



Play therapy is the most effective way to help children grow

Disruptive behavior is the most common reason for school referrals for play therapy. Disruptive behaviors include the interference of teaching and classroom orders, and distractions to other students' learning emotions. When children are misbehaving, the relationship with the teacher is upset. The negative impacts of the disruptive behaviors will result in a lot of interpersonal trauma, such as anti-social behavior, violence, and drug problems.

As the language ability in children has not developed well yet, play therapy can provide them with a natural medium to express themselves. Play transcends the barriers of age and language. Children can use play to tell people what they like and how they feel. For children, play is the best way to deal with what makes them angry, worry or confuse.

In the process of play therapy, children are enabled to strengthen their confidence and self-control

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when they are allowed to express their emotions. Children learn to entertain themselves, get what they need in a positive manner, handle the disruptive behaviors and get along well with other kids. Everything that children learn in play therapy is the universal value.

Nicky: The Boy Who Decided to Move on



**“Children need to learn that they are not a loser
when committing a mistake.”**

Nicky was brought to play therapy. He was seven years old when he came to see me. His parents were in jail because of drug trafficking. Nicky's emotions had been ups and down since then. He had fights, screams, curses in class, and nobody was able to contain him. His grandmother brought him to consult a psychiatrist. He was diagnosed with Attention-Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and was prescribed Ritalin to help him calm down. In the first few months, Nicky seemed to be feeling better. There were no complaints from school, everybody was happy to see the changes in Nicky. Three months passed, grandmother felt something did not seem to be ok with Nicky. He looked dull, and lost his appetite and energy. What made her worry more was the side effects that might have halted Nicky's physical growth and development. Feeling desperate, she sought play therapy. Nicky was excited to play in the sandbox. He created a battle ground where bombings and killings were intense and suffocating.



**“We should accept children as who they are,
but not his violent behavior.”**

Nicky came to play therapy every Thursday. He used to run to the playroom and hide in the corner, getting himself ready to frighten me. His play themes were all war related games, Nicky put on a helmet, holding a rifle gun and defending for his country.

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: You use the gun to shoot at me.



: Nicky. You are not for shooting. I am sitting here to watch you play.



: Pull the trigger.



: I won't shoot at you.



: (Pointing the rifle gun at my head). Shoot!

I set the limit with a pleasant and firm voice, insisting my decision for not taking any action to harm Nicky. I did not want to confuse him about my identity. He did not need to doubt if I was a bad guy.



: Pull the trigger.



: I am not going to shoot at you.

Nicky seemed to be upset. He fired a shot at me, but he intentionally missed my body.

I knew Nicky's reactions so well. His anger was caused by my "rejection" of shooting at him. He was mad but he has shown his self-control, that should not be overlooked.

Limit setting might not work out immediately. The child would keep trying to mess with me. His emotions were accepted, understood, and recognized. I did not perceive Nicky as a brutal aggressor.

What he should learn was the respect for the playroom. I believe that he would be respectful in a mutually trust relationship.

Came Thursday again. I did not need to bring up what happened last week. Every session had a brand

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new start.



“Emotions should be accepted, understood, and recognized.”

Play therapy encouraged this angry child to deal with his frustrations. The grandmother reported that Nicky did not have any fights at school. The teachers were excited to see him participate into football games, track and field team. In the team sports, Nicky made more friends, and his social interest developed. He no longer felt lonely.

In the last play therapy session, Nicky did what he had been doing as before, hiding in the corner to wait for the therapist. He started to play quietly. He drew circles with different sizes on the white board. He also wrote numbers which meant the scores of a dart board. When he finished, he started to shoot at the white board. For every shot he took, he recorded the scores. He looked like he was enjoying himself in the game.

The shooting game lasted for 30 minutes. He stopped and walked over to the white board. He figured out the total score with a beautiful smile. Without any hesitation, Nicky started to wipe off all the scores on the white board, and he turned around to show me his hands.



: You used your hands to wipe off the scores. Nobody would know anything about what you did.



: (Nodding his head and smiled).



: You look at ease. You have a special way get things done.



: (Showing again his hands which are full of black ink).

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: All the records are gone now. Nobody would know your history.



: Yes.



: You look at everything in the rear mirror. You move on.

This was the last session of Nicky's play therapy. I felt a little bit unsettled, but I was also thrilled to see the huge changes in the child.



: Nicky, you have something for Dr. Tom?



: Yes. I don't forget. (Taking out an apple from his pocket and handed to me). This is my lunch. I save it for you.



: Thank you. Nicky. You share the best with me. I will remember the days we were together.

Nicky gave me a big hug and said good bye.

Since that day, we had not come across each other again.



**“Play therapy is not just for children to have fun;
Play therapy is a positive way for character building.”**

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About Dr. Tom Yuen



- Doctoral Degree in Counseling Psychology from University of North Texas, Registered Psychologist in British Columbia, and Director of the Positive Counselling & Play Therapy Services, Vancouver, BC.
- Student of Dr. Garry Landreth, winner of International Society of play therapy Lifetime Achievement Award.
- Practiced psychological counselling in the United States, Canada and Hong Kong over 30 years.
- Conducted a large number of researches about positive psychology, mood disorders, play therapy for children, and youth issues with numerous journals, chapters, and books about psychology and counselling.

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