



# All about: Play Therapy

WORDS BY CHILD AND ADOLESCENT PSYCHOTHERAPIST, CLAUDIA MALOCCA

**P**lay therapy is a structured, theoretically based approach to therapy that builds on the normal communicative and learning processes of children. It is a form of psychotherapy in which play is used as a means of helping children to externalise their inner world and communicate their feelings.

It was initially developed in the turn of the 20th century and is used as a primary intervention for multiple social, emotional, and behavioural disorders. This Article will address what play therapy is, how it works, and the types of referrals play therapy is suitable for.

Play therapy is an age and developmentally

appropriate therapeutic intervention for children from the ages of three up to fourteen. Teenagers and adults have also benefited from play therapy techniques and recreational processes. Through play therapy, children learn how to communicate with others, express feelings, become more responsible for behaviour and how to modify it more appropriately. Children also develop problem-solving skills and learn a variety of ways of relating to others. Play provides a safe psychological distance from their problems and allows expression of thoughts and feelings appropriate to their development.

Meta-analytic reviews of over 100 play therapy outcome studies have found that

the overall treatment effect of play therapy ranges from moderate to high positive effects. Play therapy has proven equally effective across age, gender and presenting problems. Some examples of referrals are children who have experienced loss, bereavement or trauma.

Children who have emotional, or behavioural difficulties, low self-esteem, anxiety, separation anxiety, school refusal and depression. Play therapy is also effective for children who are neurodiverse such as Autism, ADHD and ADD.

Play therapy works in various ways. Play naturally decreases the stress hormone (cortisol) and increases the feel-good