

# Play Therapy

## The How and Why of Choosing Toys

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**Why do children play?**

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**What are the functions of play?**

**How do therapists use children's play?**



# **What is play-therapy and why do we use it in the treatment of children?**

- 1) Children can not free associate**
- 2) Children can not recount events well, particularly if they were frightening, upsetting, traumatic and/or not well understood by them**
- 3) Important things happening in their lives can not be expressed in words frequently**
- 4) Yet, they usually express or act out in play many of the events described above**

# **Why do we use play-therapy with children?**

- 5) The child's capacity to communicate depends on his age and other variables.**
- 6) Up to 4 or 5, they express many of their feelings and wishes quite openly, if they have the language for it, and the cognitive capacity to recognize them**
- 7) They sort of wear their instincts on their sleeves. He/she may say "I am going to marry my mum and daddy will go away"**

# **Why do we use play-therapy with children?**

- 8) With the resolution of the oedipus complex and the consequent establishment of a more operational super-ego, instinctual wishes and feelings that were expressed freely, become conflictual and as a result go into hiding**
- 9) Guilt and shame are a more prominent factor in the developmental equation from now onwards**



# **Why do we use play-therapy with children?**

- 10) Thus from that point onwards, and including all of latency, one can see the manifestations of their instinctual conflicts, wishes, and feelings, in the form of derivatives that are more visible in play, behaviors, attitudes, likes and dislikes.**
- 11) Kind of a “first line of disguises” that are in sharp contrast with the openness of the under five**

# **Why do we use play-therapy with children?**

- 12) It seems that play is like a more neutral ground where the derivatives of instinctual forces are permitted to appear, perhaps because for the most part, the conflict with the external world and/or the child's conscience, is minimized because it is only play and not reality**
- 13) Play is thus kind of an experimental ground, similar to what fantasies are in the adult world**

# **Why do we use play-therapy with children?**

- 14) Because many fears, feelings, traumas, conflicts, etc in the child, particularly the young child, are expressed as derivatives in the language of play**
- 15) Play is thus “the language” by which they communicate indirectly, what is going on with them, either internally or externally**
- 16) All child therapists “must learn this language”**



# Why do we use play-therapy with children?

- 17) With the very young, most if not all important communications, take place through play
- 18) As they grow older, an increasingly more important role is played by verbal communications, until finally, they substitute play
- 19) Play for play sake is essentially useless as a therapeutic tool, does not accomplish anything

# **What do you do with the play?**

- 20) Thus, play is the language of children to express themselves, and that language needs to be understood, by the therapists**
- 21) Learning the language of play requires much training**
- 22) Children's play, interests and conflicts, change from one developmental stage to the next**
- 23) What does play contributes to the child otherwise?**

# How do we then use play?

- We use it to try and understand the problems the child is confronting, and how they effect his/her development.
- They may be developmental conflicts that they are failing to master and that produce anger, fear, guilt or shame, or lead to ego inhibitions etc
- They may be conflicts with the external world which expects too much, makes excessive or inappropriate demands, is abusive or traumatic etc



# How do we then use play?

- Or, is not providing the child with the required nurturing, necessary for development to proceed normally, at any given phase
- For as long as we see that the child lacks the capacity to communicate verbally, in a meaningful way.

# Up to what age we use play?

- Being a very verbal child is not equivalent with the capacity to communicate feelings and conflicts, through language
- Clearly, there is a gradual transition, from play to talking when the child matures, and reaches the appropriate age
- Play then, gradually recedes into the background, until it may finally disappear

# **What kind of toys?**

- **Toys are chosen following a large number of variables:**
  - a) Age of the child and stage of development**
  - b) Intellectual capacity of the child**
  - c) Child observed spontaneous preferences**
  - d) Nature of the problems or conflicts of any given child**
  - e) Suitability of specific toys to express in play their problems or conflicts**



# **What kind of toys (continued)?**

- f) Safety of the toys**
- g) Parental preferences or objections etc**
- h) Cost of the toys**
  - i) Sturdiness of the toys etc, etc**
  - j) Potential dangerousness of the toys**
- k) Toys that lend themselves to verbal interactions not silent play**

# For what sex and what ages?

- The sex of the child, needs to be taken into account while thinking of which toys will be the most appropriate
- Boys and girls easily share certain toys and activities (houses, family figures, animals, paper, colors, scissors etc) but other are more specific to one sex or the other
- For example baby dolls or anything that resembles or suggests maternal functions are more appropriate for girls

## **What kind of toys (continued)?**

- **Similarly the age of the child, skills, intelligence as already mentioned, is determinant in the toys and or activities chosen**
- **I believe that all therapists must learn to make some simple toys out of paper.**
- **Here are some examples.....**

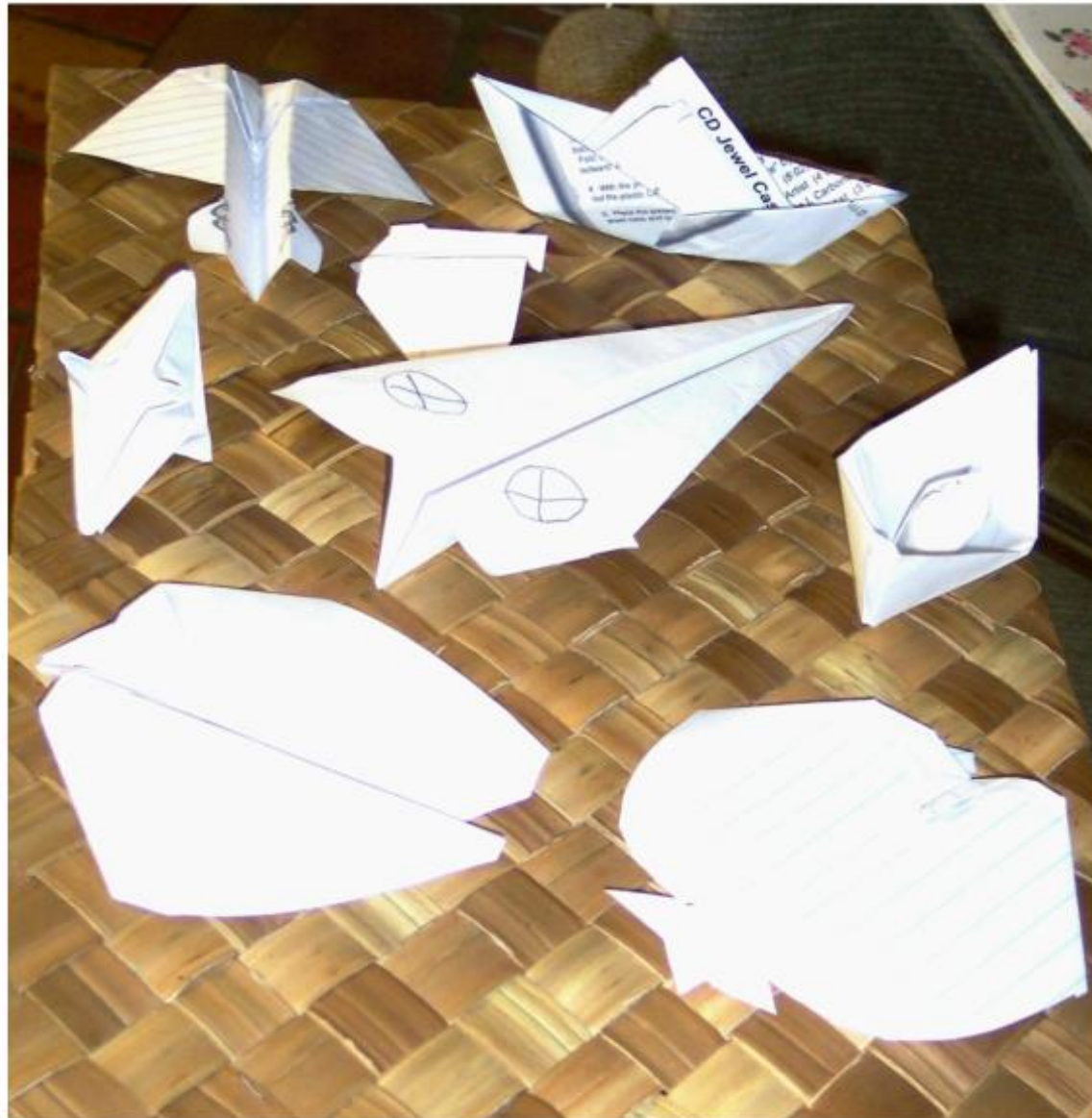


## **Therapists skills in making simple toys**

- **For example, paper hats, paper boats that can float in water, different types of paper airplanes that can fly in the consulting room etc.**
- **Such things are highly attractive to children and tend to cement the relationship when used appropriately**
- **Familiarity with Origami paper constructions is highly desirable. Examples will be shown**

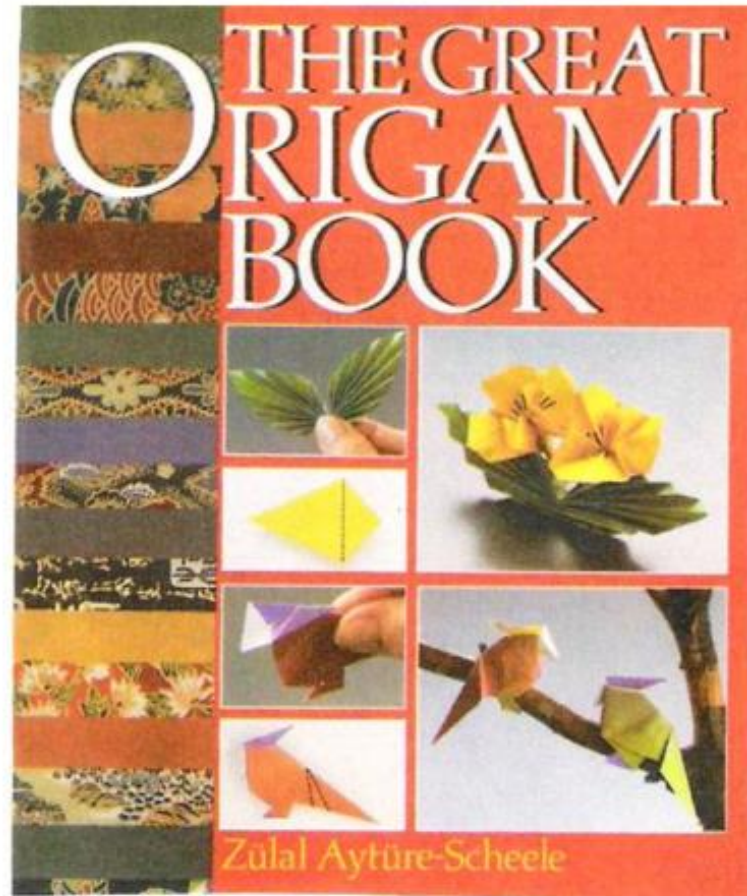








# Therapists skills in making simple toys



# EXAMPLES OF TOYS AND COMMENTS ON THEIR USEFULNESS



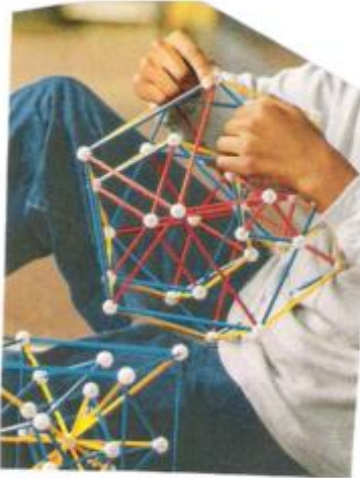


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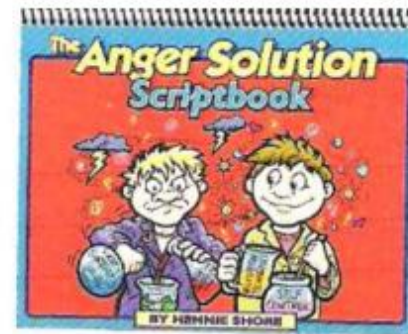


# EXAMPLES OF TOYS AND COMMENTS ON THEIR USEFULNESS



**CWCP**

**Give Children  
the Words  
They Need To  
Control Their  
Anger**



**A Card Game That Teaches  
the Top Ten Anger Solutions**

This engaging card game teaches children effective ways to resolve their anger as they match 10 different Anger



Solutions to common provocative situations. Situation cards are coded so that players can only match appropriate solutions with the 40 different situations. The game is designed to be played in counseling session, the classroom, or even the home. A great way to practice anger control techniques. For ages 7-12.

***The Anger Solution***

# Be creative, think outside the box!

For example, with a child whose mother or father may be away for any reason, perhaps in the army etc, and who is anxious or worried about this, you may want to introduce a globe of the world, or maps to show where the absent parent is, or toy telephones to pretend you are talking to them etc.





# Which toys to avoid and why?

- Generally games that take a long time to finish do not lend themselves for the expression of the usual childhood conflicts.
- Such things as chess, monopoly etc. are not useful or desirable in most cases
- Short, very interactive games are useful, because they may allow for discussions of the child inability to loose, follow rules, tendency to cheat, low frustration tolerance, envy of the adults skills, and the like



# Not desirable



# **What about parents attitudes to certain toys?**

- **For example, guns or other aggressive toys**
- **Or sexually explicit dolls**

# **How do you choose what toys for which child?**

- 1) Ask family for the child interests, preferences etc.**
- 2) He may already has chosen certain toys to act out and express his/her conflicts**
- 3) In your evaluation interviews you should find out what he plays with, what he would like to play with etc.**
- 4) Never overdo the parents capacity to buy toys**



## **Need to explain to parents why do you play with their children**

- **Generally most parents do not understand how playing with the therapist will benefit their children and indeed just playing will not do much good**
- **Thus, education of parents in this regard, at a level that they can understand and make sense of, is essential in most cases**

## **How many toys for a given child, many or few?**

- **Generally speaking you do not want a large number of toys for any given child, 3 or 4 is enough when well selected.**
- **These toys are complemented by paper, pencils, color pencils, copybooks, occasionally scissors, if the age and interest of the child justifies it.**
- **Some therapists may keep in the play room specific things such as a house, dolls etc that can be used by everyone.**



# Other Issues

- At Hampstead (Anna Freud's Clinic) all the play therapy rooms were provided with a wall with individual cupboards, with locks.
- Each child had his own cupboard with a lock and key for his toys. No other child had access to this locker for obvious reasons.
- On arrival to the session the child was given the key and was allowed to select from his toys, by himself, the ones he wanted to use that day
- We strongly recommend this method

# **When do you add or take away toys and if so why?**

## **Add toys, games, etc:**

- **As the therapy evolves, things become clearer, new conflicts are observed, the child grows older, there might be a need to add some suitable toy or toys**

## **Take away toys, games, activities:**

- **When they are used as a resistance**
- **When they are used inappropriately such as destructive purposes that are not acceptable or should not be tolerated**



## **Where do you keep the toys and why?**

- 1) Each child is to have his own space (not disturbed by siblings). This helps in developing a good relationship to the child**
- 2) It avoids other children destroying the child's productions that may be in progress**
- 3) Avoids children seeing the other kids toys, and then wanting them for him/herself, or at least similar ones!**

## **What about paper, pencils, color pencils, pens, crayons and the like?**

- As mentioned, these are regularly provided for children in certain age groups.**
- According to age, skills, intelligence etc is the number of colors or crayons provided, as well as the materials for cutting (pastels, oils etc should generally be avoided, except in exceptional cases)**
- Cutting with scissors is more meaningful if you choose the material, not only according to age, but according to the conflicts of the child. Never use pointed scissors**



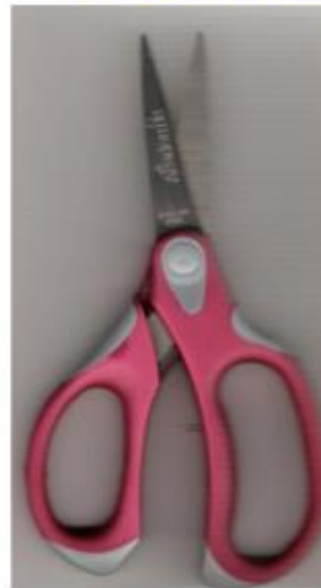
## What about scissors, cutting activities, etc?

- Scissors only after a certain age and only in carefully selected children
- Should always be of the blunted type

**This**



**Not this**



## **What about sand, water , plasticine, etc?**

- **Though water and sand may be highly desirable at certain ages and in relation to certain conflicts they are generally avoided due to the incredible mess that can result from their use.**
- **Plasticine is more desirable and some children use it in highly creative manners. Others, of course, can make a significant mess with it. If you are going to provide choose which type (some more messy than others) and ideally various colors**
- **Again it lend itself to make families , houses, animals etc that may be appropriate to the circumstances of the child**

## **What about sand, water , plasticine, etc?**

**Some therapists may use sand and or water in limited and controlled quantities, by using containers of small size, as shown below. But even this can become very messy and troublesome with some children and indeed do some damage to the office**





# **What about the room characteristics to be used for play therapy?**

- **Not your fancy office with valuable objects**
- **A place of reasonable size, a safe place devoid of valuable objects**
- **Washable floors**
- **Washable walls**
- **Washable markers**
- **Washable everything**

# What toys to definitely avoid?

- 1) Monopoly. Why?
- 2) Chess and similar things, reading comics, Nintendo games and the like. Why?
- 3) Objects that can become a weapon
- 4) Objects with loose parts, screws (that can be swallowed or aspired), or with sharp edges, pointed, etc. Objects painted inappropriately (lead paint, loose paint etc)
- 5) Things that lead to or tend to encourage unnecessarily rough or dangerous interplay

# **Children wanting to take the toys home**

- 1) Explain from the beginning, that toys are not to be taken home, even when the child promises to bring it back. One of the few rules generally used in play therapy**
- 2) Are there exceptions to this rule?**



# **Let's discuss again the usefulness of some toys**

- 1) Families**
- 2) Houses**
- 3) Babies**
- 4) Dolls and of what type? Anatomically correct, crying, talking, boys, girls, etc.**
- 5) Toy toilets**
- 6) Various types of animals including aggressive ones**

# What about writing stories?

- Scrapbooks in which events, feelings shown in the sessions can be chronicled, are frequently a useful and important device in the treatment of children.
- Meaningful stories concerning the child and his conflicts can be written, at times by the child himself, at times dictated to the therapist or as part of a collaborative effort
- The feelings or characters that appear in the sessions, such as Mr Angry, Mr Sad, Mr Lonely, Mr Bully, Mr Frightened etc, can be described, with efforts at understanding why they came this particular day

# What about comics?

- Generally should be avoided because the child immerses himself in the reading and excludes the therapist and any talk of his/her problems
- Thus, they should not be provided during the sessions or allowed in the sessions, if brought from home. (Another general rule)
- Yet, I remember that in the waiting room for children at The Hampstead Clinic, there were many comic books. On occasion one child will bring into the therapy a comic with a story that fitted him/her to a t. So, glance at them, just in case, but as a general rule avoid them



## **What about computers, video games , etc?**

- **Nintendo and video games should be a no no in all cases as already mentioned. They are essentially used for the purposes of excluding the therapist and as such they are a resistance. Remember too that some children are really like addicted to them outside the sessions anyhow**
- **Computer games, or other computer activities, if well selected can be used on occasion. Drawing and painting can be done in computers by gifted children, and if directed in the right direction, might be useful (parents fighting, people sad, being punished, etc)**

## **What about naming feelings in the play with animals, in writing files, stories etc?**

- 1) A lion can be angry, hungry, has killing feelings, destroying feelings, etc.**
- 2) A baby can be sad, crying, hungry, or smiling, pleased, laughing, happy etc**
- 3) All the above can be chronicled in folders or scrapbooks with specific names**





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