

Why use play based therapy?



Play is vital for children. It is how they make sense of the world around them and their own internal world. It helps shape all aspects of their learning and development.

Play is a child's natural way of communication. Using play, in a therapeutic environment with an experienced play therapist who can help support, regulate and keep them safe, enables children to use their play to make sense of their experiences.

Research has shown that play and the use of metaphor allows a child's brain to develop new neural pathways and strengthen links in their brain. Play can actually positively change a child's brain structure, especially if the child has experienced early trauma or numerous adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

Play-based learning is also quicker than other ways of learning and requires fewer repetitions to establish a skill.

Play is essential for children to develop physically, emotionally and socially. Play allows children to develop their imagination and creativity and it encourages confidence and concentration. Play helps children to make sense of their ever changing and growing world. It also allows them to make mistakes safely.

Play is a symbolic communication - a child will often communicate through play what they cannot express with words. Working in metaphor is also a safer way for a child to process past experiences. Play also acts as a bridge between the conscious awareness and emotional experiences.

Play Therapy is not a quick fix. Depending on the level of presenting need a child may work with a Play Therapist for a few months, or a year or more.

77% to 82% of children referred show positive improvement.

Play helps children to:

- ✓ Understand relationships
- ✓ Experience and identify emotions
- ✓ Act out troublesome issues
- ✓ Practise roles
- ✓ Explore situations
- ✓ Learn, relax and have fun
- ✓ Develop physical skills
- ✓ Find out what is 'me' and what is 'not me'

Time visiting with a Play Therapist enables a child to consider and acknowledge their feelings. It helps them learn that is OK to feel and teaches them to cope with big feelings in a safe and constructive way.

Play Therapy is client-centred and integrative, it draws on many types of therapy and works well alongside most other kinds of support that children may be offered. Play Therapy is based on the work of Carl Rogers and Virginia Axline, but also draws on Landreth, Freud, Jung, Gestalt and many others.

Play Therapy has very few rules, but as many as necessary. This means it is ideal for children who struggle with boundaries, as limitations are only put in as they are needed. Children struggling with boundaries also benefit as the work in the playroom is 'client-led' meaning they decide how and when they interact with the equipment in the room and the therapist.

The equipment offered in each session includes:

- ✓ A sand tray with dry sand - and if there is space, another tray with wet sand
- ✓ A selection of symbols that will encourage the child to create any story in the tray, on the floor, or a table
- ✓ Clay - usually grey and red
- ✓ Art and drawing materials - paints, glue, glitter, collage etc.
- ✓ Small world play equipment including people, animals, vehicles and houses
- ✓ Music and movement equipment, including instruments
- ✓ Puppets
- ✓ Dolls, medical and caring equipment
- ✓ Dressing up equipment, such as masks, scarves, hats, glasses etc.

If a therapist is working with adolescents or adults, the equipment is tailored to suit their needs, but a wide range of equipment is always on offer. If the therapist is mobile, a travel kit is used - covering essentials but still relatively portable.

A session is usually 40 minutes in length, but this may vary depending on the age of the child and the individual child's needs.

Sometimes big feelings come up in the playroom for the child and this can mean their behaviour can get worse before it gets better as they process those feelings. Usually things settle down as they get to know and trust the therapist.

Parental/PR consent is needed for therapy, and parents/carers and the referrer are met with prior to therapy starting, at regular intervals during the therapy and at the conclusion of working with a child. For short-term therapy of less than 20 sessions, there is usually only one interim meeting. For longer-term therapy, meetings or phone consultations are offered about every 12 weeks.

Parents/carers and referrers are encouraged to keep the therapist informed of anything that may be relevant to the child and are welcome to ask for updates. Therapy is confidential, but client confidentiality would not be maintained if there is a safe-guarding disclosure.

Which children may benefit from Play and Creative Art Therapy?

Play therapy is known to benefit children who are experiencing problems with:

- General stress and anxiety, self-esteem and emotional well-being
- Behavioural difficulties
- Attachment issues
- Fears and phobias
- Low confidence, low mood and low self-esteem
- Frustration and anger issues
- Experiencing school issues such as transitions to new schools or classes, anxiety around SATs, or exams
- Friendship issues and bullying
- Parental separation, divorce, family member in prison, or other family conflict
- Hospital stays and other medical treatment
- Issues around food and other eating issues
- Trauma, including experiencing or witnessed neglect, emotional, physical or sexual abuse
- Adoption, fostering and being in care
- Changes in family dynamics including step-parents, blending families and new siblings
- Experience of a serious accident, other disaster or PTSD
- Experiencing loss or bereavement
- Additional behavioural needs including attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum diagnosis (ASD), Tourette's or similar
- Sleep issues and toileting issues



Supporting children with adverse childhood experiences

Some of the children of the families you may know, or are working with, may be experiencing, or have experienced, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs):

- abuse - physical, verbal or sexual neglect - emotional or physical

Growing up in a household where:

- a parent is addicted to drugs and/or alcohol
- a parent has experienced domestic violence
- a family member is in jail
- a family member is diagnosed with a mental health condition
- a parent is absent through divorce, death or abandonment

They may also be experiencing childhood adversity including: bereavement, bullying, poverty and community adversity - including living in a deprived area or experiencing neighbourhood violence.

ACEs are associated with poorer health and social outcomes in adulthood.

The Scottish Government published a paper in July 2018, 'Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)', reporting that adults who had experienced four or more ACEs in childhood were:

- 4x more likely to be a high-risk drinker
- 16x more likely to have used crack cocaine or heroin
- 6x increased risk of never or rarely feeling optimistic
- 3x increased risk of heart disease, respiratory disease and type 2 diabetes
- 15x more likely to have committed violence
- 14x more likely to have been a victim of violence in the last 12 months
- 20x more likely to have been in prison at any point in their life.

In the paper, they committed to actions in key areas to support children and their families and adults.

The Children's Mental Health Charter (2019) also supports therapeutic help for children:

'Focus on the needs of children. Children's voices must be heard, and their dignity and human rights upheld. Within school, the curriculum must embed within it an understanding of emotional well-being, the principles of good mental health and the certainty of therapeutic help for those children who need it.'

Play and Creative Art Therapy is an ideal, child-centred way of therapeutically supporting children who need it. Therapists are regulated through PTUK and the PSA and undertake both regular clinical supervision and on-going CPD.

About Elaine

Elaine spent a long time working as a teacher before deciding to become a play therapist. She has worked supporting children and their families for over 25 years.

Any child aged 4-13 is welcome in her playroom but she also does creative art therapy and sand tray therapy with young people and adults.

Elaine has completed a post graduate diploma in play and creative art therapy through Play Therapy UK and Leeds Beckett University. She is registered and accredited through PTUK and the Professional Standards Authority (PSA).

Elaine is also an Emotional Logic Coach, working with children, young people and adults and is a registered Thrive Practitioner. She offers CPD training for teachers, school staff and other professionals, supervision and support for support staff in schools and offers parents support in play skills to allow them to engage more in playing with their child.

Elaine is fully insured and has a current DBS certificate.

You can contact her on email: hellocreatingcalm@gmail.com, or by phone on 01749 678940 or 07749 701914.



About Orca



Orca is Elaine's therapy dog. She is a collie-poodle cross and is extremely friendly.

She has been trained at Little Orchard Dog Training, and has several Kennel Club certificates, including her Silver Good Citizen Award.

She is a registered PAT dog, through Pets as Therapy. She loves a tummy tickle and her favourite food is cheese.

Orca can come and be part of the playroom, or spend the session in her crate, depending on what a child wants for any given session.

If a child has an aversion to dogs, Orca can be kept safely away, but if a child is allergic to dogs and is coming to Elaine's playroom rather than being seen somewhere else, it is strongly suggested that they see another therapist, as Orca will have been in the playroom and the child needs to be kept safe.

**For further information, please see the website: creatingcalm.co.uk
or contact Elaine: hellocreatingcalm@gmail.com**