

SYNERGETIC
PLAY THERAPY™

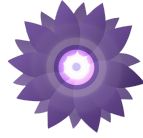
Partnering with Caregivers Review

Becoming a Parent/Caregiver's External Regulator:

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

As the child is supported in the play therapy process, it is important that we also aim to work with the parents and caregivers as much as possible, recognizing that they are part of the dynamic that brings the child into therapy. As external regulators, we support the re-patterning of their nervous system activation while also supporting a shift in the way they view their child and themselves. As the parent/caregiver borrows our regulatory capacity, we offer the parent/caregiver a new template of possibility for how to connect with themselves and thus with their child.

1. The therapist **supports the parent/caregiver in shifting his/her/their perceptions** related to the perceived challenging events and thoughts associated with their child.
2. **Attunement** between therapist and parent/caregiver is essential in order to heal disorganization in the lower brain stem and re-pattern their nervous system.
3. The therapist models **self-regulation** to the parent/caregiver, because people learn most through observation.
4. The therapist's ability to use mindfulness to be congruent and authentic in language and non-verbal signals allows the parent/caregiver to feel safe in the relationship and engage in **reflective awareness**.



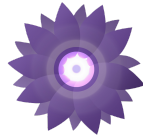
5. The parent/caregiver's symptoms are understood as **symptoms of dys-regulated states of the nervous system**.

6. The **therapist is the most important tool in the therapy room**. Stories are used to help facilitate the relationship between the therapist and the parent/caregiver. In SPT's truest form language is not required.

7. The therapist supports the parent/caregiver in getting in touch with their **authentic self**; who the parent/caregiver truly is rather than who the parent/caregiver thinks he/she/they should be.

8. The **synergy** between the therapist's authenticity, attunement, congruence, and nervous system regulation support the parent/caregiver in learning how to **attach to self**, the cornerstone of all healing.

9. The parent/caregiver projects his/her/their inner world onto the therapist setting them up to **experience his/her/their perception** of what it feels like to be him/her/them.



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

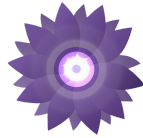
Caregivers are coming into the intake typically anxious and worried that either they or their child will be judged. The SPT therapist understands the importance of making the “unknown known” and becoming their prefrontal cortex to help them begin to regulate through their experience.

- 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. It is helpful to 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 become 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 to 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,

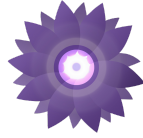
- Discuss payment and how payment will be handled
- If the financial situation is complicated, create a “financial agreement” that both sign
- Discuss when and whom you will have check-ins with
- Discuss who will bring the child to sessions and when
- For information on dealing with the dynamics that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

Caregivers in the Playroom:

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.

Reminder again: 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.



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SPT Caregiver Training Session:

The purpose of the training session is to 1)prepare the parent/caregiver for being an active participant in the session, 2)make “the unknown known” for the parent/caregiver, 3)establish your role as “coach” and co-regulator. When conducting a training session,

- Meet the parent where they are at (Ie. communicate in their values and at their level of understanding)
- Go slowly- teach/role play one concept at a time; don’t move ahead until the current concept is understood
- During role plays, the therapist models the reflections and regulation first before asking the parent/caregiver to try
- Empower the parent/caregiver! Celebrate their effort, understanding, etc!

Skills to practice: (Fill in from the training video)