

## **Group Theraplay Training Report**

### **Background**

Theraplay is a child and family therapy for building and enhancing attachment, self-esteem, trust in others and joyful engagement. It is based on the expected patterns of playful, healthy interaction between parent and child. Theraplay interactions focus on four vital assets found in parent-child relationships: Structure, Engagement, Nurture, and Challenge. Theraplay sessions create an active, emotional connection between the child and parent or caregiver, resulting in a changed view of the self as worthy, lovable, positive and rewarding. Following previous level 1 training I have had the opportunity to use these skills in practice as a school social worker with children and their parents and I was keep to develop skills for schools and sensory play (Sensory Learning & Play). As a result I completed the Group Theraplay training on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2016. In treatment, I (Theraplay therapist) guide the parent and child through playful, fun games, developmentally challenging activities, and tender, nurturing activities. The very act of engaging each other in this way helps the parent regulate the child's behavior and communicate love, joy, and safety to the child. It helps the child feel secure, cared for, connected and worthy. This is called "building relationships from the inside out."

### **Theraplay Research**

There has been some useful Theraplay Outcome Research which I have shared below;

Theraplay has evidence-based status; it has been rated as demonstrating "promising research evidence" by The California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse (December, 2009); the Clearinghouse rates programs on a scale of 1-5. Ratings from 1-3 indicate that the program is well-supported by research, with a rating of 1 being the highest attainable. Theraplay has also been rated as a promising practice by Washington State Inventory of Evidence-Based, Research-Based, and Promising Practices. For Prevention and Intervention Services for Children and Juveniles in Child Welfare, Juvenile Justice, and Mental Health Systems under "Mental Health". The article regarding; the effectiveness of Theraplay for the clinical treatment of adoptive families outlines a model for integrating family systems theory with Theraplay to create a new

approach entitled Whole Family Theraplay (WFT), as well as provides a preliminary report of a pilot study demonstrating the efficacy of that model. WFT integrates Theraplay with family systems approaches (Structural and Experiential Family Therapies) to treat parents and all the siblings within adoptive families. The findings indicate that WFT treatment may lead to statistically significant benefits in regard to family communication, adults' interpersonal relationships, and children's overall behavioral functioning )Whole Family Theraplay: Integrating Family Systems Theory and Theraplay to Treat Adoptive Families *Adoption Quarterly*, 16 (3-4), 175-200: 2016).

### **Group Theraplay Research**

Theraplay is a play therapy approach that helps children form better relationships and attachments with others. It focuses on the nonverbal aspects of interaction. This study reports on a Group Theraplay program in a special school for children with developmental disabilities. Twenty-three students, arranged into four groups, participated in the year-long program that used Theraplay principles to enhance their social development. Results were compared with a group of 15 students who served as the comparison control. Data from the Social Responsiveness Scale showed that students from the Theraplay group had significant improvement in the subscale of "social communication" when compared with the comparison group. Feedback from teachers suggested new ideas in working with this group of children. A discussion of the rationale behind why Theraplay works for these children was presented. The limitations of this study and directions for future research are addressed (Effectiveness of Group Theraplay on enhancing social skills among children with developmental disabilities). A primary objective of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of Theraplay on reducing internalizing problems among children. Described as at-risk for developing internalizing disorders, 46 children in grades 2-4 were randomly allocated to either the Theraplay condition (weekly Group Theraplay for 8 weeks) or the wait-list control condition. A standardized measure of internalizing symptoms (CBCL) was completed before and after the 8-week period. Results showed that children from the Theraplay condition showed significantly fewer internalizing symptoms when compared to the waitlist group (Theraplay in the Chinese world: An intervention program for Hong Kong children with internalizing problems: 2009).

(Theraplay Treatment Outcome Research: 2016)

## **Group Theraplay Training**

Theraplay can benefit children with a wide range of presenting problems; Attachment insecurity, developmental delays, autistic spectrum, ADHD, withdrawn, low in mood, angry or fearful. Group Theraplay training is for professionals who want to use Theraplay in classrooms, nurseries, residential settings or with family groups. The training I attended was; intensive, interactive and practical, it included the opportunity for each trainee to lead a group activity; it included video examples of group work and discussion around techniques. Especially in the areas I am passionate about, for example; special educational needs and traumatised children & young people and more importantly how to engage with them effectively to promote a therapeutic environment and result in long term change for their emotional and mental wellbeing in a fun and nurturing way.

## **Outcomes**

- ✓ How to apply Theraplay principles to group treatment
- ✓ How to plan and structure a Theraplay group
- ✓ How to adapt group Theraplay to different populations
- ✓ How to manage resistance and other problems
- ✓ Describe the steps toward implementing group sessions internally
- ✓ Skill development in how to use group rules and techniques through practice

Now I have attended the training as part of my role as a social worker I will be able to deliver; Theraplay group sessions in schools, at the sensory centre and in the community, as well as, family group Theraplay. This is a great development in my career and invaluable investment in children & young people who will benefit. As I plan for future CPD opportunities, I am eager to conduct research into Theraplay in my local community to help develop an evidence base for future work.

## Reference

Siu, A.F.Y. (2014). Effectiveness of Group Theraplay® on enhancing social skills among children with developmental disabilities. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, 23(4), 187-203.

Siu, A.F.Y. (2009). Theraplay in the Chinese world: An intervention program for Hong Kong children with internalizing problems. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, 18(1), 1-12. (Download .pdf)

Theraplay Treatment Outcome Research,  
<http://www.theraplay.org/index.php/theraplay-research> September 2016

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