



## Play Therapy

### What is play therapy?

Play therapy is a type of therapy that helps children to explore their feelings, to express themselves and to make sense of their difficult life experiences. Children are given a safe and confidential space where they are free to explore their expression through play, which is the child's natural way of learning, communicating and exploring their world. Children use play first and speech second.

Recovery from difficult life experiences can be helped by a play therapist allowing a child space to express themselves in a safe and trusting environment. Play therapy gives children the opportunity to explore and understand their feelings. It can help them to change their view of the trauma of abuse so that they are less likely to blame themselves. The resulting increased self-esteem can help the child cope with future difficulties in the world. Children from different cultures, genders and abilities can all be helped by play therapy.



### Why Play Therapy?

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children recognise that play therapy is a particularly safe and powerful intervention for children facing complex trauma as a result of sexual abuse because of the emphasis on the therapeutic relationship which helps the child on their road to recovery.

At Lifecentre, the child has the freedom to guide the pace and agenda of each session. By choosing play materials which make the most sense to them, each child is able to express, explore and make sense of their experience.





Children's language is still developing right up into adolescence. This can often mean that traditional counselling can be harder for them to engage with. Some children may not have the ability to put their feelings into words.

Play therapy gives them the chance to explore materials; use movement; and create images, stories and worlds that can be expressions of how they are feeling and what they have experienced in their lives. The toys, figures or arts used for expression help to add distance to the child's experience, which helps them to feel safe.

The wonderful thing about play is that it allows communication to happen on an unconscious level, so the child does not always need to understand what they have played, drawn or communicated, but they will still be able to benefit from allowing those things to be expressed. It is believed that recovery is manifested in small gradual breakthroughs and shifts of perspective which can be noticed in the child's attitude, behaviour or simply in how they view their experience differently.



## How does Play Therapy work?

The play therapist works to show the child that they are always accepted and free to express themselves however they would like to, within certain boundaries to keep them safe. This is important both for children who may be fearful of taking risks and children who engage in problematic risky behaviour so that the child can learn appropriate limits to keep them safe.

Play therapy involves thinking, feeling, body movements, actions and visual representation. Children are given the opportunity to use their whole self to work through what they have experienced and are therefore able to release and control some of the memories stored in their bodies or deep in their unconscious







In play therapy children are able to process memories or experiences at their own pace and can create distance from the traumatic event by using play, art or creativity. Children may need to play out the same thing over and over until they have processed it and can place it in the context of their life. For some children this can happen during one series of play therapy sessions, but for others, they may only be able to process small amounts at a time and may need to come back to therapy again.

## Play therapy at Lifecentre

At Lifecentre, our play therapy approach is child-centred, meaning it is focused on the needs of the individual child. The play therapists spend time getting to know your child and giving them space to express themselves in the way that they would like to.

It may then be that their play therapist is able to suggest some resources or activities to help your child to process their experience; or they may just continue to provide a consistent environment that can act as a container to hold your child's experiences or expressions.

Your child has the freedom to choose whether they might like to take up a suggestion or to decide for themselves what they want to do in their session, which could be anything from playing with dolls to making a mess in the sandpit. In this way, the play therapy is tailored towards the individual needs of your child.







## 1. Take the first step

Fill out our referral form on our website or ring 01243 786349 to speak to one of our client support officers. We will process your application and get back to you as soon as possible. Play therapy is typically recommended for children between the ages of 3 and 10.

## 2. Start the conversation

This is a chance for the parent or carer of the child to meet the play therapist for a detailed assessment of the child's needs and situation. This first meeting will typically take place without the child there, so that they do not feel scared by lots of adult talk.

## 3. Meeting the child

The play therapist will meet with the child for the first time for a child-centred assessment which involves play and explaining in simple language to the child what to expect. We ask the parent/carer to stay with the child for this first session - unless the child does not want that. Should this counselling precede a trial in court we will tweak our support accordingly.

## 4. Receive weekly support

We offer up to 18 sessions of play therapy as part of each programme, with an additional 4 around a court case. We ask that the parent or carer does not stay in the room for these but stays nearby, so that the child knows where they are.

## 5. Review sessions

Review sessions will be held with the parent/carer (usually without the child) halfway through the course of sessions and again towards the end to prepare for the ending.

If more than one sibling within the same family need support from Lifecentre, each member of the family may be allocated a different counsellor or play therapist.

If you have a child below the age of 3yrs who has been sexually abused or there is serious concern that this may have happened, Lifecentre can offer a one-off session with the primary carers of that child to provide psychoeducation in regards how best to look after that child, what to look out for and how best to respond to the child's needs as time goes on.





## Explaining to a child what play therapy is

As a parent or carer of a child under the age of about 10 years, you might like to read to them this explanation below to explain to them how play therapy works at Lifecentre. It aims particularly to give an explanation of confidentiality in child friendly language.

When you come to your play therapy sessions, we want you to know that this is a safe place to talk about or play with what you would like to. That means that what happens in the sessions is private, but it's not a secret, so if you would like to talk to someone you trust about your sessions, then that is ok.



Your Lifecentre counsellor is not going to tell anyone outside of the Lifecentre team about the details of what you play or do, unless she is worried about you.

If she is worried about you and thought it would help to tell your family, or your teachers, or whomever looks after you, she would talk that through with you. She will sometimes also talk to them about how you're getting on, without needing to tell them the details of what you play or do.

This is so that they can help you.

Sometimes she might have to tell someone important about what happens in your sessions, if she is worried that someone is hurting you or that you are going to hurt someone. This is so that she can help to keep you and other people safe.

If police have been working with you about what happened to you, then they might want to see the notes that she writes about your sessions. If the police ask to see them, then she will talk to you about this first before showing anybody else.

If you are worried about any of this, or don't like it, please tell your Lifecentre counsellor. She won't be cross with you. What you feel is important to her.

When you come to your sessions there are lots of things for you to play with and do. There are also a few things to remember to help keep the room a safe place: one thing is that we don't hurt each other, and the other is that the toys or things in the room mustn't be broken on purpose. If you make a mistake, no-one will be cross with you.

