



Learn to PLAY



Referral Information for professionals in health or education

Learn to Play Therapy aims to develop the ability of children to spontaneously engage in pretend play. It is for children aged 18 months to 10 years who find playing difficult.

To benefit from Learn to Play Therapy children need to be developmentally at the 12 – 18 month level (particularly cognition) and have at least one meaningful word, gesture or focussed attention on an activity that interests them.

Pretend Play

Pretend play is the focus of Learn to Play Therapy as many children do not develop this ability to play. Pretend play involves the child's ability to understand the viewpoint of another, see beyond the literal use of objects, and impose meaning and stories within their play.



Identifying children who would benefit from Learn to Play Therapy.

Learn to Play Therapy was developed for children with developmental difficulties, including children with autism spectrum disorder, acquired brain injury, learning difficulties, language disorders, and developmental issues that impact on language and social ability.

Examples of other indicators of children who would benefit from Learn to Play Therapy are children who:

- Are not socially aware of others
- Destroy the play scenes of siblings or peers
- Want to socially interact with others but do not know how to do this
- Do not understand a story
- Find it difficult to think of a story and what will happen next in a story
- Have delayed expressive and receptive language
- Have poor narrative language
- Are highly anxious in social situations

What is involved when you refer

After receiving your referral, the therapist will contact the family to arrange a time to meet them. They may have a meet and greet session first with the child and parent/carer. A pretend play assessment with the child will be carried out before therapy sessions begin. The pretend play assessment will provide valuable information as to what play activities will be suitable to begin therapy with the child.

Therapy sessions involve engaging the child in play so that play becomes joyful and meaningful to the child. Play activities will be chosen to build the pretend play skills of: play scripts (stories in the play) sequences of play actions (the organisation of the play), object substitution, (using an object as something else), doll/teddy/figurine play (the ability to decentre from self), role play (the child pretends to be someone else in play), and social pretend play. As the child progresses through therapy, the play activities provided will increase in complexity as the child develops their pretend play skills.



What are the benefits of Learn to Play Therapy?

For a child with expected intellectual capacity for age, changes in a child's pretend play abilities begin to be noticed from the 6th to 8th session. For children who meet the minimum criteria and have an intellectual disability, changes may be noticed by the 12th – 16th session. These changes are:

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- Increased ability to spontaneously play
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- Increased time spent in independent play
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- Increased ability to use symbols in play (object substitution)
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- Increased ability in how to use toys in pretend play
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- Increased ability in including dolls/ teddies/figurines in play
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Because pretend play is associated with social and language abilities, the following changes should also be observed:

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- Increased social awareness
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- A decrease in the destruction of siblings and peers play scenes
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- Increased language utterances
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- Increased ability to follow a short story
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- A happier child, with more awareness of what their siblings or peers are playing.
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For large changes in pretend play ability, research has shown that 22 to 24 sessions are needed for children with autism spectrum disorder.

For more information please see the website: learntoplayevents.com

Who to contact for a referral: