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## Psychoanalytic Play Therapy as Psychotherapy in Children

Sumarni<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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#### \*Corresponding author:

Sumarni

#### E-mail address:

[sumarni@gmail.com](mailto:sumarni@gmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT

Play therapy is a form of psychotherapy that can be used in children. Play therapy does not only recognize environmental factor but also promote parent guidance and school consultation as important functions of the child therapist. This article aimed to understand psychoanalytic therapy as a way to help the child to suffer less, relieve anxiety, cope with trauma, be better able to attend, learn and work in school, manage personal anger and aggression; and come to terms with a learning disability or physical handicap. The role of the therapist in psychotherapy was very important. The therapist and his attitude were a form of intervention. Most of all, the therapist empathically listens and responds to the child. Parent guidance in the therapeutic process was more effective. The parent-child relationship was an as significant factor in the effectiveness of play therapy.

### 1. Introduction

Mental disorders in children, especially in the United States and the world are increasing and touching a tipping point. In 2001, the US Surgeon General stated that mental disorders in children were experienced by 1 in 10 children and adolescents.<sup>1</sup> Therefore the need for mental health services for children is increasing. Play therapy has been widely accepted as a choice for mental health interventions in children, besides playing therapy requires practitioners who are trained to do so.

Play is part of the world of children. Children learn about themselves, others and life through play. In 1989, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights identified play as a basic right for a child to achieve optimal development, and in 2007, the American Academy of Pediatrics

issued an official report on the importance of play for children's development. Research in the field of neurobiology development and psychological trauma in 2004 says play stimulates neural structures in the brain and is important for the normal development of children. However, in reality, psychological trauma can occur in development and as a result, the traumatic event will be stored in a nonverbal part of the brain that is the amygdala, thalamus, hippocampus, or brain stem. Meanwhile, the ability to think and the ability to process an event occurs in the frontal lobe. The game is a physical activity, so playing will guide the brain to move memory from the nonverbal to the frontal lobes.<sup>2-3</sup>

Play therapy is a form of psychotherapy or counseling that uses games to communicate and to

help patients, especially children, to prevent or restore life's challenges.<sup>3</sup> Play therapy aims to help children consciously understand what they think, feel and do, as well as change views that can improve their personality. Play therapy not only recognizes environmental factors such as children's health, environmental conditions, and cognitive abilities, but also the involvement of parents and schools as an important function of children's therapists. Therefore it is important to know and explore the application of play in children.

Psychoanalytic play therapy is a type of directive psychotherapy where games are used to establish contact or communication with clients, as a medium of observation and sometimes, as a medium for translating communication. The Founding father of psychoanalytic therapy is Sigmund Freud. Freud defines the game as a collaboration between therapist and children to produce a resolution of conflicts experienced by children and achieve therapeutic goals.

4

Psychanalytic theory was later developed by Anna Freud, Lowenfeld, and Klein (Axline, 1981), and became the basic principle of psychoanalytic play therapy for children. Psychoanalytic play therapy was first used by Anna Freud in Vienna and Melanie Klein in Berlin. Both believe in the richness and complexity of childhood and its development, appreciate the suffering known to children, and appreciate play therapy for understanding and healing children.

The Anna Freud method is more scalable, aimed at helping children consciously understand what they think, feel and do, and change the outlook that can improve their personality. Anna values children's behavior and defense as their best efforts to survive facing their anxiety, trauma, life experiences, and growth. Anna Freud not only recognizes environmental factors such as children's health, environmental conditions, and cognitive abilities, but also the involvement of parents and schools as an important function of child therapists.<sup>5</sup>

Playing helps children place their conflicts into the symbolic arena. A child who feels unable to confront

his alcoholic mother when confronted in front of a doll depicting his mother. Children are also able to project intolerable feelings about themselves projecting internal conflict outside themselves, making reality more comfortable for them to deal with. Basically, psychoanalytic play therapy creates a forum where children can face themselves, the conflict, and the people in their lives from a place that is psychologically safer and free to express themselves.

The role of the therapist in every psychotherapy is very important. In some ways, the therapist and the way he acts are a form of intervention. In line with relationship-based therapy, the therapist tries to create a safe atmosphere and accepts the child. Empathic attitude and acceptance in children, their experiences, and expressions are very important. The therapist shows appreciation for the thoughts and feelings of the children, which is theirs. The therapist must be able to be neutral and focus on conflicts experienced by children, not on their personalities so that children are able to explore the sadistic side of themselves. Children need therapists who can manage their psychic needs and can display emotions naturally and sincerely.

The feelings expressed by children from the therapist's self (their perception of the emotions the therapist displays) are valuable information. Sometimes this is related to self and therapist issues, these issues should then be clarified. The therapist should give a reaction about what can be done related to the aggressiveness and anger of the child, that the child should not hurt themselves, the therapist, or damage the office. By setting limits on their behaviors, the therapist directs the child's impulsivity through symbolic action. For example, the therapist says "you can't hurt me, but here there is a doll that stands in my place and you can treat anything to the doll". The therapist does not allow the patient to endanger himself, but the child can freely persecute, disturb, ignore and even love the doll or toy that represents the therapist (or others). By setting boundaries, the therapist maintains a feeling of security in a child while he freely expresses his emotions.

The role of parents is no less important in the success of play therapy. For parents, bringing their children to therapy is not easy. Recognition that children are psychologically injured or need professional help is very difficult and can reduce self-esteem as a parent.

The more parents are involved in therapy, the better the therapy influences the child's development. Therapists need parental cooperation to bring children, meet after meeting, and take care of administration related to therapy, but there are other things more important than that. Parents are the primary source of information about children and home circumstances. They can tell the therapist their perceptions about the child's behavior at home, how the child interacts with siblings and children, and how his habits are at school. Parents can provide a history of the child's development and the problems that caused it brought to the therapist. When meeting with parents, the therapist listens carefully and appreciatively, so that parents are comfortable talking honestly about their child's condition. Parents will try to cover up the dark side and their shortcomings in parenting if they feel criticized and uncomfortable with the therapist.

Schaefer has discussed the therapeutic power of the game. Play can reduce resistance to therapy. Play is a form of communication in children. Jean Piaget argues that play helps children express their subjective feelings in a direct, dynamic, irreplaceable individual language where words are not enough to express them.<sup>6</sup>

During play, children are motivated to satisfy their needs and master the environment. Playing also helps children in developing creative ways of thinking. Creative thinking is the basis for problem-solving skills and the ability to experiment with a variety of game choices without fear of negative consequences. Play can be a medium to release negative emotions so that the recovery. Children use various toys and materials to release tension and affect. Abreaction, an experience of recalling past events, can occur in children who are recovering from stressful events and related emotions. During play, children can play about

negative life experiences by breaking toys into small pieces, expressing the emotions of each fracture, assimilating each experience through new views, and achieving new abilities in dealing with these experiences.<sup>7-8</sup>

According to Schaefer, pretend play through role-playing helps children to try new roles and try alternative behaviors. Role-playing can develop empathy so that you can understand the position of others in life. Fantasy in this pretend game helps children to understand themselves and their views of the world. Fantasy games give children a stronger sense and more ability where this is not possible in the real world, so they can regulate effect, reduce aggression and increase positive feelings. The use of certain themes and metaphors in games gives meaning to life through the formation of a child's belief system. Metaphors can enrich, shape, and strengthen children's experiences.<sup>9-10</sup>

Schaefer also discussed the development of attachment to therapeutic relationships. Physical and sensorimotor play in therapeutic relationships helps in the correction of emotional experiences, towards the formation of new attachments. With strong attachment, children are able to develop relationships, able to accept and strengthen a sense of belonging. Following rules and playing in pairs with others helps distractible children to be more focused and maintain attention. More than that, Charles Schaefer stated that enjoying the game is a therapeutic process. Participating in fun activities contribute to pleasant feelings, reduces stress, and raises the spirit of life.<sup>11</sup>

More than that, play therapy is the application of theoretical models to build interpersonal processes where the therapist uses the therapeutic power of the game to help clients recover from psychosocial difficulties and develop optimal growth and development.

Therapists pay attention to patterns and themes in children's play to respond to therapeutic and cathartic movements in the end. John Allan states that the difference between playing with therapy is the therapist's ability to think analytically about

everything that happens during therapy sessions verbally, nonverbally, and symbolically in children's games and artwork.<sup>12-16</sup>

## 2. Conclusion

Psychoanalytic play therapy aims to understand the complexity of childhood and its development, appreciate the suffering known to children, and appreciate play therapy as a healing process for children. A therapist plays a role in helping children consciously understand what they think, feel and do, and change insights that can improve their personality. Anna Freud's method is more widely used in play therapy because it is more measurable in respecting children's attitudes. Anna Freud not only recognizes environmental factors such as children's health, environmental conditions, and cognitive abilities, but also the involvement of parents and schools as an important function of child therapists.

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