

Trauma related therapeutic playful activities for children and their parents Eveline Groothoff

Part 1 Some essential play features

The healing factors of play

Part 2 Storytelling with a puppet- animal as co-therapist

Other therapeutic play activities

What is play: some essential play features

- Play is one of the seven basic-instincts or emotion-systems (Panksepp), and essential for life
- Play involves all personality domains (affects, cognition, creativity, relational schemata)
- Play is active and free
- Play has an as-if quality, connected to reality but different

The play-paradox

- Without goals, free, playful versus goal-directed, serious
- Flexible and variable by experiments versus organising and inscripting by repetition
- Real versus not real

Play healing factors

- Play enhances affect regulation (catharsis, coping of stress)
- Play reduces fear, access to painful themes
- Play promotes integration of affective and cognitive information
- Play creates a focused attention
- Play stimulates impulse control
- Play promotes attachment bonding
- Play invites experiments with new behavior
- Play stimulates coping, creativity, solution focused thinking
- Play creates a personal narrative



Luna, 6 jaar



Stanley, 9 jaar

Part 2

Storytelling with a puppet: the form

- To address a group of young children with their parents, you need:
 - a **storyteller**
 - a **puppet-animal** as co-therapist
- Options: One person acting as storyteller and at the same time voicing and moving with the puppet (ventriloquism)
- Or: Two persons: one the storyteller and the other the puppet-animal, moving, reacting by talking, asking questions, acting shocked, expressing anger and sadness etc.

Dynamics between storyteller and 'co-therapist'

The puppet-animal is a listener with direct/active and **expressive** reactions and functions as someone with whom it is easy to **identify**:

- ✓ Expression of disbelief ('is this really true?...', 'I don't understand ...', 'how awfull ...', ...)
- ✓ Asking questions
- ✓ Expression of feelings
- ✓ Expression of needs, thoughts
- ✓ Connecting emotions to the body ('Wow, I feel this sadness in my stomach')
- ✓ Asking how they cope ('What did they do to feel better?')

The story elements

- The title: “The flight”
- The narrative: *“Once upon a time there was ... a big big great country with ... , the president wanted to have more: more land, more power. He wanted to take the land of other people, war, search for safety, the flight, bus and trains, the fathers staying at home, loss of goods, pets, arrival at ...”*
- The basic negative affects (rage, sadness, fear,)
- The basic affective themes or reactions (shock, disbelief, loss, numbness, powerlessness, despair, revenge}
- Connecting feelings to bodyparts
- Some humor in the story is helpful to break the tension, stress release
- Ending: a. stating uncertainty future (realistic)
b. focus upon strength and resilience (mobilisation of active position, creativity, coping and hope)

Other expressive activities

to calm the brain, release bodytensions and/or to give expression in an essential **non-verbal** way: creative/imaginative and motoric

- Drawing ('a bad day, a nice day, past and future, things I lost, things which make me happy, my dreamworld')
- Making 'my own world' in the sandtray ('an unsafe/bad world, a safe/happy world') = simple cartboxes, bottom with plastic cover and filled with sand and empty matchboxes, sticks, stones and painted paper like toys)
- Music and dance, especially rhythmic (mambo), with left-right moves
- Singing and clapping or tapping with left-right movements

For adolescents

- Creative and expressive activities:
- Making something, like a drawing, an object of waste material, a collage, as a reminder of the lost things, of a new world, themes of the told Story
- Making a symbolic expression of their personal power and resilience
- Creating their own little dance-moves/song/poem
- Showing their creations to each other (group of adolescents)
- Making a diary with focus on negative thoughts and feelings always ending with positive facts, thoughts, feelings or what happened that day