



Growing Up in Play Therapy **Developmental Stages in Synergetic Play Therapy**

In Synergetic Play Therapy it is rare to begin the play therapy process with a child in the last 3 stages, as the success of the last three stages are influenced by the first three stages. Typically a child enters the last 3 stages during the empowerment phase of the play therapy process when their emotional age becomes more aligned with their chronological age.

Do I exist? In-utero - first few months of life

- o Often no language or eye contact
- o Spacey and not grounded feeling in the room
- o Often child stays in one spot and plays with only one or two things
- o Therapist will often question the significance of his/her/their existence in the room due to child playing alone and not interacting
- o Therapist often completely ignored
- o Feeling of hypo-arousal in the room
- o Hard to mobilize energy
- o Therapist often feels like they are in a fog

Is the World OK? Birth - 18 months

- o Play focuses on the unpredictable and scary nature of the environment
- o Therapist is set up to feel unsafe and not be able to trust what is happening around them
- o The therapist might be the witness to scary things occurring in the environment or might be an active participant in the play
- o Often the play is emphasized with hyper-arousal and anxiety

Am I OK? 3-6 years old

- o Play focuses on the therapist not feeling ok about him/her/their self
- o Therapist is set up to feel insecure, wondering what he/she/they did wrong, inadequate, like a failure/not good enough

How much can I do? 4-6 years old

- o The emphasis is on quantity instead of quality

How well can I do it? 7-11 years old

- o The emphasis is on quality instead of quantity unless it is about mastering something

Adapted from Duey Freeman's Developmental Model with credit to Heather Gunther, Certified SPT Therapist, for Do I Exist? Stage.