

What to Expect in an Initial Play Therapy Session

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If you decide to bring in your child for a play therapy evaluation, here is what to expect. Depending on the age of the child, I will probably ask the parents to come in without the child for the initial meeting. The exception to this is with the older teen who is well aware of why he/she is coming and whose parent is comfortable discussing the issue in front of the child.

During the first meeting without the child, I will ask questions about the presenting problem as well as any precipitating factors. A family history will be taken, both of the parental relationship as well as both parents family of origin. Goals for change will be set and we will discuss how we will know goals have been achieved.

Typically I will then meet alone with the child for 4 sessions. Many times during this period I may schedule one of these meetings with the whole family to do a group activity. This is useful to highlight any family dynamics that may be affecting the child.

When alone with the child for play sessions, I will initially let the child lead the way. Toys and activities in my playroom are specially chosen to provide a "vocabulary" for children too young to express their emotions using words. When your child leaves the session, they may talk about playing in the sand, coloring or making a collage. These are all techniques for me to get to know your child better and for them to express themselves.

I prefer to not discuss the child's "progress" in front of them unless I let them know we will be doing so. This respects the child's feelings of trust about what happens in the session and it is uncomfortable for a child to be talked about in front of them. If there is anything that needs to be discussed I may ask for time alone or the parent may call before or after the session.

After 4 sessions, I will meet again with parents without the child to discuss observations, recommendations and revise the goals. This pattern will continue until therapy is terminated.