Making the Case for Structuring Play Therapy

• In using any theoretical model and its methods and techniques we have to account for its validity and effectiveness in accomplishing the therapeutic goals we want the child to accomplish.

• Directive techniques have been demonstrated to be effective both immediately after treatment and then one year later (Reddy, Files & Schaefer, 2005)

• They provide rapid change in targeted symptoms, manualized instructions that are easy to understand and use, and standardized intervention protocols

Why use directive techniques?

• After all Child-Centered Play Therapists say that we need to trust the child to lead the course of therapy in a gradual and natural manner; believe the child is capable of solving his problems.

• Experiential Play Therapists tell us to honor the child and allow them to direct their own play.
When the Child Needs Us to Structure the Session

1. When child is older and needs developmentally appropriate play.
2. Younger child with pre-verbal trauma and gaps in sensorimotor level of development
3. When time or number of sessions is limited
4. There is a current crisis that needs problem-solving and child doesn’t have that skill
5. When child doesn’t seem able to put together their experience in symbolic, metaphoric way
6. When there is stagnant post-traumatic play
7. When child is stuck in “battle zone” of divorce and other abuse

Prescriptive and integrative models for choosing play therapy interventions

• Prescriptive Play Therapy- the child’s symptoms guide the selection of theoretical and clinical treatment choices

• Ask, “What treatment, by whom, is most effective for this individual with that specific problem, and under what set of circumstances?

• Integrative Play Therapy Models: are a synthesis of concepts and methods from two or more school, models or theories

Structured Play Therapy: Inside the Brain of a Child

Neurodevelopmental Model
- prescriptive
- integrative

Structure activities to target areas of the brain
Release Play Therapy
Theory
-Children use play to heal from painful experiences. When they can’t do that self-healing play they need therapist to intervene and help restore that play.

-Play produces an abreactive effect: through play kids can re-live painful event, produce a release of affect. Repetition of the abreactive play is needed to assimilate the thoughts and feelings about the event.

-Children gain insight from play not from interpretation.

How It Works:
1. Start with a good case history from the parent, find out what stressors or traumas preceded the child’s symptoms and behaviors.
2. Establish a relationship with the child.
3. When the child is comfortable introduce the structured play situation:
   - set up the situation or scenario to be played out
   - add the people figures and other props needed
   - start playing out the scene in which the trauma or stressful event occurred then prompt the child to continue playing out what happened and finish the story.

Types of Release Techniques
1. Release of Feelings in Standard Situations
   - sibling rivalry, parents getting divorce, parents alone together, or bullying that cause emotional reaction
   - you get release of feelings but experience isn’t specific to child and characters are not personal.

2. Release of Feelings in a Specific Play Situation
   - scene resembles a definite experience recreating in play a stressful or traumatic experience in child’s life.

3. Simple Release
   - child is encouraged to release aggressive behavior and unacceptable feelings. Child may also need to release previously unexpressed feelings of infantile pleasure.
Revised and Updated

1. Setting the Stage: warm-up activities, simple release
2. Reconstructing, Re-enacting and Releasing: garbage can game, standardized story stems, specific event in reality or in fantasy
3. Putting the Event in the Past: repetition of scenes, putting the puzzle together and putting it away, timelines, constructing scene about life in here and now and in the future
4. Mastery – from helplessness to empowerment: creating safe place, closing the scene, cognitive re-structuring, creating a new ending

Brain Child doing Release Play Therapy
- working the limbic system and cortex
- build neural pathways
  - look for amygdala hijacking

Cognitive-Behavioral Play Therapy
Theory and Basic Concepts

Situation ➔ Thought ➔ Feelings ➔ Behavior
- it’s all in how we interpret the situation (Beck)
- change your interpretation, feel better, do better

- You can’t change your mood without thinking a thought or doing something
- Cognitive Restructuring
- Behavioral Experiments
Using CBT for structured play activities

Basic CBPT technique examples
For RPT Mastery: use cognitive restructuring to explore the thought processes in the scene: cognitive distortions, beliefs connect to feelings/behavior

Mood O Meter -looking at feelings, change a feeling

Jazzing up CBT for little kids and just for fun

Cognitive Interventions that use play

Simon Says make it more playful – techniques from ADHD treatment. Stop, relax, focus and go; Freaked out Feline to Cool down kitty (Puppets)

EMDR and release play therapy

Experiential Mastery Technique: have child draw picture

Brain Child

-working the cortex
-hippocampus
-neural pathways
-beware of amygdala hijacking
Developmental Play Therapies

Theory and Concepts:
- patterned repetitive activities
- building attachment, touch, bonding, growth
- play at the child’s developmental age

Developmental Play Therapy with Viola Brody
- therapist in charge by attending to child and by nurturing touches, simple activities; slippery hand game, stacking hands, back writing, cradle time, singing, snacks, coloring

Developmental PT Techniques

Therplay type activities provide structure engagement, nurturing and challenge:
- Simon Says game - rhythmic hand clapping
- lotion for boo boos and hurts - paper punch
- getting parents involved

Sensory activities for sensorimotor development and attachment and more balanced sensory tolerance
- bubbles, gloop, silly songs and rocking

Brain Child on Sensorimotor Play

- working the brainstem
  - diencephalon
- neural pathways
  - soothing the physiology
Gestalt Play Therapy

Theory and Concepts: helping children become aware...it is through awareness and experience of their actions that change begins to take place.

- I/Thou Relationship: we come together as equals
- Contact: the ability to be fully present with your whole self
- Strengthening the Self: need sense of well-being and inner strength
- Emotional Expression and Aggressive Energy: uncover and express blocked emotions needs energy to feel powerful and take action
- Self-Nurturing: children need to accept parts of themselves to work toward feelings of self-worth and integration

Gestalt Play Therapy Activities

Contact: drawing or painting while listening to music, “sharing the rhythm” music, balloon tennis

Strengthening the Self: Sensorimotor - falling on pillows, pantomime, sensory activities, Mastery - build something together, learning games together, Power and Control - being the boss, director, captain

Aggressive Energy: clay, drums, splat, nerf darts

Emotional Growth: storytelling, drawing, feelings I.D. for the left brained kid

Self-Nurturing: The Fairy Godmother

Brain Child “with gestalt the puzzle comes together”

- working the brainstem
- diencephalon
- neural pathways
- connecting the puzzle pieces in the cortex, amygdala and hippocampus
Lunch Break

The hands know how to solve a riddle with which the intellect struggles in vein. Carl Jung

The best interventions are the ones that a person walks in and immediately wants to do.
Janine Shelby

Structuring the Play Therapy Session

“Ingredients and Cooking Tools” -
- realistic family figures that can stand up and sit down
- furniture and household items
- miniature school and playground equipment
- Balloons, bubbles, nerf darts, big soft blocks, lotion, clay, gloop, musical instruments, rhythm noise makers, newspaper, big pillows, splat balls, poppers
- puppets, Playpal, stuffed animals
- feeling maker book, feelings posters, games, name that feeling
- paper, markers, paint, crayons, glue, scissors

“Recipe” Collections for Play Therapy Activities

101 Favorite Play Therapy Techniques [1st, 2nd and 3rd Editions] by Heidi Kaduson and Charles Schaefer
Short-term Play Therapy by Heidi Kaduson and Charles Schaefer
Play Therapy with Traumatized Children by Paris Goodyear-Brown
Digging for Buried Treasure: 52 Prop-based play therapy interventions for treating the problems of childhood by Paris Goodyear-Brown
Techniques, Techniques by Susan Kenney-Noziska
Simon Says Pay Attention: Help for Children with ADHD by Daniel & Marcie Yeager
Windows to our Children by Violet Oaklander
Hidden Treasure: A Map to the Child's Inner Self by Violet Oaklander
Structured Play-Based Interventions for Engaging Children and Adolescents in Therapy by Angela Cavett
Liana Lowenstein’s Creative Interventions
For other play therapy books go to http://www.selfesteemshop.com/index.php
Sampler of activities from handouts

• Group activity

Choosing the right recipe

Downstairs/Brainstem/Limbic work
  Play activities in which the play itself creates change
Upstairs-Downstairs Brain work
  • Kinesthetic activities and manipulation of the play materials (Goodyear-Brown, 2010 p. 251)
Educational/Cognitive
  • Written/verbal activities combined with play action (running, throwing a ball) or reward (snacks, candy)

Creating or Adapting your own recipe

Adapting your own "recipe" from another activity
1. Don’t leave out ingredients
2. Experiment with substitutes (puppets for family figures)
3. Test kitchen: “advanced” students, try it on yourself, your co-workers, or maybe your kids

Format for Activity Development:
1. Purpose or Goal to meet
2. Developmental age range
3. Neurodevelopmental area to strengthen or repair
4. Materials and Time needed to complete
5. Instructions steps to complete
6. Evaluation – how helpful, ? how fun?
Adapted Activities
Stop Relax Focus Go → Cozy Corner for transitions
Ask the Expert (videotape) → webcam recording
Bubble breathing, Bubble Fall → Bubble Pop
Yoga Pretzels → Volcano Blow, Yoga Stories
Knocking blocks down → Lego Lego (build-tear down)

Do It Yourself 🌍 Create your Own Activities
Spit Wad Balloon → to Let go of the Bugs
Floorplan → for client's house or school or playground
Toy Story → tell a story with five toys that child picks
Volcano → inhale, arms up to head, exhale stretch arms up to let volcano blow
McGuyver Style → look around your playroom or office and have fun inventing an activity with things you have on hand

Selecting techniques for the child’s presenting problem and situation
1. Assessment/Relationship Stage
   - start structured activity the move to child-directed, finding a balance
   - light-hearted activities that sample your toys and creative supplies
   - they're building trust and you're assessing them
   - Exploring let them find out more about you and your place than you find out about them
   - drawing, map-making, interviews, games, puppet introductions and interview
Hi Ho its off to work we go

3. Venturing in—early work activities
- Brainstorming: Serenity Prayer in Action, Problem Pile (cards)
- Decide your goals: Butterfly treatment planning
- Try it out: simple and standardized release
- Learning about feelings, strengthening the self
- Tackle the smaller problems

4. Deep in the Cave—doing the intense work
- Specific release scenes
- Disclosing threatening material; titrating, fast forward-rewind
- Releasing blocked emotions
- The “aha” moment
- Getting perspective; lifeline map

Special Challenges ~ Specific Goals

Divorce—changes, boundaries, and finding a foxhole
two house dollhouse play, battle zone

Trauma—looking at each puzzle piece, putting the
puzzle together

School Problems -
- Visit the school, feel the energy in classroom
- Playground show, fast forward and rewind
- Homework games, climb upstairs to a calm cortex

Coming Together ~ Growing Apart

5. Growth/Launching
Healthy Coping: Self care tags
Self Esteem: Be your own Superhero, Self-Nurturing
Mastery: Skill Building, co-constructing the child’s
life story with healing journey; re-visit lifeline

6. Taking Flight
Adding it All Up: Review of Our Work
Graduation
Departure toolbox: balloon, stress ball, notebook,
cracker, stuffed animal, stomping mat, solution stack
Integrating Play Therapy in a neurodevelopmental context

**Cortex:** All modalities can be used. Directives include: writing, drawing, games, therapy

**Limbic System:** Traditional play therapy: CCPT, EPT, Jungian

**Midbrain:** Less verbal, more sensory. Can use elements of: experiential, child-centered, play therapy

**Brainstem:** Primary process and primitive sensory. Can use elements of: experiential, child-centered, play therapy

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**Putting together a Menu**

Structured Play Therapy Model (Jones, Casado & Robinson, 2003)

1. Guidelines for Structured Treatment Planning
2. Choosing structured activities based on intensity
3. 3 Stages: beginning, working stage and termination stage
4. Criteria for moving to next stage

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**More menu planning**

Brief intervention for grief and loss (Oaklander, 2007, p. 122)

1. Think crisis intervention; there is only a few sessions to make things better
2. Plan ahead what you will do in each session
3. Set boundaries. You can’t fix their pain by giving in on limits.
4. List the issues and set priorities with the child if possible, or with parent.
5. Include parents to build basic communication and generate problem-solving tools.
6. With kids therapy is intermittent. They’ll be back.
7. Be clear with the child about the purpose of the therapy session.
Treatment Planning
Let’s Try it Out

Integrating Structured Activities:
Formulate the Prescription: Neurodevelopmental treatment Planner

Combine along dimensions of intensity for client, directiveness and consciousness, and client need for contact>strength>emotional expression>self-nurturing

CBT session agenda setting
Downsizing recipes for younger children (Shelby)

Is Structured Play Therapy For You, for the child, for the program?

• Discussion
• Are you a planner?
• Can you sell the activity?
• Final Reflections

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Structured Activities and Treatment Ideas

By a Creative Cast of Play Therapists who facilitate, direct, and guide children in their healing process

Balloon Metaphor  When things are going ok we’re flexible, like this deflated balloon, we can bend, but when we’re stressed or have been through a traumatic event, we fill up inside with feelings and thoughts about what happened. (Start to blow up balloon.  

We may have lots of different feelings. (With each feeling named add more air to the balloon.) Sometimes we may feel fear, we feel________(cue child to name a feeling); angry, sad disappointed, bad about ourselves, ashamed guilty, lost. We think nothing’s going to get better, we’re not safe, or bad things will keep happening.  

The feelings can get stuck inside and then we feel pressure from other people; they rub us the wrong way, it feels like they push us around. We keep feeling more feelings, sometimes feelings get so big it feels like we’ll just explode. (Pretend you’re going to pop it.)  

If we let feelings out all of a sudden who know where we’ll end up. (Let balloon go and watch it fly around the room.) But when there is a stressful or traumatic event and we feel _____(have child name feelings again) we can release them a little at a time by playing it out and talking it out (slowly release the air from the balloon) and pretty soon we’re back to being flexible and bendy and just feeling better. How about we get started playing and working to let go of that stress?  

Finding Your Safe Place   1. Introduce “safe place” as a place that you imagine is peaceful and quiet, and where you can feel happy. Nobody bothers you and nothing bad happens there; this is a place that feels good to you.  

2. Offer child options to build a model draw a picture or make a safe place in the sandtray. Discourage having it be a hiding place.  

3. Have child notice what they hear, see, touch and smell.  

4. Discuss ways they can use their safe place as they move into more intense material during therapy. If picture make a copy so they can take original with them. Pictures of the sandtray can also help clients make the image concrete and take that image with them.  

Standard Story Stems for Standardized Release Play (Bretherton, Oppenheim, Buchsbaum & Emde 1990)  

1. Child’s Birthday – Have child select a figure for themselves and other family members. Have a table and small birthday cake figure. Say it’s the child’s birthday, mom has made a cake and it is time for the party. Ask the child to get the table ready and then say “sow me and tell me what happens now.” Show the child how the figures can move and talk so the child knows what is expected in other stories that are played out. A prompt or inquiry may be made to encourage the child to continue the story or to address the main story issue. Ending the story may also require prompting the child: “How does this story end?”  

2. Spilled Juice – Have child select family figures (mom, dad, boy, girl) and present a table and pitcher. Tell the child to play the child (same sex child that represents the self). One of the children accidentally spills juice at the dinner table. The ask the child to, “show me and tell me what happens next.  

3. Three’s a Crowd - Select three figures, all same sex as client, and a ball. Start telling and acting out the story with one child playing ball with a friend. Have another child, the sibling come and ask to play too. The friend threatens not to play if child doesn’t exclude the younger sibling. Ask the client to show and tell what happens next. If needed prompt the client to tell how the story ends.  

4. Monster in the Dark – It’s night and the family is downstairs while the child plays upstairs in the bedroom. Suddenly the lights go out and the child hears a sound, which the child thinks is a monster. Therapist has parents and sibling figures sit on the couch downstairs. The other child is upstairs  

Toy Story – Have the child pick five toys in the playroom for you to tell a story with. Using the toys act out a story. Be sure to describe what the characters thought, felt and what action they took. Pick five toys for the child and encourage them to tell you a story. Prompt the child to also describe what the toys or figures were thinking and feeling. With older kids this can be used as a warm-up activity that models identification of thoughts and feelings.  

Caterpillar to Butterfly Treatment Plan  (Cavett, 2012) Using construction paper, pipe cleaners scissors and decorations; like glitter and stickers help your young client to make a caterpillar, cocoon and butterfly. These are pasted on a piece of side by side with room underneath to list the client’s symptoms, problems or behaviors to change. Talk about how the cocoon is like when we feel _____(cue child to name a feeling); angry, sad disappointed, bad about ourselves, ashamed guilty, lost. We think nothing’s going to get better, we’re not safe, or bad things will keep happening. Under the cocoon list what needs to be changed; the presenting problems. Under the cocoon list therapy interventions and activities that will help. Under the cocoon list the treatment goals. Have child write these if they wish. This can be placed in the child’s file or a therapy notebook that includes their pictures, stories, lists of resources, coping tools and positive qualities.  

Serenity List – With older kids talk about the Serenity Prayer; accepting what you can’t change and changing what you can. Together with the child make a two lists; one for things to accept, one for things to work on changing. This is helpful with kids whose parents are divorcing, who are dealing with losses, disappointments, or parents with problems. This is good for identifying goals to work on.
Using Release Techniques with Toddlers and Young Children (Gainsbauer and Siegel, 1995) – This approach, based on Levy's specific release technique, was used with traumatized infants and toddlers in a medical setting. They found that "behavioral memories" related to behavioral, emotional and sensory experience can be acted out with play materials. In their approach they would:

1. Introduce play materials that represent aspects of trauma situation
2. Allow the child to play out “what happens next”
3. Encourage repetition to allow for bringing feelings to the surface and integrating them in adaptive ways.

Therapist’s role is more active in providing the language to label feelings and concepts like mad, sad, scared and doggie-owie and mommy gone. The therapist must also convey empathy through modeling feelings about the hurt and by comforting the child. Parents need to be present to help explain what the child is playing out, to comfort the child and restore a sense of trust.

Knock the Blocks Down/Finding the Anger in my Body (Cabe, 1999) – using large cardboard or foam blocks build a “wall” high enough so the child can kick it over. Stand about six feet back side by side with the child. Ask the child to think of what has been making him angry. Tell him that he gets to kick the blocks down but as he and you approach the blocks notice where he is feeling the anger in his body. Talk about tightness in the chest, throat and neck. Ask the child to notice his muscle tensing as he and you take each step toward the blocks. Ask if he notices his heart beating faster. Just as you approach the blocks stop him from kicking the blocks. Back up 6 feet and start over; have him notice the tightness and muscle tension with each step toward the blocks and continue talking about how anger builds in our bodies. After 2-3 repetitions then let him kick the blocks and repeat if he wants to. It is also helpful to have the child tell the blocks what they’re angry about as they kick them. Discuss how our bodies react when we’re angry and how we can use those reactions as signals to re-direct ourselves. (The slowing down and stopping helps kids practice inhibiting their angry reaction and then choosing how to discharge that anger (fight response).

My Life has Gone Kerplunk – Use Kerplunk game to discuss ways in which the child’s life has fallen apart. Children who are dealing with divorce, death in the family, moving or multiple stressors experience many little and some big losses. As we build the “nest” with sticks I talk about what their life was like, their home and how they had a nest that held things together. When we start to play; pulling out each stick we identify something that has changed or been lost. At first pulling out sticks doesn’t cause much change. As more sticks are pulled out more marbles fall and go kerplunk, then we identify the biggest change. Usually children are ready to play the game again but I will quickly suggest we build another nest. I then talk about how; with the adults in their life and therapy, they will re-build their lives. We pause to reflect on our nest that is strong enough to hold up all those marbles. Then we focus on the game and see who can make the fewest marbles go kerplunk.

The Fairy Godmother and the Parts of Me I Don’t Like (Oaklander, 1988, 2006) – Discuss with child how we all have parts of ourselves that we don’t like and might even hate. As aspects of the self; the senses, body, intellect and emotions, are disowned the child doesn’t feel good about themselves. This part can take over, like if I did something stupid I may say “I’m stupid!” as if, that’s who I am.

1. Have the child identify that part; draw it, make it out of clay, or use a puppet/figure/doll to play that part.
2. Have them show and tell you about what is bad or unlikeable about that part of them.
3. Now ask the child to talk to that part; making critical, angry statements; “Tell that part what you think of it…”
4. Find a nurturing part (The Fairy Godmother) Now, ask the child what would a kind, accepting Fairy Godmother say to that part.
5. Have the Fairy Godmother say those positive things to the puppet. For example; “At least you try things. You’re a nice kid and nice kids don’t deserve to be hurt.” She also needs to say, “I will always be with you and never leave you.”

Superhero (Kelsey, 2008) – Discuss superheroes that child is familiar with. Ask the child to pretend she is a superhero who has never been invented before. Have her imagine what she would look like, what her superhero powers are and how she would use them. For example, Spiderman looks like a spider in a web can climb tall buildings and capture mean guys. Then have the child draw a picture of this superhero. When this is done ask the child about her superhero, how is this superhero like her, what the powers are and how they are used. Write these down and save with the picture. These may be used later with later stages of release play. For example, the child plays out scenario about a trauma and changes the main character to her superhero.

Puzzle Pieces – The purpose of this activity is to help kids look at the puzzle behind their behaviors and trauma related symptoms. Together with child draw and cut out a 4 piece puzzle with pieces large enough to write on (3x4 inches). Use these to talk about how traumatic memories scatter and then are stored in different parts of the brain. (A picture of the brain is helpful to show where thoughts and feelings come from.) The 4 pieces represent; images of the traumatic event, sensory/body memories, emotional memories, and thoughts/beliefs about the trauma. This can be used as a follow up to specific release play that re-constructs traumatic memories. The child can see in a tangible way how thoughts and feelings they have now are connected to the trauma.