

Play Therapy for Students with ASD

Behavioral and Relationship Approaches

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Presentation Overview

- Therapy with students identified as having Autism
- Play therapy
- Play therapy approaches for working with students with Autism
- AutPlay: a behavioral approach
- DIR Model: a relationship approach
- Where to get additional information

Therapy with Students Identified as Having Autism

- Applied Behavior Analysis
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Social Skills Interventions
- Equine Assisted Therapy
- Improvisational Music Therapy

The Association for Play Therapy Definition

Professionals trained in play therapy systematically using a theoretical model to establish an interpersonal relationship & process by using the therapeutic powers of play to help children prevent or resolve psychosocial difficulties and achieve optimal growth and development.

The therapeutic powers, also known as change mechanisms, are the active forces within play that help children in communication, emotional regulation, relationship enhancement, moral judgment, stress management, ego boosting, preparation for life, and self-actualization.

Play therapy historically has focused on ages 2 -12, but during the last decade, there has been a push for play therapy for adolescents (and even adults!)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmKxvTtSWoc> Introduce play therapy to a student by using pictures and language.

Play Therapy Today

- Psychodynamic
 - Psychoanalytic
 - Jungian
 - Adlerian
 - Release
- Humanistic
 - Child Centered
 - Filial
 - Gestalt
 - Experiential
- Systemic
 - Family
 - Group
 - Ecosystemic
- Family Oriented
 - Theraplay
 - DIR/Floortime
- Brief
 - Solution-focused
 - Cognitive-behavioral
- Autism
 - AutPlay
- Eclectic
 - Narrative
 - Integrative
 - Prescriptive

Play Therapy Approaches for Working with Students with Autism

- Child Centered/ Non-Directive Play Therapy
- AutPlay
- DIR/Floortime Model



AutPlay

A Behavioral Approach

AutPlay General Information

- AutPlay is a comprehensive approach that combines play therapy and behavior therapy approaches
- It is intended for children (ages 3 – 18) with Autism Spectrum Disorder, developmental disabilities, and other neurodevelopmental disorders
- It incorporates a parent training component where parents are trained in using AutPlay techniques at home with their child

AutPlay Target Areas

Primary Target Areas

- Emotional Regulation
- Social Functioning
- Connection

Secondary Target Areas

- Sensory Processing
- Anxiety Reduction
- Behavioral Change

AutPlay Phases

- Phase 1 – Intake & Assessment
 - About 3 – 4 sessions
- Phase 2 – Directive Play Interventions
 - Unlimited amount of sessions
- Phase 3 – Termination
 - About 3 sessions



Phase 1: Intake & Assessment

- Typically the first 3 – 4 sessions
- Focus on gathering information
- Focus on relationship development



Phase 2: Directive Play Interventions

- Unlimited number of sessions
- Focus on skill development
- Incorporate a periodic evaluation

Phase 2 Interventions

- **Emotion Regulation**

- Feelings Beach Ball
- Worry Tree
- Mr. Potato Head Feelings

- **Social Skills**

- Social Skills Bag
- Conversation Bubbles
- Social Skills Cross-Off

- **Connection**

- All Around Me
- Make My Moves
- Family Night

Phase 3: Termination

- Typically 3 sessions
- Complete a parent consultation
- Complete a final goal evaluation
- Celebrate the child's accomplishments



AutPlay Strengths

- A Holistic Approach
 - Combines directive play therapy approaches with behavioral therapy approaches to comprehensively address the whole needs of the child
- Integration
 - Easily able to implement in home and school settings
- Evidence-Based Foundations
 - Incorporates effective principles of behavioral and play therapy approaches

AutPlay Challenges

- Termination
 - “Termination Phase”
- Impairment Based Limits
 - Working with severely impacted/impaired children
- Evidence
 - Its efficacy has not been demonstrated beyond the case-study level

Getting Additional Training in the AutPlay Approach

<http://autplaytherapy.com>





DIR & DIR Floortime

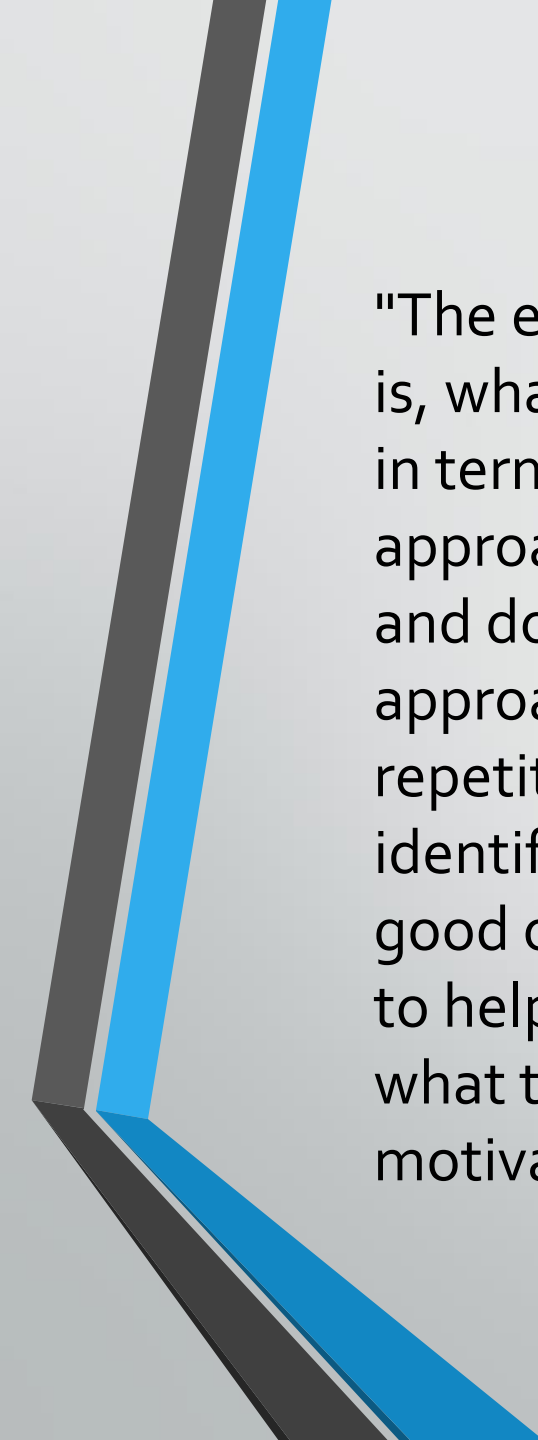
A Relationship Approach

DIR Model

- The objectives of the DIR model are to build healthy foundations for social, emotional, and intellectual capacities, rather than focusing on skills and isolated behaviors
- Comprehensive framework that is tailored to each child's unique challenges and strengths
- D (Developmental)
- I (Individual Differences)
- R (Relationship-based)

DIR Floortime

- DIR Floortime is the application of the DIR model into practice
- A specific technique to follow the child's natural emotions while also challenging the child towards greater mastery of social, emotional, and intellectual skills
- Emphasizes the role of parents and other members
- Most widely known as an approach to support children with ASD
- <http://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2220350494> Floortime & neurodevelopment



"The essence of motivation is finding out what the natural interest of the child is, what they like they do. Don't have any preconceived notions. Don't think in terms of "rewards." The stimulus/reward approach is a very limited approach, which was based on research done with animal, not human, models and doesn't encompass empathy and development of thought, etc. The approach does work, to some degree, but it tends to keep the child in a rote, repetitive mode. When a child is "stimming," think of it as an opportunity to identify motivation to deepen his or her engagement. Motivation is basically a good observer seeing what the child likes and building on this natural interest to help the child learn what he needs to learn. Thus, motivation is finding out what the child naturally enjoys doing and then building on that interest and motivation".

- *By Stanley Greenspan, MD*

Stage 1: Self Regulation & Interest in the World

- Stage 1 Goal: Become calm, attentive, and interested in the world
 - Discover the child's sensory and motor profile by entering their world
 - Help the child improve in Stage 1 by helping them look, listen, begin to move, and calm down
 - If the child becomes upset, provide the child with a sense of security that helps calm him or her down
- Short stretches of time, several times per day (20-30 minutes)

Stage 1: Do's and Don'ts

- **DO** interact with the child, without distractions, for short stretches of time, 20-30 minutes, several times per day.
- **DO** find enjoyable ways to involve child's senses and movement at the same time.
- **DO** interact with the child, do not just stimulate with exciting toys.
- **DON'T** leave the child to gaze at the world on his own for long stretches of time. You cannot spoil your child by spending too much time with them.

Stage 1 Activities

- To encourage mastery:
 - The Look & Listen Game
 - The “Soothe Me” Game
 - Hold the child’s hands or move them to the rhythm of your voice, making a game out of shifting their attention to a new activity.

Stage 2: Intimacy, Engagement, & Falling in Love

- Stage 2 Goal: Falling in love with each other
 - Throughout this stage, the child becomes more focused on you and other people outside of themselves
 - Your task during this stage will be to promote pleasurable feelings between you and the child
 - Staying emotionally involved will help ensure that intimacy gradually grows

Stage 2: Do's and Don'ts

- **DO** use a variety of high and low pitches and soft to loud tones when speaking to your child.
- **DO** use gentle touch while telling her what you are doing
- **DON'T** speak in monotone or with little facial expressions.
- **DON'T** be afraid to look or sound silly while having fun with your child.

Stage 2 Activities

- To encourage mastery:
 - The Smiling Game
 - The “Dance With Me” Sound and Movement Game
 - Identify an object of interest and hide it behind your back or under your seat so that the child must come get it. Do so in a way that does not frustrate the child too much, but rather amuses him.

Stage 3: Two-Way Communication: Helping a Child Communicate Gestures & Expression

- Stage 3 Goal: Becoming a two-way communicator
 - Take note of things the child is naturally interested in and challenge them to express themselves with feelings and actions in a purposeful way
 - The child will open the circle of communication by doing what they want to do
 - You can then build on this intention by helping the child achieve their goal
 - The child will close the circle of communication when they take advantage of what you offered and gestures back to you
 - Continuous back and forth communication is the goal

Stage 3: Do's and Don'ts

- **DO** simultaneously exercise as many of the seeing, smelling, hearing, touching and moving elements as you can while you interact.
- **DO** play lots of emotionally pleasurable games for longer times. The more interactive playtimes you share, the more fun you'll have.
- **DO** seek out the magic moments.
- **DON'T** be a ringmaster and direct the during play. Follow the child's lead and help to give direction and organization to their new abilities.

Stage 3 Activities

- To encourage mastery:
 - The Funny Sound, Face, and Feeling Game
 - The Circle of Communication Game
 - Encourage the child to point to the things she wants, take it from you, and then return it in a way that creates a flow of back-and-forth communication.

Stage 4: Complex Communication: Expanding Circles to Solve Problems

- Stage 4 Goal: Using a series of interactive emotional signals or gestures to communicate
 - Challenge the child to interact with you to solve problems, including those they want to solve and problems you present
 - Exchange gestures, including sounds, words, and actions, as the two of you problem solve

Stage 4: Do's and Don'ts

- **DO** engage in long chains of interaction around all your child's interests and make a point of exploring a range of feelings.
- **DO** challenge your child to experience different feelings so those feelings can become part of who they are.
- **DO** let your child know what you expect in terms of behavior, much as a corner policeman directs traffic. Use expressive facial expressions, body postures and vocal tones.
- **DO** challenge your child to solve more and more complex problems.
- **DON'T** label your child as good or bad. Be careful not to become preoccupied with teaching your child about discipline and controlling their behavior
- **DON'T** focus only on playing with blocks, puzzles, or cause-and-effect toys.

Stage 4 Activities

- To encourage mastery:
 - The Working Together Game
 - Copycat Game
 - Place a toy in which the child is interested on the top self, help him to find the toy when he discovers it is missing, and encourage him to problem solve ways to retrieve the toy.

Stage 5: Emotional Ideas

- Stage 5 Goal: Using symbols or ideas to convey intentions or feelings
 - Encourage the child to tell you what they think and want
 - Become their partner in emerging make-believe play, whether this is through pretending to be an animal or opening up conversation about wishes, dislikes, and interests

Stage 5: Do's and Don'ts

- **DO** get down on the floor and become a character-such as a bear, in a pretend drama of child's own choosing. Interact, talk, and emote through your character.
- **DO** hold long conversations about anything that interests your child, from a new toy to his favorite or most despised food.
- **DON'T** rely on puzzles, books, structured games, DVDs, or TV to spark child's ideas

Stage 5 Activities

- To encourage mastery:
 - Let's Chitchat
 - Start a conversation with the child about something she is interested in and help her to elaborate on the topic in a logical way.

Stage 6: Emotional & Logical Thinking

- Stage 6 Goal: Building bridges between ideas
 - Challenge the child to connect ideas together by seeking the child's opinion, enjoying the child's debates, and enlarging the child's pretend dramas
 - Help the child learn to think by holding long conversations in which you seek their opinions

Stage 6: Do's and Don'ts

- **DO** rely on creating elaborate pretend dramas that have logical plots and rely on enjoyable debates about everything from food to sharing toys.
- **DO** use reflective discussions. When your child wants something, Ask “What/when/why/how...?”
- **DO** carry out these activities in peer, sibling, and small play groups.
- **DO** expose your child to a range of activities. Encourage their natural interests and abilities.
- **DON'T** simply tell your child what to do; explain why you want to do something.
- **DON'T** solve problems for your child; let her solve them herself. Your role is to help her brainstorm or to offer any needed encouragement.

Stage 6 Activities

- To encourage mastery:
 - The Director Game
 - “Why Should I?” Game
 - Develop a simple game into more elaborate stories, challenging the child to make it more complex. Encouraging the child to build those bridges between multiple aspects of a story.

DIR Model Strengths

- DIR is not about doing the right or wrong thing, it's about the process that encourages the child to learn.
- DIR is very versatile and can be done in a variety of settings, with peers or without.
- DIR allows child and adult to bond over a common engaging activity.

DIR Model Challenges

- Following the child's lead while also challenging them.
- Changes do not happen overnight. Helping a child with ASD be a cooperative player takes time.
- Keeping the focus on the child's choices and learning process without intervening too much

Getting Additional Training in the DIR & DIR Floortime Model

- Dr. Greenspan's Training /Certification Program
 - <https://www.stanleygreenspan.com>
- The Greenspan Floortime organization offers parent workshops

Resources

Play Therapy

<http://www.a4pt.org/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmKxvTtSWoc>

AutPlay

- Books:
 - “AutPlay therapy for children and adolescents on the autism spectrum disorder”
 - “Play-based interventions for autism spectrum disorder and other developmental disabilities”
 - Both written by Dr. Robert Jason Grant
- AutPlay:
<http://autplaytherapy.com/>

DIR/Floortime

- Books:
 - “Engaging Autism”
 - “The Child with Special Needs”
 - Both written by Dr. Greenspan and Dr. Wieder
- DIR/Floortime:
<http://www.icdl.com/DIR>