Play Therapy

What Is Play Therapy?

Play therapy for children is a form of psychotherapy that taps into the natural play instincts of kids, allowing them to safely explore their world and express themselves.

Unlike regular play, play therapy is a structured activity guided by a play therapist. While typical psychotherapy sessions with children involve some type of play or activity, child centered play therapy is different. Child centered play therapy allows children to lead their sessions; presenting thoughts and emotions through their choice of play.

During a therapeutic play session, a child uses toys—such as dollhouses, sand trays and puppets—to express thoughts and feelings. Guided by the play therapist in a controlled environment, a child can become more confident navigating real-life conflicts and concerns through play.

Child centered play therapy is different than social play therapy.

Child centered play therapy sessions encourage kids and their caregivers to work through emotions and behaviors.

Who Benefits from Play Therapy?

Many young children, as well as children who have complex conditions or disabilities, lack the words to express their feelings. Instead, they might communicate through their behavior. A child acting out in school, for example, might simply feel anxious about an upcoming hospital stay.

Research shows play therapy works well for kids who experience problems related to stressful life experiences. Parents often report their child’s behavior improves greatly over the course of play therapy intervention.

Child-centered play therapy works best for kids ages 3 to 10 who have the thinking and learning (cognitive) abilities to participate in imaginative play. Play therapy activities are especially helpful as children struggle to:

- Deal with grief and loss.
- Regulate emotions and behaviors related to anger, anxiety or depression.
- Work through trauma or life changes.

What to Expect During Play Therapy

Play therapy services at Gillette Children’s Specialty Healthcare can help your entire family learn how to communicate more effectively. Our play therapist may also work with parents or siblings of kids involved in play therapy, so they learn how to connect in new ways.

A play therapist helps kids make sense of their feelings and experiences through play, and guides them to develop new skills of expression. As they master these communication abilities, many children discover they don’t have to act out to get their needs met.
Although the exact duration of treatment depends on your child’s needs, child play therapy usually consists of a series of roughly 10 to 20 sessions, each lasting 45 minutes. Sessions often include the child only but also involve parents or caregivers when appropriate. As a parent or caregiver, you will also receive guidance on how best to reinforce the lesson of each play therapy session at home.

Most medical insurance covers play therapy, and Gillette accepts most insurance plans.

Find information to help you prepare for a visit to Gillette.

**Locations**

[Make An Appointment 651-290-8707] [Refer a Patient 651-325-2200]

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