



SYNERGETIC
PLAY THERAPY™

Partnering with Caregivers Review

The Intake:

The Set Up/Offering begins at the first point of contact with the caregivers, which is often a phone call. Remember to get them in front of you as quickly as possible, so that they can borrow your nervous system. Get present and attune to the caregiver as you are stepping into the role of external regulator

Caregivers are coming into the intake typically anxious and worried that either they or their child will be judged. The SPT therapist understands the importance of making the “unknown known” and becoming their prefrontal cortex to help them begin to regulate through their experience.

- Suggest how the time together can be used, making sure to outline how much time each of you have for sharing
- Explain the SPT process. The use of visuals is often helpful as overwhelmed caregivers are limited in how much information they can auditorily process.
 1. Discuss the process in a way that is meaningful to both right brain and left brain caregivers. The more you communicate in terms of what is meaningful to the caregiver, the higher the level of engagement.
- Make sure to set goals that are age appropriate, not all or none and have a clear understanding of what mastery of the goal will look like
- Talk about money
- Talk about caregiver involvement in the process- When will you meet? Will they be a part of sessions?
- Listen for signs that the child may be highly anxious and struggle separating from the caregiver- if this is the case, plan for the caregiver being in the first session and discuss
- Remember: Whatever structure and clarity you don't create at the beginning will likely becoming a stumbling block during the process
- Remember: The relationship is the priority, not the collection of information. You are there to help give them a felt sense of you and to begin to regulate them through their dysregulation

Caregiver Check-In:

The check-in is the opportunity for you to engage the caregiver in the process and to share what their child is working on in therapy.

- Refer to Tips for Talking to Caregivers handouts for ideas on how to talk about the sessions
- Make sure link the play to the goal!
- Communicate in terms of what is most meaningful to the caregiver
- Remember, there is no such thing as a resistant caregiver. Only individuals who are being asked to do something that isn't aligned with their highest priorities or haven't made the connection between what you are saying and how it is meaningful to them. It is our responsibility to make the connection.

Working with Divorced Caregivers:

Boundaries and clear communication are the most important parts about navigating therapy with caregivers that are divorced/separated. Understanding if it is best for them to meet together or separate is important. If you need to meet separately,



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- Discuss payment and how payment will be handled
- If the financial situation is complicated, create a “financial agreement” that both sign
- Discuss when and whom you will have check-ins with
- Discuss who will bring the child to sessions and when
- For information on dealing with the dynamics that can arise, listen to the Lessons from the Playroom Podcast #45: Dueling Parents: Managing High Conflict Divorce in Play Therapy

Caregivers in the Play Room:

Once a caregiver becomes part of a session, the role of the SPT therapist becomes “coach”. The most important thing to understand is that the moment you have a caregiver join your play therapy sessions, you are now responsible for the regulation of three nervous systems—yours, the child’s, and the caregiver’s.

The therapist regulates the caregiver so that the caregiver can regulate the child.

- Do you know why the caregiver is in the session? Think of the decision to have the parents in the room as part of your treatment plan. If the parents need to be in there in order to accomplish the goal, then have them in there. If you don’t know why they are in there, then they probably don’t need to be in there.
- It is important to consider the following when deciding if the caregiver should be in a session:
 1. Do you know the caregivers’ trauma history?
 2. Does the caregiver want to be in the session? (Sometimes a resistant caregiver in the room can create a barrier, so the therapist needs to be willing to work with the resistance.)
 3. How wide is the caregiver’s window of tolerance for what the child is trying to integrate?
 4. How developed is the caregiver’s regulatory capacity?
 5. How emotionally available is the caregiver?
- If you know that a caregiver will be a part of sessions, it is important to do a “Training Session” to teach the caregiver what to expect, practice some of the skills and create more safety for the caregiver
- The parent sits on the floor next to you so that you can support the parent’s nervous system regulation.
- You become a coach.
- It is your responsibility to become the external regulator for both the parent and the child until the parent is able to fully take over.

SPT Caregiver Training Session: