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Play Therapy with Children with Anxiety

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Play Therapy and Anxiety

- One of the most prominent psychological disorders in children is anxiety disorder
- (Kaslow et al, 2012). There are many different anxiety disorders such as obsessive compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, social phobia, specific phobia, and generalized anxiety disorder. Symptoms of most of these disorders begin in childhood, they are broken down into emotional, behavioral, and physical (Pinsof & Estrada, 1995).
- Emotional symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder in children:
 - 1) Constant worrying
 - 2) Feeling like the anxiety is uncontrollable
 - 3) An inability to cope with uncertainty.

Play Therapy and Anxiety

- Behavioral symptoms:
 - 1) Inability to relax, feel peaceful, or to be alone
 - 2) Difficulty concentrating/ focusing
 - 3) Procrastination/ putting things off because of being overwhelmed and
 - 4) Avoiding situations that may be anxiety provoking.

- Physical symptoms:
 - 1) Feeling tense/ body aches
 - 2) Insomnia/ feeling restless
 - 3) Stomach problems, nausea, diarrhea.

Play Therapy and Anxiety

•The advantages of including children and play therapy and how play therapy will help children with anxiety disorder:

1 “Redefine the child’s problem as the family’s problem” instead of calling the actual child, “the problem,” doing so redefines the issue as the family’s problem which builds teamwork and promotes togetherness (Lund et al, 2002, p.447).

2 One of the main advantages of play therapy is decreasing anxiety, because generally, going to therapy can be an anxiety provoking event. Thus, play therapy would reduce anxiety symptoms.

3 Discloses secrets or areas of tension (Lund et al, 2002).

4 Presenting problems can be addressed such as poor social adjustment, ADHD, anxiety, aggression, depression, attachment issues, sleeping problems, and emotional issues (Lund et al, 2002).

5 Enhances a child’s developmental skills, for example, communication skills (Keith & Whittaker, 1981).

Play Therapy and Anxiety

- It is vital for the therapist to make the child with anxiety feel at ease in therapy to obtain optimal results.
- A child seeming to be reluctant or anxious in a play therapy session calls for the therapist to be verbal. It is suggested that the therapist not mirror the child's silence as this can cause them to feel even more anxious (Landreth, 2002).

Play Therapy and Anxiety

Lund et al offers suggestions to help children feel more comfortable in therapy:

- 1 Establish clear limits, but keep rules to a minimum.
- 2 Use fewer, simpler words.
- 3 Use visual aids
- 4 Ask for the child's opinions, comments, concerns, thoughts, and feelings. This is extremely important especially if the parents don't give the child a voice at home, therapy can be a place where they are heard.
- 5 Avoid over questioning because that may have a blocking effect
- 6 Keep therapy positive by reiterating the child's strengths rather than weaknesses.

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