

## Chapter 62

# Play Therapy for Children With Neurodevelopmental Disorders

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### ABSTRACT

*A play is referred to the language of children through which they express and communicate their feelings, thoughts, and behavior in a playful way. Play therapy enables children to gain an understanding of themselves and the world around them and helps them to overcome behavioral, emotional, social, and various other issues through play activities. The chapter majorly focuses on the effectiveness of play therapy in different neurodevelopmental disorders. Recent trends and studies suggested that play therapy is one of the most favored therapeutic approaches used in the children with various neurodevelopmental disorders.*

### INTRODUCTION

Human life begins from childhood to adulthood. From the first day of life, everyone has their own temperament, perception and meaning to strive for survival which we call as “individual differences”. Childhood is the initial stage of the circle of development. It is the utmost factor to be followed appropriately for achieving all the developmental milestones successfully. If this stage of childhood does not function properly, it may lead to the psychological, social, emotional and behavioral issues.

Presently, increased numbers of children have been diagnosed with neurodevelopmental disorders such as intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and specific learning disorders. There are many therapeutic practices that help in the management of these disorders; one of them is play therapy. The most prominent activity, in which children mostly involve, is playing. Through playing children are availed with valuable cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal

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learning opportunities. For children playing is the way to express their significant emotions, feelings and behavioral pattern of life. By the process of play therapy, children work on their own emotional and psychological problems in their own way. It is a natural expression of play where the therapist provides a secure and comfortable environment for children to express their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors within the acceptable limits. The present chapter focuses the use of play therapy and its effective application among children with neurodevelopmental disorders.

### **DEFINITIONS OF PLAY AND PLAY THERAPY**

*Play provides a developmentally responsive means for expressing thoughts and feelings, exploring relationships, make sense of experiences, disclosing wishes, and developing coping strategies. (Landreth, 2002)*

“For children, play is the natural, spontaneous, and comfortable medium through which children express themselves” (Axline, 1947).

Play therapy is a developmentally-sensitive intervention to help the children with significant emotional problems. It:

*is a well thought-out, philosophically conceived, developmentally-based, and research-supported method of helping children cope with and overcome the problems they experience in the process of living their lives. (Landreth, 1996)*

Play Therapy is defined 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. (Association for Play Therapy, 2011)*

### **HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT**

The famous Greek philosopher Plato (429-347 B.C) stated that “You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conservation”. The effective use of play as an intervention with childhood problems was initiated by Freud (1909) who published his work with the classical case of “Little Hans,” a five-year-old boy with phobia. During his treatment, it was based on the father’s notes about Hans’ play that Freud advised the father to resolve his son’s underlying conflicts and fear. It was the first recorded case of “Little Hans” in which a child’s difficulty was understood in the terms of emotional problems. Hug-Hellmuth (1921) was the pioneer therapist who provided play materials in the therapy with children to promote their self-expression. Hug-Hellmuth discouraged psychoanalysis of children below six years of age and opined it to be potentially dangerous. Hug-Hellmuth introduced play as an intervention in child therapy. Klein (1955) started using play to analyses children under the age of six years. Klein believed that a child’s play was served same as that of free association used among adults for their underlying conflicts. Freud (1946) applied the basic principles of psychoanalysis to children in therapy. Freud described that the children’s play may be a conscious repetition of their day-to-day life

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