

PLAY THERAPY

**Consult Liaison**  
Psychiatry Service

children'shealth? 

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## Introduction

**Play therapy at Children's Health<sup>SM</sup>** seeks to serve the mental health needs of children and their families impacted by complicated medical circumstances by providing developmentally supportive therapy through play, a child's natural mode of communication.

As a result of hospitalization and/or chronic illness, children may face a variety of experiences where they feel powerless or out of control. This can result in children feeling sad or anxious. Children may also exhibit other challenges, such as tantrums or acting out. They often feel afraid and lonely but find it difficult to express these feelings with words.

## What is play therapy?

**Play therapy provides a safe environment for children to express their feelings and gain a sense of control to better cope with medical experiences.**

This intervention is evidence-based for children who are developmentally 2-10 years old. Play therapy is a way of being with the child that honors their unique developmental level and looks for ways of helping in the language of the child - play. Just as adults can talk about their problems and concerns, children naturally use play to communicate confusion and stress in their world. Through the unique experience of play therapy and the special relationship with a caring, safe and accepting therapist, children can better develop skills to cope with illness and hospitalization.




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## Who is a registered play therapist?

A registered play therapist (RPT) is a licensed mental health professional who has earned a master's or doctoral degree in a mental health field with significant clinical experience and supervision<sup>1</sup>. To obtain a certification to become a registered play therapist, one must have advanced, specialized training, experience and supervision<sup>1</sup>.

## What does the research say?

Research supports play therapy as an effective intervention for children who present with anxious or depressive symptoms, challenging behaviors, self-concept problems, reactions to traumatic events, developmental delays, social-emotional challenges and relational difficulties<sup>2</sup>.

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## What is child-parent relationship training (CPRT)?

**CPRT is aimed at strengthening the relationships between parents/guardians and their children.** CPRT is an evidence-based treatment that teaches caregivers to effectively manage behavior issues and support their children emotionally. Generally, CPRT is for parents who have children between the developmental ages of 2 and 10, but it can be adapted for younger or older children.

## Who should I refer internally?

**Children who are developmentally 2-10 years old, as well as more non-verbal adolescents with:**

- Psychosocial/psychological concerns
- Difficulties with coping/adjustment to hospitalization/illness
- Anxiety surrounding hospital/medical staff
- Behavioral issues or adherence concerns

## Who should I refer to the community?

Patients with mental health concerns not related to their medical diagnosis can be referred to the community. A community list of therapists is available upon request.

## Resources/References

1. <https://www.a4pt.org/page/ParentsCornerHomePag>
2. Bratton, S., Ray, D., Rhine, T., & Jones, L. (2005). The efficacy of play therapy with children: A Meta-analytic review of the outcome research. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 36*(4), 376-390.
3. Lin, Y., & Bratton, S. C. (2015). A meta-analytic review of child-centered play therapy approaches. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 93*(1), 45-58. <http://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2015.00180.x>
4. Stulmaker, H. L., & Ray, D. C. (2015). Child-centered play therapy with young children who are anxious: A controlled trial. *Children and Youth Services Review, 57*, 127-133. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2015.08.005>

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Want to refer a patient or need more information?

Call **214-456-8115** for more information.