

Foreword

Accessing the richness of *Play Therapy: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice* allows the reader-practitioner to dive deeply into the transformative power of play itself. Each chapter acknowledges play as a force of nature, captured in its essence and refined through the comprehensive skill, broad scholarship, and multiple foci of accomplished authors and editors. The result of this immersion is inspiration and deepened professional identity for the practitioner, and healing mercies for those who become safe and playful through its applications. Guided, chapter by chapter, through this volume's varied and verdant landscapes, the reader emerges with a treasure of theoretical and philosophical grounding plus solid clinical guidance for greater professional excellence. No small accomplishment.

The diverse inclusions in Part I, Play Therapy Theories and Approaches, provide a personal narrative and professional identity for the play therapist—a necessary anchor in a windswept theoretical sea. What has evolved within responsible therapeutic domains allows varied approaches and numerous theoretical foundations—client-centered, Jungian, psychoanalytic, Adlerian, cognitive-behavioral, or attachment-based—to become united by their reliance on play. The experience of play itself is the transformative magic, but it does require grounding on the part of the therapist.

Let's look more fully at the shared source of healing in the chapters: play. What is it that most profoundly *engages* us with ourselves and the world?

Play.

It takes us out of time's arrow, allows us to exist in a separate "state" of being from all others, and when it occurs, is a self-organizing phenomenon driven by intrinsic motivation, with myriad patterns and forms, but still a process of *being* and *doing* something just for its own sake. And the prerequisites for discovering or rediscovering its bounties when it has been missed or lost are in-depth professional wisdom and diagnostic and clinical skill. By guiding a client into experiencing it more fully, play grants gifts that endure well beyond the immediate experience itself—one boon from this truly comprehensive guide.

What is the world without healthy authentic play? Or a better question might be, what is it that healthy play bestows, that its absence or deprivation reveals as miss-

ing? The capacity for joy, freedom to explore the possible, detection and enactment of one's unique talents, safety in intimacy, and an optimistic hopeful approach to life and the future are among play's blessings and benefits. Bringing these life-giving qualities through play therapy in the settings and play-needy conditions described in Part II, *Clinical Applications of Play Therapy*, provides avenues for clients to become *fully human*. Without access to play, this human birthright is just not possible to enjoy. Fulfilling this deficit has direct personal emotional rewards that enliven the practitioner's professional identity and help to assure a more balanced life for therapist and client alike—another boon from the bounty of this guide.

For the well-versed player, life in all its challenges can be experienced as a complex playground. For the play deprived, life is too often seen as a battleground. Becoming more fully grounded in providing this foundational humanitarian outreach gives greater meaning and purpose to a noble professional life. And what is perhaps unique to the play therapist-practitioner is that this “work” is fun—yes, *fun!* So the benefits for professional and client are legion.

A broad overview of play behavior in animals and humans, tracing its evolutionary trajectories and supported by a flood of recent neuroscientific play-based discoveries, reveals play behavior as a fundamental survival drive. Housed in subcortical circuitry, the universally innate biological roots that drive play behavior require environmentally appropriate signaling (the many languages of play) to activate and sustain this primal drive. The elaboration and continuing crafting of body and mind, though most urgently needed in childhood, nonetheless persist throughout the human life cycle.

In order for professionals to serve as role models and mentors, they must be authentic players in their own personal lives. So skill in learning and living through life's complexities—the subtlety of play signaling, the free access within oneself, the bodily and gestural dance of nonverbal play languages—adds veracity and emotional grounding that transcend linear cognitive limitations. Yes, it is possible to bring personally crafted lived-out-in-life art into the science of play therapeutics. This art needs to be practiced and honed in life beyond the clinical playroom.

In Part III, *Research and Practice Guidelines in Play Therapy*, esteemed authors focus on what it takes to practice competently, joyfully, and in an attuned manner. A unique contribution of this book is its evident appreciation for the science and art of play and the emergent field of epigenesis. In studies indicating that environmental playfulness (at least in playful rats) turns on latent prefrontal cortical genes awaiting the right signal, animal play researchers are demonstrating in playful laboratory animals what human clinicians surmise is occurring in effective and transformative play therapy settings—namely, that new cerebral connections that “help craft the social brain” are specifically sparked into action by active play experiences. Clinicians sense that bringing play into *action* creates new cerebral “maps” with emotional regulation as an adjunctive benefit. This new animal-based knowledge is adding more and more depth and importance to affirming play as a lifetime necessity for adaptability and individual flexibility.

There is plenty of nourishment in this volume to establish it as a fresh and necessary revelatory “bible” of play therapy, guiding the therapist to new and more effective personal and professional rewards.

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