



Cameray Newsletter

**Administration Office: 4585 Hastings Street,
Burnaby, B.C. V5C 2K3 Tel: 604-291-7422**



The Healing Powers of Play



Faced with bad news or an unpleasant task, who has not been tempted to run away and play? It is a response that comes naturally; by the time a child is in elementary school, he or she will have played for tens of thousands of hours. Play therapy builds on that natural playful instinct and uses it to help children work through emotional barriers both large and small.

Six decades of research show that play is integral to healing. After Hurricane Katrina and the Tsunami in Sri Lanka play therapy was and continues to be an essential service to those children exposed to the trauma and devastating loss. Whether a child is experiencing a minor difficulty or more troubling symptoms play therapy helps confront the problem and create lasting solutions.

Why Play in Therapy?

For children, play is a building block of happiness. The benefits of play are well documented; it improves social competence, as well as cognitive, language, physical and emotional development. Play therapy gives children a safe psychological distance from a problem's source, giving them the opportunity to:

- build a trusting relationship with the therapist;
- express and explore powerful feelings or pain;
- develop new solutions to their problems;
- learn skills such as anger management and anxiety reduction;
- understand others;
- develop a positive sense of themselves;
- learn how to create and respect boundaries.

What Happens in Play Therapy?

During a therapy session the child plays freely with puppets, dolls, sand tray, art and other materials that help them express their inner selves. Play therapists work in different ways depending upon the particular problem and their theoretical background, however, generally the therapist uses a combination of methods to systematically help your child address the trouble at hand.

Initially, the play therapist meets with both parents to find out about the current concerns, child's developmental and family history and discuss possible approaches. Your child will then attend three to five play therapy sessions to give the play therapist time

to better assess the course of treatment. Usually therapists meet regularly with parents to monitor progress, discuss the major themes and concerns, share skills and tools the child is learning and offer suggestions on how parents can best support their child at home.

When Does a Child Need Play Therapy?

All children experience difficulties from time to time and in most cases the distress leaves as quickly as it comes. However, when behavioural problems, anxiety, sadness, sleep disturbance, disputes with friends, social withdrawal, school complaints, headaches or stomachaches, and other atypical symptoms persist over a period of several weeks, a more serious underlying problem may exist. Other problems that may warrant play therapy are more obvious:

- Grief and loss
- Divorce
- Depression
- Trauma
- Low self-esteem
- Emotional, physical or sexual abuse
- Phobia
- Bullying or being bullied
- A parent's chronic illness
- Learning or communication difficulties

How Long Does Play Therapy Take?

The length of play therapy varies depending on the severity of the problem and how long the difficulties have existed. However, research suggests an average of 20 sessions is usually enough to resolve moderate difficulty. Depending on the child's age, a play therapy session usually lasts 50 minutes and weekly sessions are often most optimal for positive results.

What is the Parent's Role in Play Therapy?

Whether a child is distressed due to a dynamic within the family or not, studies show children and families heal faster when parents are involved in the play therapy process. What is said between child and therapist remains a re-

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Books about play therapy for parents and children

When Your Child Needs Help: A parent's guide to therapy for children
By Norma Doft & Barbara Aria

A Child's First Book About Play Therapy
By Marc Nemiroff & Jane Annunziata

A Special Helper Named Sarah
By Michele Hucul-Kambolis

The Healing Powers of Play (cont'd)

respected confidence, however, parents can be involved in other important ways. "Tweens" (8 to 12 year olds) in particular are often very private about the content of their sessions, so your child's therapist might share only general information about areas your child is focusing on. In some cases play therapists recommend direct family involvement, which might include the entire family. For some situations, parents learn how to take on the role of therapist and are taught how to conduct the session themselves. Whatever the degree of family involvement, a parent's role is integral to the child's healing process.

How Do I Find a Play Therapist for My Child?

The practice of play therapy is complex and different from just playing with a child, requiring extensive training and experi-

ence. When seeking a play therapist, look for several credentials and keep some questions in mind:

1. Is the therapist a licensed mental health professional, such as a Registered Clinical Counselor or Psychologist?
2. Do they have specialized training and supervision in play therapy?
3. Have they earned the credentials of Registered Play Therapist (RPT) or Registered Play Therapy Supervisor (RPTS) issued by Association for Play Therapy or Play Therapy International?
4. What type of play therapy do they do and how does it work?
5. Do they have experience in the treatment of your child's particular problem?

The British Columbia Association for Play Therapy (604-682-8122) provides information on how parents can find the right therapist for their child. You can also contact your family doctor or school counselor for a recommendation.

Michele Hucul-Kambolis is the Clinical Director of Harbourside Counseling Centre and has been a clinical counselor for 15 years. She is the author of "A Special Helper Named Sarah" and is a strong advocate for children and youth. Michele is the past president of British Columbia Association for Play Therapy and is passionate about promoting creativity and connectedness in the lives of families. She can be contacted at 604-689-9116 or www.childinfo.ca for further information.

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Parents play a critical role in helping their children develop not only the ability to

Family Literacy

Learning to read begins long before your child walks into the classroom. Babies have brains ready to learn the minute they are born. And learning starts with children's first and best teacher....You!

Literacy is skills that allow us to make sense of things and communicate our ideas to others. Our children learn literacy by being involved in family and community life. Learning and getting ready for school happens everyday as we go about our lives.

Simple activities will help your child understand that letters have a big role in their lives and that reading can be fun. Ask your child what they think road signs mean, what sound that big "M" at the drive-thru makes, and draw circles or use a highlighter to find the first letter of their name in the newspaper. Every

family is literate in their own special way. When we teach our children about their culture, or faith and participate in community events they learn what is meaningful and how to make meaning. But the best way children learn to be literate is to play and spend time with you.

No computer toy will offer what you can—the chance to show your child that they are loved, that their ideas matter, and that what they have to say is important. It doesn't matter what language you speak or your education. Listening and talking to your child are the most important gifts you can give them.

Play gives your child "hands-on" literacy skills like scribbling, doodling, cutting and pasting. And don't forget book reading. It is a great way to spend time with your child.

Tips for Enjoying Stories with Your Child

1. Stories can come from books, your imagination or family history.
2. Stories can be in any language.
3. Story time is a great time to cuddle.
4. Story time is about laughing and having fun.
5. Story time can also be songs, rhymes and games.
6. Anytime is story time; bedtime or waiting for the bus.
7. Dads, Uncles, and Grandpas tell great stories too!

New Westminster Literacy Now Update, November 2006, Volume 1, Issue 1

Corner

Shepherd's Pie

By Evelyn Raab

It's just hamburger and vegetables and stuff but, somehow, Shepherd's Pie has attained esteemed statues at our house.

2 tbsp. (30mL) vegetable oil
 1 onion, chopped
 2 cloves garlic, squished
 1 green or red pepper, diced
 1 carrot, diced
 2 cups (500mL) fresh mushrooms, sliced
 1½ lb. (750g) medium ground beef or ground turkey
 1 cup (250mL) frozen peas
 1 cup (250mL) salsa or chili sauce
 4 large potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks
 2 tbsp. (30mL) butter
 ½ cup (125mL) milk
 salt, pepper to taste
 Heat the vegetable oil in a large

skillet. Add the onion and garlic and cook for a couple of minutes, until softened. Add the green or red pepper, carrots and mushrooms, and cook for 5 to 7 minutes, until the carrots are almost tender.

Crumble the ground beef or turkey into the skillet and cook, stirring, for about 10 minutes, until the meat is lightly browned. Pour off the fat if necessary. Add the peas, stir in the salsa and cook for another 10 minutes. Season with salt and pepper and transfer to an 8-or 9-inch (20 or 22 cm) square baking dish.

While the meat mixture is on the stove, make the mashed potatoes. Cook the potatoes in boiling water (or steam them in a steamer) until completely tender when poked with a fork, then

drain thoroughly. Return them to the pot that they were cooked in, and handing your child a potato masher (or a fork) have her mash them while you add the butter, milk, salt and pepper. Smooth is the idea here, but a few lumps are perfectly acceptable – in fact, it just proves that these are homemade mashed potatoes. Spread the mashed potatoes, while they are still warm, over the meat mixture in the baking dish. Bake at 350° F (180° C) for 35 to 40 minutes, until the top is golden and the meat is bubbling underneath.

Makes 4 to 6 servings.

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Photograph by Yvonne Duivenvoorden

Opening the Doors of Communication

Talking about sensitive issues can be quite intimidating for both adults and children. Sometimes our first reaction to a certain question or comment is negative. In effect, **we slam the door** in the face of the person who asked it. This response can happen for a variety of reasons. We could be insecure about discussing the topics. We may not have the correct information to answer the question. We may not be ready to discuss tough issues with our children. Whatever the reason, it's important to make sure that your child feels like the door is always open to talk to you.

A national study by Child Trends tracked 8,000 teens aged 12 - 16. The study, which was a series of annual interviews started in 1997 and continued through 2001. The findings of this study reinforced earlier research that **parents have a significant impact on their children's decisions about sex**. The power of communication can do wonders in the minds of teenagers deciding to have sex. It is every parent's responsibility to express to

their children their values, morals and opinions on human sexuality issues. Children want to hear what their parents have to say; and when there is open communication between parent and child, the child will more likely respect their parents and value their morals and beliefs.

If you don't have open communication with your children on sexuality issues, then they won't be able to express their sexual concerns. **It's better for them to hear information from adults than to receive misinformed messages about sex from their friends.** So start talking to your kids now and always know where they're going and what they're doing.

Below are some examples of **Door Slammers**, followed by better responses that will help to open the doors of good communication. In addition, these good communication skills will help you have more successful everyday conversations with your child - no matter what you are discussing. Give them a try! You will definitely see some positive results:

Door Slammers

- "If you say that again, I'll..."
- "That's none of your business."
- "I don't care what your friends are doing!"
- "We'll talk about that when you need to know."
- "That's just for boys (girls)"
- "Why are you asking me that?"
- "You're too young to understand."

Door Openers

- "What do you think?"
- "Do you know what that means?"
- "This is why I feel that way..."
- "That's a good question."
- "I don't know, but I'll find out."

Campaign For Our Children Inc.

Some Recommended Readings:

The Thinking Parent's Guide to Talking Sense About Sex

by Deborah Roffman, Perseus Publishing, 2001

How to Talk to Your Child about Sex

by Linda and Richard Eyre. Golden Books, 1998



Being open to your child's questions and concerns will help build a good trusting



Cameray Child & Family Ser-

Administration Office:
4585 Hastings Street,
Burnaby, B.C. V5C 2K3
Tel: 604-291-7422

Burnaby Office
#203-5623 Imperial Street
Burnaby B.C. V5J 1G1
Tel: 604-436-9449

New Westminister Office
#6-602 Seventh Avenue
New Westminister, B.C. V3M 2J3
Tel: 604-520-0009

WEB-SITE: CAMERAY.CA

MISSION STATEMENT:

Cameray Child & Family Services is a community-based agency committed to the strengthening of individuals and families through a spectrum of services including counselling, education, outreach, and advocacy.

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We are a non-profit agency serving Burnaby and New Westminister residents since 1972.

The Leon and Thea Koerner Foundation

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Cameray welcomes new staff:
The New Westminister Office: Catherine Browne, Brett Peterson, Lori Newell, & Kristina Lee (returning from mat leave)
The Burnaby Office: Lyndsay Sieger, Rhonda Woodcock
- Cameray is nearly at the end of its four-year accreditation period and is currently working on applying for re-accreditation. As an agency, this is very important because it demonstrates that we are meeting and exceeding industry standards and providing the best possible service for our clients.
- Each September Cameray Child and Family Services hosts a gala event and art auction at Horizon's Restaurant. The evening features a live auction of pieces generously donated by renown local artists and a silent auction showcasing works of art and more. Guests will be treated to a food and wine reception provided by Horizons while taking in the stunning view from the top of Burnaby Mountain. All proceeds go towards Cameray's programs in Burnaby and New Westminister. Join us for an exciting evening of art, food and wine and help support your vital services in your community. The Second Annual Art on the Horizon will be held in September, 2007. For tickets and information, contact Susan at 604-291-7422.

DONOR HIGHLIGHT

Calkins and Burke Limited have made annual donations to the Early Intervention Parenting Program, to be used for the Christmas hampers. Many families have benefited from this donation over the years and we are very grateful for their continued support.