

Preface

Play is important for children. Mental health professionals have known this for decades. Research has supported the importance of play in child development for decades as well. Play was first used in therapy by psychoanalytic therapists in the 1930s but soon became part of nondirective client-centered therapies. Recently, play has been integrated into cognitive-behavioral approaches with children. One of the unique characteristics of play is that the processes that occur in play have important functions in child development. The use of play in therapy fits with a developmental perspective in working with children.

Play has many functions. In daily life, children communicate through play; express emotions and worries in play; and develop many abilities through play. In therapy, with adult guidance, the play process can be used to bring about change in a variety of ways.

A plethora of clinical literature presents a rich clinical base for the effectiveness of play in therapy to bring about change. However, as the field moves toward empirically supported practice, it is imperative that an empirical base be developed for the use of play in therapy. For play to continue to be used in therapy, we must learn when and how play is effective and for which child populations. Also, we need to know what types of play and techniques are helpful under which specific circumstances. Ideally, these studies will inform us about why play helps. There are many theories about how play aids the child, but empirical support for various theoretical explanations will help identify the mechanisms of change and inform future practice.

The aim of this book is to contribute to the growing base of empirical support for the use of play in therapy. The research findings presented in this

book also have implications for the use of play in prevention and intervention programs.

A large body of basic research supports the important role of play in child development. Play influences cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal development and has been linked to areas of adaptive functioning such as creativity, coping, emotional understanding, and affect regulation. The findings from this basic research have important implications for the development of assessment and intervention programs for emotionally disturbed children and prevention programs in early childhood.

Within the area of applied research, a number of evidence-based interventions for children exist that include play as a key component of treatment. These treatments are often outside the realm of traditional play therapy and include, for example, behavioral and cognitive-behavioral interventions such as parent-child interaction therapy, trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy, and cognitive-behavioral play therapy.

These two important areas of play research—basic and applied—remain largely unintegrated. There is a growing need for translational work that links the basic developmental research in play with the applied work in assessment, intervention, and prevention. This book provides a bridge between the literatures.

Part I focuses on the research on play and child development. Chapter 1, by Russ, Fiorelli, and Spannagel, presents an overview of cognitive and affective processes in play and their role in adaptive functioning in children. Chapter 2, by Jent, Niec, and Baker, reviews play and interpersonal functioning. Both chapters discuss implications of the child development research on play for the use of play in therapy.

Part II presents evidence-based play assessment approaches. Chapter 3, by Kaugars, presents an overview of play assessment measures and empirical support. Chapter 4, by Breslan-Knight and Salamone, focuses on the assessment of parent-child interaction through a structured play-based assessment. Chapter 5, by Tharinger, Christopher, and Matson, focuses on the use of play in the increasingly popular therapeutic assessment approach.

Part III presents evidence-based intervention approaches that integrate play as an important component. Chapter 6, by Niec, Gering, and Abbenante, reviews the empirical support for parent-child interaction therapy, in which play is a key component. Chapter 7, by Briggs, Runyon, and Deblinger, reviews play in trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral treatment. Next, Kasari, Huynh, and Gulsrud (Chapter 8) review the play intervention research with children with autism. Pincus, Chase, Chow, Weiner, and Pian (Chapter 9) review the use of play in cognitive-behavioral therapy for anxiety disorders. In Chapter 10, Knell and Dasari present cognitive-behavioral play therapy, an integrated treatment approach. Finally, Short, Noeder, Gorovoy, Manos, and Lewis (Chapter 11) present research on play in assessment and treat-

ment with children with special needs and with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, Asperger syndrome, and language disabilities.

Part IV focuses on play intervention and prevention programs in school settings. Bishop-Josef and Zigler (Chapter 12) give an overview of the history and research in Head Start programs with preschool children and discuss the role of play in the curricula. Russ and Pearson (Chapter 13) review the focused play intervention studies in primarily elementary school settings and implications for future programs in the schools.

Finally, in Chapter 14, Russ and Niec offer some thoughts and conclusions that emerge from the chapters. Implications for integrating play into therapy, prevention programs, and research are discussed.

We are fortunate to have such outstanding authors who are experts in the field contributing to this volume. These expert clinicians and researchers present the current knowledge base of research in the play area as it pertains to intervention and prevention. We hope that this book will provide a base for future research and practice with play.

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