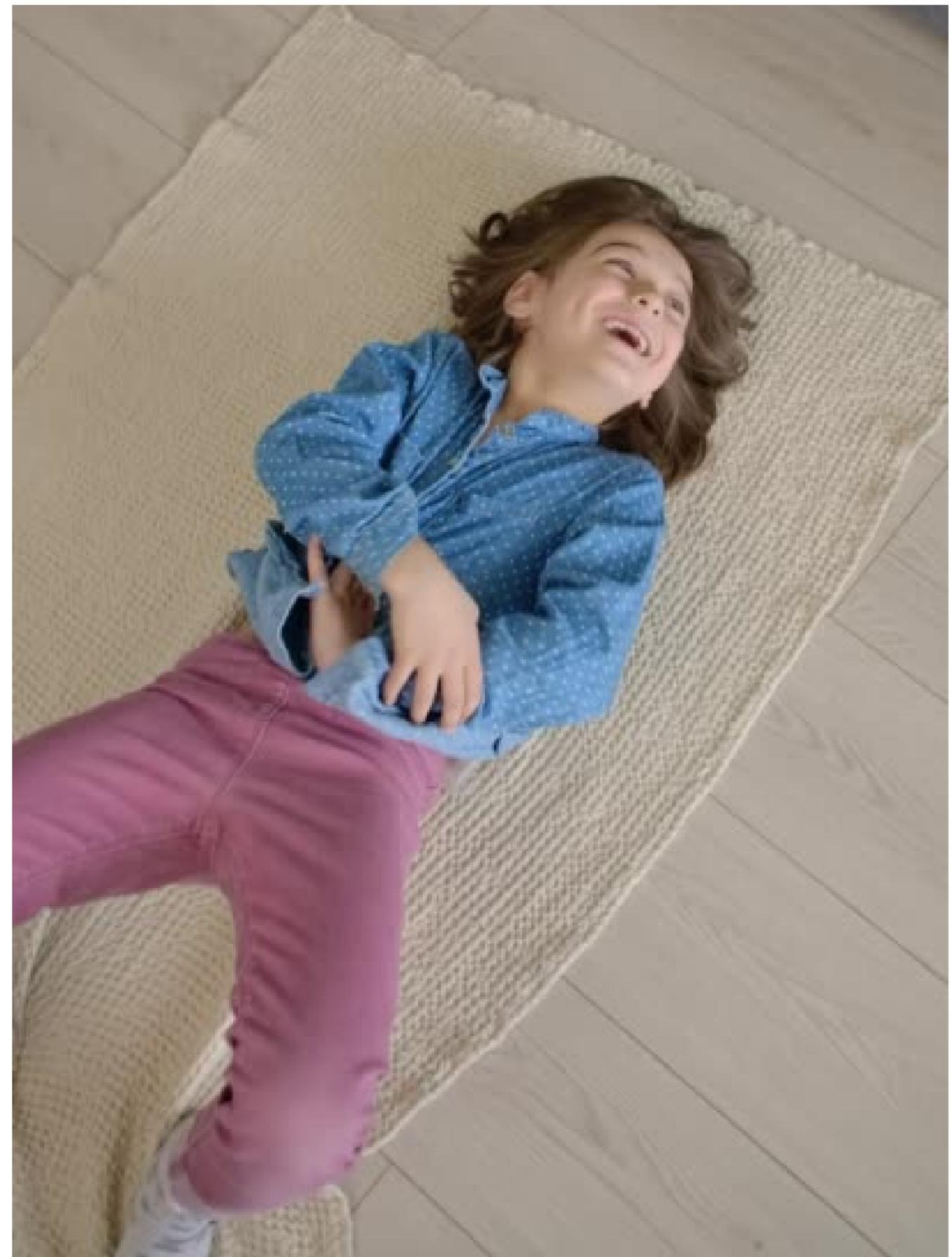
**Facilitating
Creativity**



Therapeutic Responses 3

Reflecting Feeling

Encouraging



Therapeutic Responses 4

Reflecting Feeling

**Facilitating
Relationship**



Therapeutic Responses 5

**Reflecting
Feeling**

Encouraging



Therapeutic Responses 6

Reflecting Feeling

Facilitating Relationship



Therapeutic Responses 7

Limit Setting

**Facilitating
Decision Making**



Therapeutic Responses 8

Reflecting Feeling

**Facilitating
Relationship**



Therapeutic Responses 9

**Reflecting
Feeling**

**Tracking
Content**



Therapeutic Responses 10

Facilitating Creativity

**Facilitating Decision
Making**



Therapeutic Responses 11

Tracking Behavior

**Facilitating
Creativity**



Therapeutic Responses 12

**Reflecting
Feelings**

**Reflecting
Behavior**



Four Healing Messages

I AM HERE

Nothing will distract me. I will be fully present physically, mentally, and emotionally. I want to be so fully present that there will be no distance between myself and you. I want to enter fully into your world, to move about freely in your world, to sense what you sense, to feel what you feel. Once I have achieved this kind of knowing contact, it is easy to know when I am not in contact with you. Can I enter so fully into your world that I have no need to evaluate you any more?



Four Healing Messages

I HEAR YOU

I will listen fully with my ears and eyes to everything about you, what is expressed and not expressed. I want to hear you completely. Can I experience, hear, you as you are? To accomplish this kind of hearing, I must be secure enough within myself to allow you to be separate from me.



Four Healing Messages

I UNDERSTAND

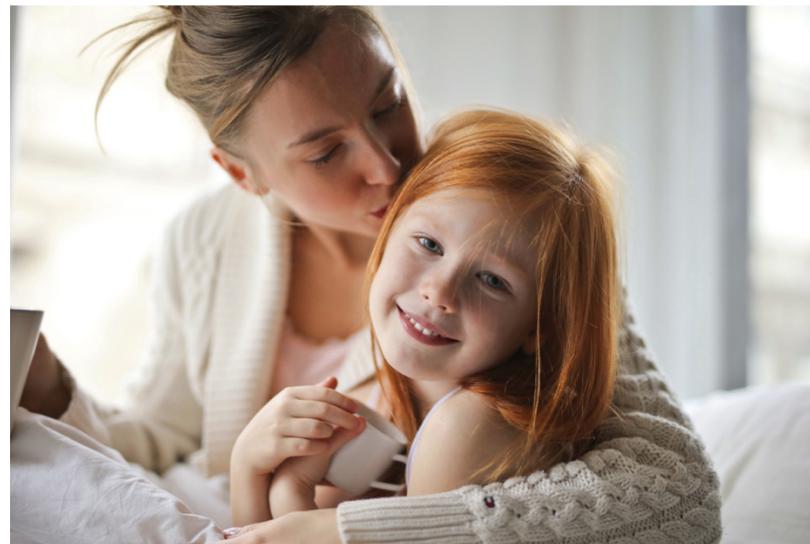
I want you to know I understand what you are communicating, feeling, experiencing, and playing and so will work hard to communicate that understanding to you. I want to understand the inner depth and meaning of your experience and feelings, the loneliness of feeling no one cares, the hollowness of failure, the desperation that can accompany sadness. The crucial dimension in therapy is the communication of this kind of understanding and acceptance of you.



Four Healing Messages

I CARE

I really do care about you and want you to know that. If I am successful in communicating fully the first three messages, I will not be perceived as a threat, and you will allow me into your world. Then, and only then, will you know that I care. What I have experienced is that this kind of caring releases the dynamic potential that already exists in you. I don't create anything. Whatever change or growth we make, you make, already exists in us, in you.



Authentic Expression

Synergetic Play Therapy (SPT)

Four Threats to the Brain



Physical/Emotional Safety

The Unknown

Incongruence

Should's

Incongruence

When children sense incongruence, they will often up the play until the therapist is genuine and authentic.

The play feels real to children so it needs to feel real to you.



Incongruence

If you are not being genuine, you will be registered in the child's brain as a potential threat.

When you authentically model regulation, the child can see and feel it and then integrate it.



Questions



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