



**SYNERGETIC
PLAY THERAPY™**

Valuing Play Therapy: How a Parent's View Influences a Child's



Working with parents in the playroom is an important topic. Parents, after all, are the ones who usually initiate play therapy – they schedule the sessions, they drive their child, they pay for the service. This puts them in the role of becoming our partners and our most important allies.

Of course, it goes beyond the logistics. Parents are also such vital parts of play therapy because of the influence they have on their children and potentially their child's perception of the play therapy experience itself.

We know this already – child see, child do. So how does a parent influence their child during the play therapy process? Consider the following:

Children see their parents as role models.

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree...the family tree: children learn behaviors, ways of thinking, and how to handle specific circumstances from their parents. This isn't to say that parents have sole control over how their offspring turn out (other factors weigh in), but the voices of mom and dad loom large. A child who sees a parent "on board" with play therapy is much more likely to see its value as well. Conversely, a doubting dad or a mom with mixed emotions can stymie the healing.

Children expect parents to practice what they preach.

One of the mainstays of Synergetic Play Therapy is congruency – kids know when something is off. A play therapist who says they're sad while smiling causes a child's radar

to beep: they see danger and confusion when things don't add up. Children are honest (we know not to ask them if our new haircut looks silly) and they expect it in return. Parents who don't practice what they preach – they put their child in play therapy but question its efficiency, for instance – foster an environment of insecurity.

Children are perceptive.

Yes, incongruency threatens kids, but that doesn't mean the incongruency needs to be overt. Play therapists know that children are extremely perceptive and often pick up on both the obvious and the subtle. It's important for parents to understand this as well – signing a child up for play therapy but then only going to every other appointment sends the message that it isn't a priority. And this can leave a child wondering why they're even doing it in the first place.

Parents truly are our most important allies, so having them on board with the process isn't optional. And one of the best ways to form this partnership is by encouraging parents to see the value in play therapy. As discussed in other articles, setting the right kind of goals makes this possible. Remember, goals must be measurable, goals must be age-appropriate, and goals must not be all or nothing.

If the above isn't applied, it's easy for parents to grow discouraged. And when mom and dad get discouraged, more often than not, the child will follow suit.