

## **Therapeutic Power of Play: Improving the adult/child relationship through play**

### Basics:

- Use minimal materials or toys.
- The adult is engaging, exciting, attuned and nurturing.
- The adult notices the child's expressions and paces games to match the child's need.
- The adult touches the child in a way that's nurturing but not over-stimulating.
- The adult focuses on non-verbal communication. The use of voice, facial expressions, gestures, posture, eye contact, and rhythm communicates directly with a child's right brain, that part of the brain which processes relational information, but which is non-verbal.
- The play works in the "here and now" at the pre-verbal, pre-symbolic level, which benefits children who are not developmentally or emotionally prepared for non-directive play therapy.

### Rules:

- No hurts. Though this is a rule, 'hurts' WILL happen either by accident or on purpose. The adult responds by stopping the game, checking the child, and applying lotion. Some children won't mention they were hurt, but if you see it, respond.
- Stick together.
- Have fun!
- The adult is in charge.

### Qualities Necessary from the Adult:

- Exhibit confidence. Be appealing, responsive, take charge, spontaneous. Focus on here and now.
- Use physical contact, eye contact, make your presence felt throughout.
- Exclusive focus on the child.

### Messages the Play Gives to Your Child: You don't say these things but instead show them through our actions

- I accept you even if you are having trouble right now, and I will show you by sticking with you and helping you cope. I will not abandon you.
- I want to be with you and I want you to be with me, and I will show you by bringing you into my activities and by joining you in yours.
- You are important in my eyes, and I will show you be appreciating anything you make, say or do, and by listening to you and believing in what you say.
- I will take care of you when you need caring. Even if you do not let on that you need caring, I will know and be there for you.

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*Play Activities by Dimension:* All activities should be conducted in an upbeat atmosphere of warmth, spontaneity, optimism, cheerfulness and fun!

- **Structure:** With these activities, there should be no doubt that the adult is in charge. This assures the child that there is order. This can be very useful for children who are overactive or over-stimulated.

Examples:

- Peanut Butter and Jelly
- Pop the Bubble
- Toilet Paper Bust Out
- Draw around hands
- Row Row Row Your Boat
- Red light – Green light

- **Engagement:** Engaging activities make a connection with the child. You focus on the child in an intensive and personal way. These activities offer pleasant stimulation, variety, and a fresh view of life; this allows children to understand that surprises can be fun. This dimension can be especially helpful for children who are withdrawn, avoidant of contact, or rigid. Intrusive forms of engagement should not be used with children who are frequently agitated or who are easily over-stimulated.

Examples:

- Beep and Honk
- Cotton Ball Hide
- Checkups
- Popcorn Toes
- Pop cheeks

- **Nurture:** Nurturing activities are soothing, calming, quieting, caretaking activities that make the world feel safe, predictable, warm, and secure. These activities reassure the child that the adult can provide comfort and stability. These activities meet children's needs to relax and be taken care of, and build on children's inner representation of being lovable and valued. These can be especially useful for children whose behaviors are overactive, aggressive, or pseudo-mature.

Examples:

- Caring for Hurts
- Slippery Slippery Slip
- Soft and Floppy
- Twinkle Song
- Decorate Child
- Feeding

- **Challenge:** Challenging activities should be fun and require a partnership. They help the child take mild, age-appropriate risks, and promote feelings of competence and confidence. These can be useful for children who are withdrawn, timid, or rigid.

Examples:

- Straight Face Challenge
- Cotton Ball or Feather Guess
- Bubble Tennis
- Newspaper Punch
- Thumb Wrestle