BOP BAG

There are many perspectives in the field of play therapy regarding the use of bop bags in the play therapy process. Some therapists believe that the use of bop bags promotes aggression in children, while others believe that it is an essential toy in the play room allowing the child to express her/him/their self fully and thus encouraging empowerment.

This article attempts to bridge both opinions by outlining ways to avoid promoting aggression while encouraging the child to understand their need to express themself in an aggressive way. Please note that the examples of reflections listed below are just examples. There are many possibilities of reflections that are effective for deepening the child's awareness of themselves when they use a bop bag. Follow your intuition and trust your experience.

It is also important to note that the bop bag is a versatile toy and is not limited to one type of use in the play room. Although most children will use the bop bag as a way to project their feelings of disempowerment or empowerment, other children will use it as a source of comfort, leaning and resting on it for support or as a sensory toy bouncing and rolling on it to help regulate their nervous system (these are just two examples of other ways a bop bag can be used).

When a child chooses to use the bop bag, here are a few key principals to help guide your reflections:

1. Do not assume that you know who or what the child is wanting the bop bag to represent. It is also not important for you to know.

2. Unless you know the intended gender of the bop bag, it is best to refer to the bop bag as "it" or the gender of the child.

3. When making reflections, make reflections that address the underlying feelings that the child is attempting to project onto the bop bag. Example: Child picks up the bop bag and starts throwing it around the room, turning it upside down and making it spin fast. You are having to get out of the way to protect yourself.

   o Voice the bop bag- "If I were it/him/her/them, I would be thinking: Ouch, ouch. I am spinning out of control. My world is upside down."

   o Voice what it is like to be the observer- "I am scared and nervous watching this. I have to protect myself. I am starting to feel out of control."

- Voice your observation of the bop bag- "His/her/their world is turned upside and he/she/they have no control"

- Voice your observation of the child's interaction with the bop bag- "You want him/her/them to know what it feels like to have everything upside down. They have no control and are helpless."

4. It is important to avoid reflections that encourage aggression as much as possible. Examples of reflections that encourage aggression are: "Get him/ her/them", "You are so strong", "Show him/her/them how mad you are", "Hit him/her/them again", etc.

5. If the child chooses to use it for support or a way to regulate, providing reflections that enhance the child's awareness of what they are doing is encouraged. Example: The child has been running around the room in an anxious/frantic way going from toy to toy. They find the bop bag and lay on top of it struggling to gain their balance.

- Voice your observation of the bop bag- "It keeps moving. It's hard for it him/her/them to keep steady and support you."

- Voice your observation of the child's interaction with the bop bag- "You are trying so hard to make them stop moving so that you can relax on top. It is so hard to find a way to relax when things just keeps moving."

6. Match the intensity of the play. The child will keep turning the play up until the therapist embodies/names the intensity.

7. The most important principal to be aware of when the child works with the   bop bag in an aggressive way is that your ability to stay present and connected to yourself and to the child during the high level of intensity is the most healing aspect of the experience. If the child becomes highly dys-regulated and their aggression escalates, it is your ability to stay regulated and emotionally/energetically present that grounds the child.