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PLAY THERAPY WITH CHILDREN

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Play Therapy with Children

Understanding the Power of Play and Spirituality in Clinical Practice with Children

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What is Play Therapy?

Association of Play Therapy (1997) defines play therapy as:

"…the systematic use of a theoretical model to establish an interpersonal process wherein trained play therapists use the therapeutic powers of play to help clients prevent or resolve psychosocial difficulties and achieve optimal growth and development."

Key element: theoretical orientation and training to implement the strategies of the theory

Power and Benefit of Play with Children in Treatment

The American Academy of Pediatrics states:

"Play allows children to create and explore a world they can master, conquering their fears while practicing adult roles, sometimes in conjunction with other children or adult caregivers. As they master their world, play helps children develop new competencies that lead to enhanced confidence and resiliency they need to face future challenges."

Pediatrics, Volume 119, Number 1, January 2007

Therapeutic Powers of Play

by Charles Schaefer (Adapted)

- **Overcoming resistance**

  Play is natural and fun behavior for children which helps to establish a working therapeutic alliance.

- **Communication**

  Children often have difficulty expressing themselves verbally to communicate feelings, thoughts and needs. Play offers them a "natural" means of communication. Schaefer states, "Play is to the child what verbalization is to the adult- the most natural medium for self-expression."

Therapeutic Powers of Play

by Charles Schaefer (Adapted)

- **Competence**

  Children enjoy playing which means they will spend much time involved in playing. Playing allows opportunity to enhance self-esteem by satisfying the child's internal motivation to explore and master the environment.

- **Creative Thinking**

  Play encourages creativity and flexibility without fear of negative consequences so children can try out different problem solving strategies.

Therapeutic Powers of Play

by Charles Schaefer (Adapted)

- **Catharsis**

  Children often have difficulty ventilating intense feelings and play allows an opportunity to release these pent up feelings with some emotional distance. Releasing these feelings can often facilitate a inner peace.

Therapeutic Powers of Play

by Charles Schaefer (Adapted)

- **Abreaction**

  Schaefer states that, "Abreaction is the reliving of past stressful events and the emotions associated with them. In play, children can slowly mentally digest and assimilate traumatic experiences by reliving them with a appropriate release of affect." The play therapist can help the child to re-experience the event in a different way and gain a sense of mastery and empowerment.

Therapeutic Powers of Play

by Charles Schaefer (Adapted)

- **Role-playing**

  Play allows children to try out different roles and behaviors to experience things from a different perspective and develop a sense of self as separate from others.

- **Fantasy/Visualization**

  Imagination is enhanced through play. Schaefer states, "Pretending gives a child power over the world, even when he does not have much control in real life… This power and control is ego-boosting and augments an inner locus of control." The possibilities with imagination are endless with a child in what he can achieve and overcome.

Therapeutic Powers of Play

by Charles Schaefer (Adapted)

- **Metaphoric Teaching**

  Play allows the opportunity to develop new myths or metaphors to address issues related to unconscious content. The therapist can observe a child's fantasy play and gain understanding into the concerns of the child.

Therapeutic Powers of Play

by Charles Schaefer (Adapted)

- **Attachment Formation**

  Playful interactions with smiling and positive touch are natural and enjoyable ways for children to connect with adults.

- **Relationship Enhancement**

  Schaefer states, "Through play, a pleasure bond is formed that makes each party more attractive to the other. Once formed, mutual feelings of warmth and closeness between therapist and child contribute to the child's sense of wellbeing."

Therapeutic Powers of Play

by Charles Schaefer (Adapted)

- **Positive Emotion**

  Playing is fun and children enjoy it which can be uplifting for the child and relieve stress.

- **Mastering Developmental Fears**

  Children can overcome their fears by repeatedly playing out threatening stimuli and finding ways to master and overcome their fears.

Therapeutic Powers of Play

by Charles Schaefer (Adapted)

- **Game Play**

  Playing games involves adhering to a predetermined set of rules which provides opportunities for children to learn socialization skills. Rules involve playing fair, taking turns, and learning to lose and win graciously. Ego control and focus must override impulsive behavior.

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Types of Play Therapy

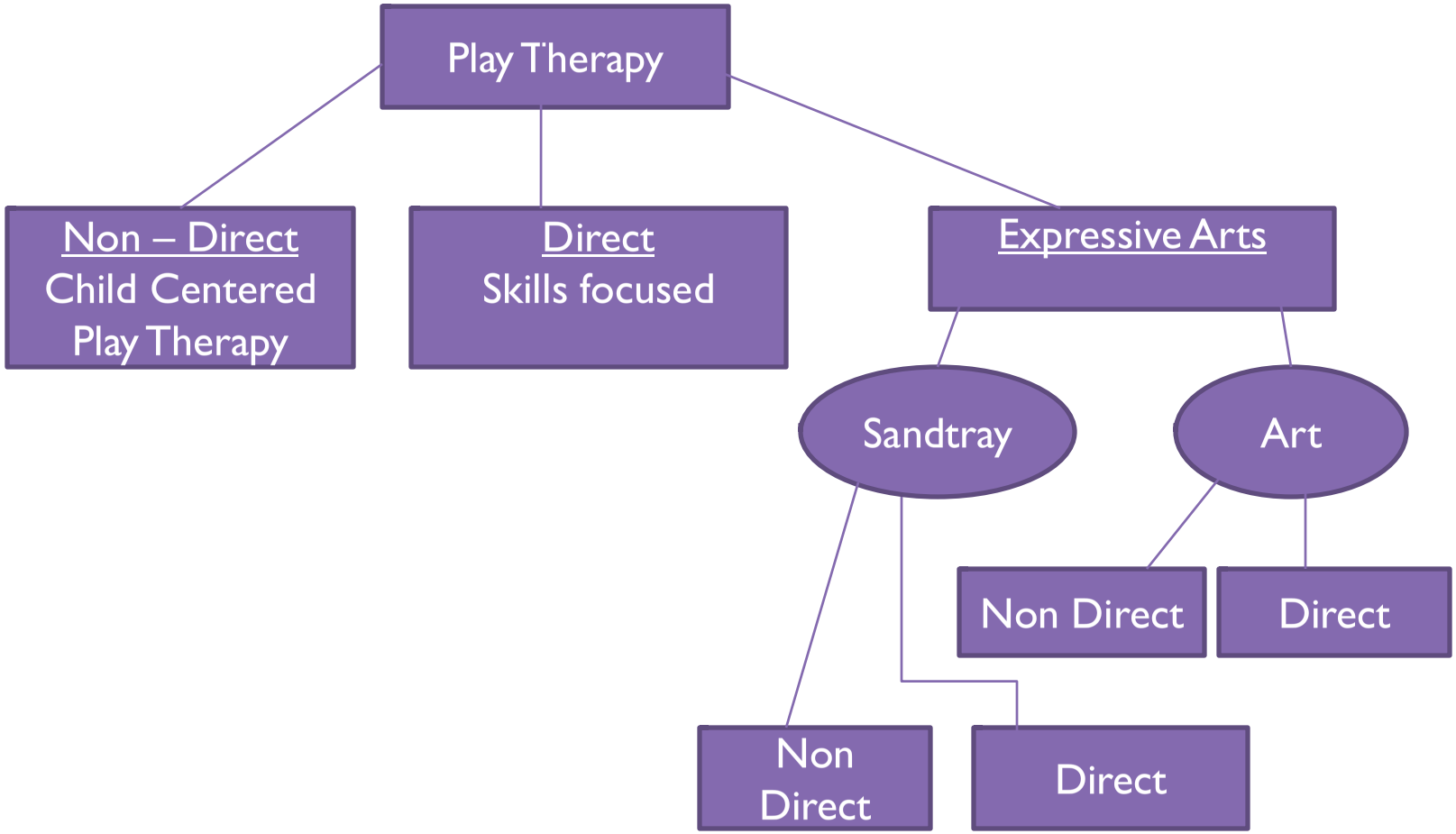
Child Centered

- Child Led
- Relationship Focused
- Safe and Secure Space
- Unconditional Positive Regard
- Belief in Child's Internal Drive for Healing

Directed Approach

- Therapist Led
- Symptom Focused
- Safe and Secure Space
- Unconditional Positive Regard
- Apply Specific Theory Model to Change Symptom

An Integrated Approach



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How Can Play Therapy Benefit Children?

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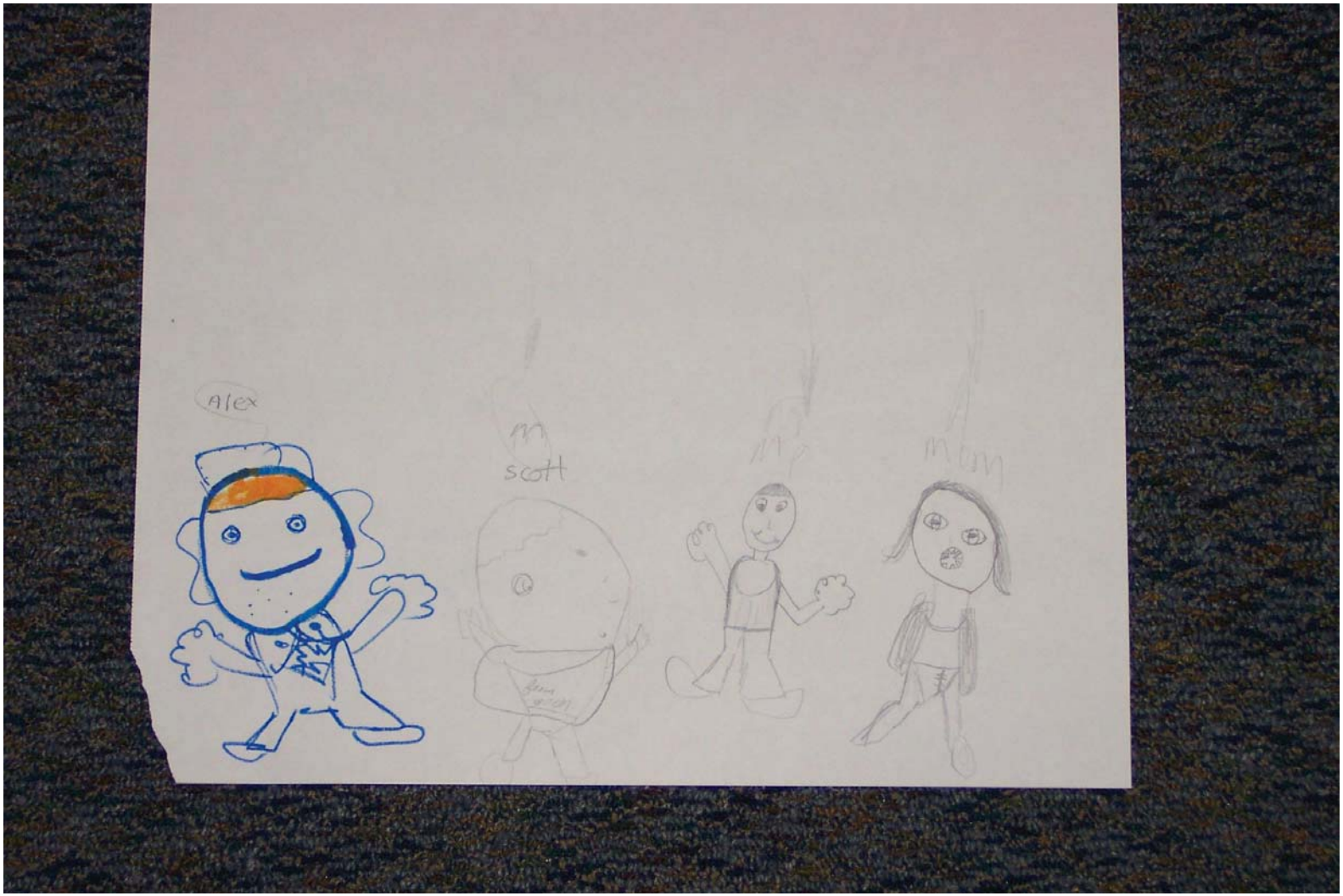

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What Does Scripture Say?

- "Then little children were brought to Jesus for Him to place His hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Matthew 19:13-14

- "He took a little child and had him stand among them [disciples]. Taking him in His arms, He said to them, 'Whoever welcomes these little children in my name welcomes Me; and whoever welcomes Me does not welcome Me but the One who sent Me.' "

  Mark 9: 36-37

What Does Scripture Say?

- "And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child will lead them." Isaiah 11:6

- "When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things." 1Cor. 13:11

What Does It All Mean?

- Jesus always engaged with people in a manner that was meaningful to them- at their developmental level and cultural relevance.

- Jesus highly regarded children and His people are regularly referred to as "children."

What Does It All Mean?

- God's purpose for His "children" is to reflect Jesus- His light into a dark world.
- A key element used by Jesus is relationship and meeting people "where they are"- developmentally, emotionally, cognitively and spiritually.
- Early intervention in childhood increases the likelihood of living an "abundant life" reflecting the power and love of Jesus- which starts with a healthy childhood and understanding our value and worth during childhood.

Strategies for Clinical Practice

- Rosebush Drawing- (Violet Oaklander)
- Before and After Drawing
- Color My Feelings