What is Play Therapy?

Play therapy is an effective and well-established therapy, devised to meet the developmental needs of children.

Play is the child’s natural medium of expression. Many children in need of therapy do not have the language, cognitive and/or emotional development to be able to verbalise the things that are negatively affecting their well-being.

Through play with specially selected toys, art and sensory resources, as well as talking, children can express themselves and work through difficult feelings and life experiences. This is often unconscious, i.e. they may not be aware that this is what they are doing – the toys can offer a safe way of giving distance to their problems.

At the heart of Play Therapy is the therapeutic relationship. The therapist’s job is to create a nurturing environment that provides the conditions necessary to facilitate positive change. The experience of a secure relationship with an empathic and accepting adult, affects positively the child’s ability to form healthy attachments with other adults and peers.

Who Can Play Therapy Help?

Play therapy is especially helpful for children who:

- are withdrawn and/or lack confidence
- have difficulties with relationship
- have suffered neglect, abuse or trauma
- have behavioural difficulties
- have emotional difficulties
- have difficulty managing in social situations.
- have suffered a loss
- have speech and/or communication difficulties
- have additional learning needs
- are looked-after children (LAC)

What are the Benefits to Schools?

Children can:

- ... develop increased self-awareness, confidence, maturity and resilience.
- ... learn coping skills, responsibility, decision-making skills and self-control.

Leading to:

- ... a reduction in the emotional, behavioural and social barriers to learning.
- ... enhanced communication and emotional literacy
- ... healthier relationships with peers and teaching staff.
- ... improved attendance

Also:

- ... increased support and advice for teaching staff.
Working with Parents and Carers

Working effectively with parents/carers is an important part of play therapy and they are involved from the outset. I hold an initial assessment meeting with parents/carers prior to therapy starting, to gain consent, inform them about the therapy and find out about their child. We continue to meet regularly, approximately half-termly, to review progress. Support and guidance is offered to parents/carers and frequently Play Therapy brings the benefit of positive change for the whole family, as well as for the referred child.

How Long Does it Take?

Play Therapy is not a quick fix. It is child-centred, as opposed to issue-centred, an effective therapy that aims to nurture the whole child. Whilst some children will respond well to a short term intervention (for example up to 12 sessions), for those children whose problems have persisted for a long time or have complex backgrounds and/or needs, a longer-term intervention may be required (e.g. up to a year).

What Does the School need to Provide?

In order to provide setting-based Play Therapy, schools will need the following:

Essential:
- A dedicated private room that is accessible every week at the same period of time.
- Regular liaison with staff responsible for welfare of the child
- An understanding of confidentiality and safeguarding.

What do I provide?

- All Play Therapy materials.
- On-going meetings with parents/carers
- An end-of-intervention report, including strategies and recommendations as appropriate
- Assessment of emotional needs of pupils of concern

Charges for Play Therapy in Schools 2017-2018

- £100 per half day (2 children)
- £135 full day (3 children)
- £160 full day (4 children)
- £0 parent/carer meetings*

*The initial assessment meeting with parents/carers, held prior to the play therapy intervention starting, is charged at £40; however, there is no charge for subsequent parent/carer meetings.

Possible sources of funding include the Pupil Premium, the SEN budget, Social Services and children’s charities.