

Play Therapy with Depressed Children

A common therapeutic technique used with children that suffer with depression is play therapy. That is not to say that a therapist sits with your child and plays with them. The therapy utilizing play is very structured with specific tasks that are targeted to observe your child during play and to get them to express their feelings/emotions through play. Depression in younger children can be displayed in a number of ways and is not typically seen with the child looking sad, it usually manifests itself as acting out behaviors and in older children, they display anger problems and often times social withdrawal. Traditional “talk” therapy is not especially helpful in dealing with children due to their developmental level and play therapy is a very effective means of getting a depressed child to express themselves through their play. It is the job of the therapist to observe the child during play and interpret what is going on with them in order to develop an effective course of treatment and action.

Children express themselves through their play and a trained therapist will utilize puppets, games, colors, sand therapy, clay or play-doh, paints, dolls, or other toys in order to get your child to express themselves. There are a number of games and toys that are therapeutic in nature and are manufactured specifically to be used with children that suffer with depression. In play therapy, children are free to learn about themselves and through therapy with a skilled therapist they are able to work through their feelings of anger, frustration, limitations, strengths, and weaknesses. There has to be awareness of a problem even in children before we are able to work towards a solution. Even adults when asked “what is wrong” are often unable to articulate the exact reason they feel depressed or anxious and children are no different, except they have an even harder time explaining themselves. There are different types of depression, clinical depression and situational depression, as well as levels of depression. Children are often suffering from depression as a result of a particular situation or difficulties they are experiencing in their lives. Children often struggle with depression when their parent’s divorce, any type of trauma, school issues, peer issues, and changes that occur in their life. Play therapy, overall is a very effective means of getting a child to express themselves as what child does not love to play!! Make sure you find a therapist that is trained in play therapy and is knowledgeable of the particular issues that your child is going through. Explain to your child that they will be going to see someone and tell them that they are going to get to play with someone to work through their feelings. Children should always be aware at some level why they are going and a therapist will make it fun for them!! Children struggle with stressors in life, the same as adults, however the treatment required to help the problem is a bit different in children than in adults.

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