



Tips for Talking to Caregivers

Tip 1: Remember that caregivers are more anxious than you are and are worried you are going to tell them that there is something wrong with them or their child.

Tip 2: Make sure you set measurable, age appropriate, not all or nothing goals so that you can communicate clearly with the caregivers regarding progress.

Examples:

Ben (age 4) will not hit his sister. (This goal is not age appropriate or realistic. It is all or nothing)

Lucy (age 7) will be happy and feel good about herself. (This is not measurable and is also all or nothing)

Stephen (age 5) will increase his ability to use his words when he gets frustrated. This will be demonstrated by his asking for help when he gets frustrated instead of hitting. (Measurable, age appropriate and not all or none)

Tip 3: Make sure the expectations for therapy are outlined clearly in the beginning. How often will the child come? When will you talk to the caregivers and for how long? When is payment due? Etc. Any detail you leave out in the beginning will likely become a challenge during the process.

Tip 4: Get yourself off the pedestal- they need to feel like an expert too. Practice asking for their ideas and validating their intuition and attempts.

Tip 5: When you describe the play therapy process, discuss the child's perception of themselves and their world. Do your best to stay away from sharing the play. What is important are the feelings that arose as a result of how the child played, not what the child played with.

Example:

“Today, Matt was little and played with the babies. He was very worried about the babies getting taken care of” versus “Today Matt explored what happens when he feels younger and little emotionally. When he feels little, he is more sensitive to feeling anxious and worried.”

Tip 6: Stay away from describing the session through yourself as the filter. Caregivers want to hear what is going on with their child, not with you.

Example:

“Your child set me up to feel anxious” versus “Today, Suzie explored her anxiety”.

Tip 7: Be aware of placing “shoulds” on the caregivers and expecting them to be someone they aren't. If they are shutting down or getting defensive or not following through with assignments/suggestions, chances are they aren't feeling supportive in who they are and are feeling a “should” placed upon them.

Tip 8: Consider using the Nervous System Sheets, The SPT Curve, the Emotional Ages and the SPT Process of Change as ways to talk to caregivers. Many caregivers need something concrete and need a context for the process.