

Child Centered Play Therapy For Toddlers



Learning takes place in different ways throughout a person's life. Just as older children and adults learn through reading and studying, young children learn by playing. Play is the work of children. There are many different techniques and strategies used by speech-language pathologists to elicit a desired language response from a child. It may seem as if the child is in control of the session by playing, but in actuality, play therapy sessions are structured with measurable goals in mind.

Children learn best through their everyday, natural environment. In other words, young children learn best through play. In order to duplicate this environment in the therapy room, the clinician uses age appropriate activities consisting of toys such as blocks, dolls, and puzzles. There are different levels of play that a child develops at different stages of his/her life. Solitary/self-play establishes between 1-1 ½ years of age. Parallel play is seen between the ages of 1 ½-2 years of age. During parallel play you will see a child play along side others however not directly with them. You will also see the child talk to him/herself while playing. Between the ages of 2-2 ½ years old you begin to see the child arrange characters into a meaningful group and act out simple themes from his/her own experience. Pretend play begins to emerge as the child reaches 2 ½-3 years of age. Cooperative playing with other children begins to emerge between 2 ½-3 years of age and predominates by 3-3½ year of age. As the child continues to develop, the increase of dramatization is demonstrated during play. Knowing these

different stages can be beneficial in facilitating a child's development in language and play.

Because a child learns about their surroundings and basic concepts through play, the optimal teaching setting for a young child with a language delay would be through play. Toddlers learn to request, protest, and label objects and actions when playing. If a 2-year old child is playing with a doll and a bottle you can elicit pretend play, labeling of the objects he/she is playing with as well as multi-word utterances ("feed baby", "more bottle", "all done", etc.). While playing, the clinician labels objects, characters, concepts and actions. Through modeling of words and gestures, most children learn to use these words and actions to communicate their wants and needs. What children learn through playing transfers over into other activities as well. Children begin to understand that using words and/or signs is an effective way of communicating with others around them. The next time you see a young child playing with his/her toys think of it as exploring and learning time and not simply play time.

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