



DEVELOPMENTAL ENHANCEMENT
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

PLAYFUL INTERVENTIONS TO FACILITATE ATTACHMENT

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THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY




Play is Important

- Benefits are noted across cultures (e.g., Fouts, Neitzel, & Bader, 2016; Roopnarine & Davidson, 2015)
- Benefits are noted across species (e.g., Pellis & Pellis, 2016; Trisko, Sandel, & Smuts, 2016)
- Believed to serve an adaptive role in:
 - Social interactions (e.g., Mermelshtine & Barnes, 2016)
 - Neural development (e.g., Pellis, Pellis, & Himmler, 2014; Siviy, 2016)
- Theorized to be an integral component of learning and mental health treatment for infants and children (e.g., Booth & Jernberg, 2001; Purvis & Cross, 2007)




Play is Important

- The young brain develops around serve and return interactions with its environment (e.g., Levitt, 2012)
 - Repeated play interactions have the capacity to foster neurological development
 - Specifically with regards to the growth of new synapses
 - *Repetitious Rhythm in Relationship is Regulating*
 - So much of our work is on developing the parent's capacity for co-regulation



An Absence of Play

- Despite its benefits, play is not a development task that can be assumed to have been mastered at age appropriate levels (e.g., Lillard, 2015; Sorrels, 2015)
 - True for baby and parent
 - Play is something that is learned through interactions that occur within a relationship
 - It is also something that an organism prioritizes only when in a calmer state of arousal



A Parent's Inability to Be Playful

- Many parents will struggle to be playful with the baby
 - Due to stress, lack of skill, etc.
- Play is really only something we engage well in at lower levels of arousal
 - Many of our parents don't often get there
- We may need to teach very concrete and basic strategies



A Parent's Inability to Be Playful

- Ways to increase a parent's efficacy in play
 - Refer to the client as “your boy/girl” when speaking to the parent
 - “Mom, did you see how your boy was looking at you? He loves you so much!”
 - Find something the parent did right(ish) and point it out
 - “I just saw you notice pulled away. That was perfect! She pulled away, you paused a second like this(demonstrate)...so I want you to keep doing exactly that and then I want you to do the same activity in a smaller way.”



Scripts for Addressing Play Difficulty

- For child
 - *Narrating to parent* “Oh, this feels tricky”
 - To help parent understand it's not rejection/non-compliance
 - “Redo” or “Let's try again”
 - When children resist the boundaries/expectations you set
- For parent
 - “I noticed that was tricky for you”
 - “I noticed _____, I'm going to bring that back up and we'll talk about it later”



A Parent's Inability to Be Playful

- Ways to increase a parent's efficacy in play
 - Be mindful about how much you touch or hold a baby
 - If you do it better, it will decrease parent efficacy and engagement
 - Even when your job is to manipulate the baby's body (e.g., PT), have parents do it as much as possible



Cultural Differences in Play

- A baby's brain is largely the same across the species regardless of culture
 - We know that play is helpful in learning and necessary to build a sense of calm and trust
 - We must remember that cultural differences can at times be the same as intergenerational traumas
 - Adaptations that may have served a purpose but that do not encourage optimal neurological development



Cultural Differences in Play

- If there's resistance to engaging in play, find out their desires for their child and align your therapies/treatments with those while doing your relational work
 - “I want my kid to be independent.” “Perfect, I can help with that. So here are 3 things you can do...”
 - Then bring this back up (e.g., “So we're working towards your goal of helping your child learn to be independent.”)




Cultural Differences in Play

- If you stumble across a parent's insecurities, be mindful about not feeding into those and maybe even using baby to bolster the parent
 - “Oh my gosh! I wish I had a video camera to record that to show other parents. That was beautiful!”
 - “Mom! Your baby is looking at you and saying, ‘I don't think I've ever seen someone so beautiful.’”
 - “Dad! Your sweet girl is smiling at you! She thought that was so much fun.”




 Attachment Matters

- Attachment:
 - Facilitates development of emotional regulation, social skills, and empathy
 - Provides the early working model for how relationships work and what to expect
 - Healthy attachment promotes resiliency


 Play Matters

- “Playful activities can reduce stress, strengthen attachment, and solve behavior problems while bringing laughter and joy to you and the children.” (Solter, 2013, p. 3)
- Play can be a natural serve and return interaction (Levitt, 2012)
- Children learn in the context of play (e.g., Fisher, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2012; Fisher, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, & Singer, 2010)

 Building Blocks


- Build a Relationship with children through playful interactions using (Booth & Jernberg, 2009):
 - **Structure:** structuring interactions, consistent responses
 - **Challenge:** challenging child through safe opportunities to try new things
 - **Nurture:** nurturing the child; meeting and supporting the child's needs
 - **Engagement:** engaging with the child at their level, often through silly, fun ways

**These are Theraplay Dimensions but we are not presenting about Theraplay as a treatment modality*


 Structure

- Helps to regulate and organize the experience
- Allows the adult practice to:
 - Keep the child safe
 - Complete activities and/or sequences of activities
 - Set limits, express limits, and practice keeping limits
 - Teach the child that the adult can be relied on to do these things

See Booth & Jernberg (2009) for additional information on Theraplay dimensions

 How to Add Structure to Play

- Use a simple set of rules to organize activities
- Lay out the expected steps of the activity – do not assume the child knows the rules of the game or how it is supposed to go
- Do not ask questions; make statements
- Narrate what the child can expect:
 - “I'm going to blow up this balloon, toss it in the air and we are going to hit it back and forth.”
- Stick with boundaries even if you face resistance
 - “You don't like these rules/plans, let's try!”
 - “You want to be done. We're going to do this one more time then be done.”



Challenge


- Facilitates age appropriate risk taking in play
- Helps develop feelings of competency and mastery
- Allows adult to partner with the child to try new activities and experiences
- Exploring new things can aid in child accepting the other building blocks as well

See Booth & Jernberg (2009) for additional information on Theraplay dimensions



How to Add Challenge to Play


- Add challenges to activities
 - Make things a race
 - Make things competitive
 - "Wait until I count to 3 to start!"
 - "When I say red, go!"



Nurture


- Builds a sense of self-worth in child
- Sends a message that the adult will provide care and the child is worthy of receiving care
- Allows adult to care for the child without child having to ask for it
- Increases the ability for intimacy

See Booth & Jernberg (2009) for additional information on Theraplay dimensions



How to Add Nurture to Play


- Adult feeds child - can be playful or gentle but cannot withhold
- Art work on body with lotion
- Storytelling while holding
- Hair combing
- Massages
- Band aids
- Activities that create intimate moments wherein an adult can nurture the child



Engagement

- Being positive, playful and engaged allows the adult to intently focus on the child
- Provides a platform for encouragement to try new things and experiences
- Allows for attunement and monitoring of the child's arousal state
- Facilitates use of co-regulation to modulate child's arousal state
- Increases child's ability to accept structure, challenge, and nurture

See Booth & Jernberg (2009) for additional information on Theraplay dimensions



How to Add Engagement to Play

- Silly, playful, laugh inducing activities
- Activities to engage child through use of voice, tone, noise, proximity, eye contact, facial expression, and movement
- Adults may need clinician to model this behavior; not natural for all adults to do



Play Needs to Be Mutual

- It is important for the play dyad to be in synchrony
 - You will need to work to read the child AND the parent to match their abilities
 - Sometimes the child is ready for something the parent isn't and you don't want the child to feel rejection
 - Sometimes the adult is ready and pushes too far to the child
- The use of the same play interaction graduated up can build the capacity of the dyad to more intimacy with time



Play Needs to Be Mutual

- Infants/young children with attachment difficulties will often avoid or become dysregulated by more intimate interactions
 - These are what would normally facilitate attachment and bonding
 - Examples: eye gaze, skin to skin contact, feeding, rocking, cradling, etc.
- Brief or highly engaging (and silly) play can make these more tolerable
 - Allows the opportunity to practice the interactions in ways that are rewarding but not overwhelming
 - Builds capacity



Working with Eye Contact

- Allow for a barrier
 - Sunglasses
 - Mirrors
 - Tupperware lids
 - Scarves
 - Peeking from corner of eyes
- Do it quickly and don't linger



Working with Touch

- Allow for a barrier
 - Gloves
 - Blankets
 - Eye shadow/blush
 - Stickers
 - Lotion
- Decrease intimacy
 - Draw on skin
 - Resist slow, light touches
 - Start on safer parts of the body
- Do it quickly and don't linger



Working with Nurture

- Increase excitement and speed
 - Dancing to rock music
- Increase distance
 - Rocking in a blanket
 - Feeding with chopsticks
 - Do the task as pretend animals
- Do it quickly and don't linger
 - Have races
 - Instruct to do something then run back




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