

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

The Efficacy of Play Therapy with Children: A Meta-Analytic Review of Treatment Outcomes¹.

Implications for Counselors: “The obvious implication of this research is that play therapy demonstrates itself to be an effective intervention for children’s problems, one that is uniquely responsive to children’s developmental needs. Of significant note, play therapy has a large effect on children’s behavior, social adjustment, and personality.”

The diagnostic criteria this definition may match –

- Behavioral Concerns
- Social Adjustment
- Sense of Self
- Family Relationship Concerns
- Developmental Concerns
- Personality
- Fear/Anxiety Concerns

Reason for the study: “Today, play therapy is widely used among clinicians to treat a wide range of emotional and behavioral problems... [yet] play therapy has not received widespread acceptance from the scientific community and has often been criticized for a lack of sound empirical evidence to support its use.”

Methods:

- Meta-analysis: An examination of data from a number of independent studies of the same subject used to understand the overall conclusions regarding results from that research.
- This meta-analysis included 93 studies, with a total of 3,248 child participants. The studies that were included in the analysis were chosen for their experimental designs. Random assignment to treatment groups was present in 70% of the studies examined.

Results:

	Overall Effect Size (<i>p</i>)
<i>Play Therapy vs. Control Group</i>	0.89 (.05)
<i>Play Therapy vs. Alternative Treatment (traditional child therapy)</i>	0.79 (.05)
<i>Registered Play Therapist (RPT) Provider</i>	0.72 (.05)
<i>Parent trained by RPT Provider</i>	1.15 (.05)

Conclusion:

- “After play therapy, the average treated child was functioning at 0.80 standard deviations better than children not treated.”
- When play therapy is conducted by a trained professional (RPT), parents are involved from the beginning, and the treatment is approximately 35 sessions or more, the impact and effectiveness of play therapy is long lasting and significant.

¹ Bratton, S. C., Ray, D., Rhine, T., & Jones, L. (2005). The Efficacy of Play Therapy with Children: A Meta-Analytic Review of Treatment Outcomes. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 36(4), 376–390.