

SECOND EDITION

play
therapy
basics and beyond

Terry Kottman



AMERICAN COUNSELING
ASSOCIATION

5999 Stevenson Avenue
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dedication

For Jacob, who teaches me what being a kid (and now, a teen)
is all about—every day—whether I want to learn or not.



For Rick, who is there with me learning—there for the good,
the bad, and the ugly.

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preface

Over the past 20 years, the demand for mental health professionals and school counselors who have training and expertise in using play as a therapeutic modality in working with children has increased tremendously. There has been a commensurate demand for trained play therapists. I designed the first edition of *Play Therapy: Basics and Beyond* to provide an introduction to the different skills used in play therapy combined with an atheoretical orientation to the basic concepts involved in play therapy. It was a practical introduction to play therapy concepts and skills. I stressed the application of various play therapy strategies across a wide range of theoretical orientations. The first edition has been widely used to teach introductory play therapy courses and introductory child counseling courses. I wrote this second edition in response to requests from colleagues for an updated version of the original.

The primary intended audience for this book is students enrolled in introductory play therapy courses and introductory child counseling courses. Because the book provides information about many different theoretical orientations, it can be helpful no matter what the theoretical orientation of the professor, the student, or the program. I also wrote this book for clinicians who would like to have more knowledge and understanding of play therapy but who do not have access to formal training in the field.

With these two audiences in mind, I made some assumptions about the backgrounds of those using the book as their entry to the world of play therapy. I assumed that the reader has some basic background in counseling, psychology, social work, or some other related field—many of the terms and concepts used in this book are borrowed from other mental health–related areas. Two other assumptions were that the reader has some knowledge and exposure to children and at least a sketchy understanding of child development.

PLAN OF THE BOOK

Chapters 1 through 3 compose Part 1, Basic Concepts. In Chapter 1, “Introduction to Play Therapy,” I provide an explanation of the paradigm

shift necessary to move from talk as therapy to play as therapy, several definitions and rationales for play therapy, descriptions of the therapeutic powers of play, information about appropriate clients for play therapy, and descriptions of characteristics and experiences needed by therapists who want to use play as a treatment modality. In Chapter 2, "History of Play Therapy," the reader will learn about the evolution of play therapy. Chapter 3, "Theoretical Approaches to Play Therapy," contains detailed descriptions of nine selected contemporary approaches to play therapy, focusing on the theoretical constructs, the stages of play therapy, the role of the therapist, goals of therapy, approaches to working with parents, and distinctive features of each approach.

Chapters 4 through 11 compose Part 2, Basic Skills. In Chapter 4, "Logistical Aspects of Play Therapy," the reader will learn about setting up a space for play therapy, choosing and arranging toys, explaining the play therapy process to parents and children, handling the initial session, assessing children's play behavior, dealing with paperwork, ending a session, and terminating the therapy process. There are several basic play therapy skills that are used in most approaches to play therapy: (a) tracking behavior, (b) restating content, (c) reflecting feelings, (d) limiting, (e) returning responsibility to the child, and (f) dealing with questions. The application of these skills varies depending on the theoretical orientation of the therapist and the stage of therapy, but at one time or another, most play therapists use them. In Chapters 5 through 10, I define each of these skills, delineate the purpose for its use in the play therapy process, and explain how the skills can be applied in various situations in play therapy. To make each of the skills more concrete and accessible to the reader, I provide examples of the application of the skill and invite the reader to practice the skill using exercises tailored to demonstrate various situations in which the skills would be appropriate. At the end of each chapter, the reader can find practice exercises designed to hone the application of the targeted skill. I believe that all play therapists need to look at their own thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and personal issues to become truly skillful in working with children. The "Questions to Ponder" at the end of each chapter are my attempt to facilitate this self-examination process.

In Chapter 5, "Tracking," the reader will learn about using tracking to establish a relationship with the child. Building rapport is also the focus in Chapter 6, "Restating Content." The reader can explore strategies for reflecting feelings to help the child learn to understand his or her emotions in Chapter 7, "Reflecting Feelings." In Chapter 8, "Setting Limits," I provide the reader with several different techniques for limiting inappropriate behavior in the playroom. In Chapter 9, "Returning Responsibility to the Child," a rationale and description of methods for returning responsibility to the child will help the reader explore this important skill. Because all children in the playroom ask questions, the reader will learn how to understand possible meanings and how to handle queries in Chapter 10, "Dealing With Questions."

In Chapter 11, "Integration of Basic Skills: The Art of Play Therapy," I provide an explanation of and practice in methods for deciding which

skill to use when and for integrating several different skills together to create a combined intervention that works more smoothly and more efficaciously than an isolated skill would. The reader will also explore the need for blending the therapist's personality and interactional style with play therapy skills to present a more natural flow of interaction with the child.

Chapters 12 through 15 compose Part 3, *Advanced Skills and Concepts*. Much of the communication that takes place in play therapy comes in the form of metaphors. Chapter 12, "Recognizing and Communicating Through Metaphors," contains descriptions of strategies and practice exercises for learning to understand possible meanings of children's metaphors. The reader will also learn and practice ways to use metaphors created by children to facilitate communication with them in their own natural language. In this chapter there is also information on designing therapeutic metaphors and other storytelling techniques that can be used in play therapy.

Chapter 13, "Advanced Play Therapy Skills," includes information on using metacommunication, visualization strategies, art techniques, sand tray play therapy, and role-playing/playing with children in play therapy. In this chapter, the reader can find examples of the application of each of these advanced skills and exercises that provide guided practice in their use.

In the years since the first edition of this book, the research in the field has suggested that one of the main factors that increase the efficacy of play therapy is working with parents. There have also been some suggestions in the literature that consulting with teachers of children who are struggling in school can also enhance the efficacy of play therapy. Because of this, I have added this new chapter, "Working With Parents and Teachers" (Chapter 14). This chapter is an overview of the information available concerning filial therapy, Kinder Training, Parent-Child Interaction Therapy, and Adlerian parent and teacher consultation.

Because play therapy is an emerging profession, it is essential that individuals interested in the field stay informed about professional issues that can have an impact on the field. To facilitate this process, in Chapter 15, "Professional Issues in Play Therapy," I include information on the following issues: (a) research into the efficacy of play therapy, (b) legal and ethical issues, (c) cultural awareness and sensitivity, (d) inclusion of aggressive toys in the playroom, and (e) public awareness of play therapy and professional identity of play therapists

BECOMING A TRAINED PLAY THERAPIST

Reading this book will not be sufficient to transform the reader into a trained play therapist. To become a play therapist, it is essential to thoroughly study the concepts and information in this text, explore specific theoretical approaches in more depth, learn more about both beginning and advanced-level play therapy skills, and gain experience working with children using play therapy interventions under the supervision of a play

Preface

therapy professional. I believe that an introductory play therapy class should require the students to conduct multiple play therapy sessions for which they receive feedback from experienced play therapists before venturing to begin to conduct other play therapy sessions (also under the supervision of a trained and experienced play therapy supervisor). I also believe that an individual who wishes to become a play therapist must continue to work on his or her own personal issues. Several organizations (e.g., Association for Play Therapy, Canadian Association for Child and Play Therapy, British Association of Play Therapy) have provided guidelines for the training and supervised clinical experience necessary to become a trained play therapist.

about the author

Terry Kottman, PhD, RPT-S, NCC, LMHC, founded The Encouragement Zone, a training center for play therapists and other counselors. Before her “retirement,” she was a professor of counselor education at the University of Northern Iowa and the University of North Texas. She is a registered play therapist-supervisor; maintains a small private practice; and volunteers in an elementary school, working with children and school personnel. Dr. Kottman developed Adlerian play therapy, an approach to counseling children that combines the ideas and techniques of Individual Psychology and play therapy. She regularly presents workshops on play therapy, activity-based counseling, counseling children, and school counseling. Dr. Kottman is the author of *Partners in Play: An Adlerian Approach to Play Therapy* and the first edition of *Play Therapy: Basics and Beyond*. She is the coauthor (with J. Muro) of *Guidance and Counseling in the Elementary and Middle Schools*, coauthor (with J. Ashby and D. DeGraaf) of *Adventures in Guidance: How to Integrate Fun Into Your Guidance Program* and *Active Interventions for Kids and Teens: Adding Adventure and Fun to Counseling*, and coeditor (with C. Schaefer) of *Play Therapy in Action: A Casebook for Practitioners* and (with A. Vernon) of *Counseling Theories: Practical Applications with Children and Adolescents in School Settings*.



