



More Synergetic Play Therapy

Learning Objectives:

1. Discuss what it means to “overcome a challenge” in the play therapy process
2. Describe what it means to become the external regulator in a session to help a child integrate their challenges
3. Understand ways to conceptualize what is happening in the playroom and the child’s work

Therapeutic Stages & Tracking Process: (see Handout)

The SPT Therapeutic Stages (The Curve) is a tool to help you have language and left-brain dialogue about what’s happening in the playroom so you can know where you are in the play therapy process and communicate it to parents and other adults in the child’s life.

- Orient: The child will orient to you, the toys, and the room
- Test: The child will test you. This is a one-time experience. After that, testing is usually part of the Set Up. You will be tested for two reasons:
 - 1.
 - 2.
- Working Stage: Children will do everything in their power to help you understand what it feels like to be them. They will use their verbal stories, play, body language, tone of voice, etc. to help us understand. In the playroom, you may be asked to be an active participant or an observer of their play.

Notes:

Assessing Emotional Age: (see Handout)

Tracking on the Curve

- There will always be a primary developmental question, although many can occur simultaneously

Notes:

The Funnel Analogy (Window of Tolerance):

- After watching a child play in the sandbox with a funnel, Lisa created the funnel analogy as a way to conceptualize what is happening in the playroom.
- The funnel itself represents the child’s window of tolerance in any given moment and/or mind’s capacity to integrate sensory data of an experience.
- The water coming into the funnel represents the sensory data of the experience itself.

- As the child interacts with the world, the water flows into the funnel. In most moments, the sensory data is within the window of tolerance (within the funnel's capacity to hold it) and therefore the water flows through the funnel and gets integration (the experience gets integration).
- In challenging events, it's like an increase of water flowing into the funnel. Some of the water overflows, some of it goes down, and some of it gets backed up. The funnel is "flooded".
- It is important to note that in every experience some data (parts of the experience) goes down the funnel.
- In the playroom, the child is bringing to life the challenging thoughts, feelings and sensations that have not gone down the funnel. In a sense, children are engaging in exposure therapy to give themselves another opportunity in the context of a safe environment to integrate the experience. The therapist's own window of tolerance and regulatory capacity support the child in moving towards the data that originally could not be integrated.

Notes:

Types of Reflections: (see Handout)

It is important that the therapist's self-reflective statements are used in addition to observation and tracking statements in the sessions.

Note: As play therapists learn SPT, it can be common to overuse self-reflective statements and over regulate when regulation is not actually needed. Remember, only "rock the baby" when the baby needs to be rocked as authenticity and attunement are key!

Notes:

To Work On:

1. Track one of my clients with the following: Chart them on the SPT Therapeutic Stages; Identify their "Starting Points;" and Identify their "Emotional Age."
2. If I can, either audio or video record a session. Track my types of reflections to see which ones I do often and which ones I don't do and practice these.

Quiz Review:

1. Therapists can feel lost and struggle to track a child's play because play therapy itself is often a right-brain process.
2. In the therapeutic stages, the line curving down represents that the child's symptoms or behaviors will typically get worse before getting better.

3. Orienting starts when the child is in the playroom.
4. When testing, the child is looking for two things from the therapist: can I be myself? and Are you going to be you?
5. The therapist sets a boundary the moment they know that the child will not be able to stay in their window of tolerance.
6. To set a boundary, the therapist acknowledges and redirects.
7. We “rock the baby” when the baby is regulated.
8. Once regulation/overcoming the challenge is occurring 30 percent of the session or more, the child has moved into the “empowerment” phase of the Therapeutic Stages (ie. SPT Curve).
9. The child is done with the play therapy process when their emotional age matches their chronological age.
10. One way to track the child’s progress is to identify the “starting points” and “what you would love to see” at the beginning of each therapeutic cycle. This allows the therapist to understand what empowerment and overcoming the challenges will look like.
11. Every time you move into another layer of the Therapeutic Stages curve, you will have new “starting points”.
12. In the funnel analogy, the funnel represents the brain and the water represents the brain’s capacity to take in data.
13. In all events that are perceived as challenging, something goes down the funnel and gets integrated.
14. We actively look for reminders of the data that didn’t go down the funnel so that we have another opportunity to integrate it.
15. Children are in a sense engaging in exposure therapy when they are in the playroom – they bring to life the thoughts, feelings, sensations and some details related to the perceived challenging events in order to have another opportunity to have a relationship with it, so that it can be integrated.
16. It can be challenging to interpret play because sometimes what the child is bringing to life in the playroom is a felt sense, a feeling, a sensory issue or a sound and not literal parts of an event.
17. During “The Set Up”, the therapist will feel the developmental question related to the emotional age of the play.
18. During the “Is the World Ok?” developmental question, the emphasis is on the self and whether the self is ok.
19. When you first try to assess the emotional age of the child, you are going to look in the first three developmental questions.
20. It is important to recognize that when a child comes in towards the beginning of the process and they seem to be in empowerment that they probably are not.
21. We can have multiple perceptions of challenges within one developmental stage.

22. Body based reflections include describing what is being experienced in your body and also making movements that demonstrate what is happening in the body (example, taking a breath).

23. A non-intrusive way to have a child connect to their body is to name something going on in yours?

24. When the therapist names the feelings in the play, it is important to say "You are making me feel....."

25. Observational reflections are "just the facts" and include describing what we observe happening in the play and also what the child is doing.

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