EXPANDING PLAY THERAPY:
HOW TO THERAPEUTICALLY SPEAK THE CLIENT’S LANGUAGE IN A DIGITAL ERA
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THE OLD AND THE NEW

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

• After the session, participants will be able to identify at least 2 new ways to incorporate digital tools therapeutically into play therapy.

• After the session, participants will be able to identify at least 3 therapeutic components of digital play therapy.

• After the session, participants will be able to understand and identify at least 2 therapeutic benefits of introducing digital tools in their practice with clients.
DIGITAL TOOL DEFINITION

- Phones – music, google, etc.
- Computers – music, google, programs, testing, etc.
- Tablets – all of the above and apps
- Gaming systems - games

Resource regarding play therapists and innovation 2017:

KEY ASPECTS

- 1) Speaking the client’s language
- 2) Accessibility
- 3) Portability
HOW IS USING TECHNOLOGY IN PLAY THERAPY OK?

SCREEN TIME CONCERNS

BALANCE AND INVOLVEMENT
This cannot be emphasized enough.
The 2015 change in policy was informed by research done AFTER the explosion of apps (10 pages of citations!): [link](http://www.tapclickread.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Research-Bibliography-for-TapClickRead-2015.pdf)

- [www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org) - Family media plan “maker”

SYNOPSIS

"...attempts to help families think more strategically about what they want for their children are long overdue. Going beyond time limits is not an invitation for complete freedom, but an education of responsability on the part of parents and others who raise children. Nothing in the AAP’s guidance or the federal government’s report says, “Just hand your kid an iPad.” Instead, they ask parents and educators to step into their role as mentors and guides. “We don’t want to lead into the cult of intensive parenting,” said Radasky, who has two kids herself, ages 3 and 7. “But we do want them to be aware and involved. It’s not about watching the clock as soon as your kid starts playing games. Instead, watch—and interact with—her.”

WHAT KIND OF BALANCE?

- Home – working with parents in ways that work with their familial values and the client needs
- Social – boundaries, time, safety, interactive skills
- Activity – keeping active for physical and mental health
- Academic – use at school and at home

PROFESSIONAL USE CONCERNS

- Digital Use Decision Making – for other tools too!
• Knowledge – understand what you’re doing and why you’re doing it; how does it fit with your professional and theoretical beliefs?

• Comfort – are you comfortable with the tool you’re using? If you are not and you have knowledge which supports its use, then practice, learn, explore, use, practice some more.

• Familiarity – use the tools you are contemplating. Understand what tenets of play therapy the tool meets. The Therapeutic Powers of Play fits this beautifully.

• Integration – integrate the tool into practice.
USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN SESSION

Play therapists who utilize or plan to utilize either computer or internet applications in play therapy (including, but not limited to social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, email or online role-playing games) become fully aware of the potential benefits and limitations of this technology, and review the content to ensure appropriateness. Play therapists should refer to the most up to date HIPAA regulations and/or the guidelines from their state licensing laws and/or legal and ethical code of their professional organization regarding the use of technology in session.


ALSO, PLAY THERAPISTS ENSURE THAT:

1. The client is developmentally capable of using and benefiting from the technology.
2. The technology meets the needs of the client and is culturally appropriate.
3. The client understands the purpose and operation of the technology.
4. The use of the technology is consistent with the treatment goals.
5. The client and guardian of a minor client fully understand the potential benefits and limitations of the technology.
6. All possible efforts are made to protect the client’s identity that may otherwise be compromised through the use of the technology.
7. Any and all inappropriate pop-ups are blocked.
8. Confidentiality issues and applicable federal, state guidelines, ethical code of their professional organization regarding the use of technology is carefully reviewed with clients and guardians of minor clients.
9. When utilizing technology for parent/legal guardian consultations, the play therapist will provide all parties with an informed consent, including the benefits and or limitations of the technology being utilized.

THERAPEUTIC COMPONENTS OF PLAY THERAPY TECHNIQUES

Know what you are doing... and why you are doing it.
APT DEFINES PLAY THERAPY AS:

- "The systematic use of a theoretical model to establish an interpersonal process wherein trained play therapists use the therapeutic powers of play to help clients prevent or resolve psychosocial difficulties and achieve optimal growth and development."

- "More simply put, child play therapy is a way of being with the child that honors their unique developmental level and looks for ways of helping in the "language" of the child - play. Licensed mental health professionals therapeutically use play to help their clients, most often children ages three to 12 years, to better express themselves and resolve their problems."

APR  CONTINUED:

- "Play Therapy works best when a safe relationship is created between the therapist and client, one in which the latter may freely and naturally express both what pleases and bothers them."

PLAY THERAPY

VIRGINIA AXLINE

- "Play Therapy is based upon the fact that play is the child's natural medium of self expression ... it is an opportunity which is given to the child to "play out" his feelings and problems just as in certain types of adult therapy an individual "talks out" his difficulties."
BASIC PLAY THERAPY COMPONENTS
VIRGINIA AXLINE, 1947

- Must develop a warm and friendly relationship with the child.
- Accept the child as she or he is.
- Establishes a feeling of permission in the relationship so that the child feels free to express his or her feelings completely.
- Does not hurry the therapy along. It is a gradual process and must be recognized as such by the therapist.
- Only establishes those limitations necessary to anchor the therapy to the world of reality and to make the child aware of his/her responsibility in the relationship.

LOWENFELD, 1979

- "I set for myself as a goal to work out an apparatus which would put into the child's hand a means of directly expressing his ideas and emotions, one which would allow of the recording of his creations and of abstracting them for study."

THERAPEUTIC POWERS OF PLAY
Charles Schafer, Ph.D.
THERAPEUTIC POWERS OF PLAY
CHARLES SCHAEFER, PH.D.

Fosters Emotional Wellness
- Self expression
- Access to the unconscious
- Direct teaching
- Indirect teaching

Facilitates Communication
- Catharsis
- Abreaction
- Positive emotions
- Counter conditioning fears
- Stress inoculation
- Stress management

Enhances Social Relationships
- Resiliency
- Self esteem
- Self regulation
- Creative problem solving
- Moral development
- Accelerated psychological development

Increase Personal Strengths
- Attachment
- Empathy
- Social competence
- Therapeutic relationship
RESEARCH ON THE USE OF GAMING

There is a lot out there, here is a good place to start: **Super Better**

Jane McGonigal, Ph.D.
THERAPEUTIC COMPONENTS OF DIGITAL PLAY THERAPY TECHNIQUES

THERAPEUTIC BENEFITS OF INTRODUCING DIGITAL TOOLS IN YOUR PRACTICE

- Speaking your client’s language
- Entering your client’s world
- Connections with your client’s real world behaviors
- Familiar and comfortable medium
- Hearing them
- Interest in their interest(s)
- Client mastery
- Allows use with sensory/tactile defensive clients
- Allows use with severely traumatized clients
- Allows use with differently abled clients
- Some tools are quite culturally flexible

THERAPIST BENEFITS OF UTILIZING DIGITAL TOOLS

- Portable
- Save information between/across sessions
- Easy to store
- Easier to clean/hygienic
- Less expensive
- Titration toward the use of other tools in the session
IMPORTANCE OF TECHNOLOGY IN OUR CLIENT’S EVERYDAY LIVES

- Common, everyday known medium which is integrated into our everyday lives
- “there’s an app for that…”
- Organization
- Time management
- Event recording (everything from steps taken in a day to behavioral management)
- Money management
- Shopping
- Banking
- Entertainment
- Much more

THERAPEUTIC COMPONENTS OF DIGITAL PLAY THERAPY

- The therapist can:
  - Establish and/or deepen rapport
  - Assess a number of factors (assessment framework)
  - Implement interventions
  - Measure success/progress
  - Introduce/integrate coping skills

- Interactive process can be:
  - Expressive
  - Projective
  - Unfolding
  - Processing

- Addresses inter/intra personal issues

- Assessment Framework
- Level of Mastery
- Problem Solving Tolerance
- Coping Skills
- Strategic Abilities
- Revised Q Estimator
- Social Interaction Abilities/Styles
- Competitiveness
- Norm Competence Level
- Level of Rapport
- Development

- Interactive process can be:
  - Expressive
  - Projective
  - Unfolding
  - Processing

- Addresses inter/intra personal issues

WHICH AFOREMENTIONED THERAPEUTIC COMPONENTS CAN BE MET THROUGH DIGITAL TOOLS?

- Develop a warm and friendly relationship with the client.
- Accept the child as he or she is.
- Establish a feeling of permission in the relationship so that the child feels free to express his or her feelings completely. (speaking client’s language)
- Does not hurry the therapy along. It is a gradual process and must be recognized as such by the therapist.
- Establishes those limitations necessary to anchor the therapy to the world of reality and to make the child aware of his/her responsibility in the relationship. (e.g. interaction)
- Recognizes the feelings the child is expressing and reflects these feelings back in such a manner that the child gains insight into his/her behavior.
- Maintains a deep respect for the child’s ability to solve his/her problems and gives the child the opportunity to solve his/her problems in such a way that he/she is himself/herself and is made to value the child.
- Does not attempt to direct the child’s actions or conversations, but allows the child to make choices and to institute changes in the child.
- Adequate
WAYS TO INCORPORATE DIGITAL TOOLS THERAPEUTICALLY

- Have digital tools, such as a tablet, available in the play room along with other play therapy materials.
- Bring digital tools to off-site locations.
- Bring digital tools to remote locations.
- Places where traditional materials are too difficult/impossible to have available.

For use with:
- Titration – in particular with highly traumatized clients who are not ready for a sensory experience.
- Tactile defensive clients – e.g., ASD, OCD, severely allergic.
- Resistant clients – e.g., teens who are “too cool” for traditional materials.

USING DIGITAL TOOLS IN PLAY THERAPY – INDIVIDUAL, GROUP, FAMILY; DISCUSSING USE WITH CAREGIVERS

- What do caregivers/collateral contacts/referral sources want to know? What do they want to hear from you regarding the treatment of their child/referral?
  - Intake
  - Treatment planning
  - Phone conversations
  - Use the TPP chart!
WHAT DIGITAL TOOLS CAN BE USED IN PLAY THERAPY?

There are hundreds, let's look at a few…

FIRST, ASK YOURSELF:

How do these therapeutic components apply to the use of digital tools in therapy?

- Catharsis
- Abreaction
- Positive emotions
- Counter conditioning fears
- Stress inoculation
- Stress management
- Attachment
- Empathy
- Social competence
- Therapeutic relationship

- Resiliency
- Self-esteem
- Self-regulation
- Creative problem solving
- Moral development
- Accelerated psychological development

- Self-expression
- Access to the unconscious
- Direct teaching
- Indirect teaching

Fosters emotional wellness
Enhances social relationships
Facilitates communication
Increase personal strengths
Attachment
Empathy
Social competence
Therapeutic relationship

C. Schaefer (TPP)
J. Parson - chart
A FEW DIGITAL TOOLS FOR USE IN THERAPY

- Plants v Zombies 1
- Castle Story
- Meebie
- Life@home
- Virtual Sandtray App (VSA)

PLANTS V ZOMBIES 1

CASTLE STORY
"Developed by Dr. Steve O'Brien, a child psychologist and associate professor with over 20 years of clinical and academic experience, Life@Home is an innovative and powerful tool for a wide range of professionals who seek to better understand children. The Life@Home application enables professionals to view a child’s perception of his or her home environment through a fun, gamelike process. Children today are usually skilled and comfortable with technology, which has essentially become their language, and Life@Home makes use of children’s affinity for this new and constantly evolving form of communication."

http://psychtouch.com/
Please break into groups with one iPad per group.

Choose:

- Life@Home
- Plants vs Zombies 1
- Virtual Sandtray App

Get a directive from the table.

**Options**

**Option 1**
- Free play to experience a little of each of the three apps provided
- Apply tenets and TPP components as you play.

**Option 2**
- 20 minutes each for 2 of the provided apps
- Apply tenets and TPP components as you play.

**Option 3**
- Focus primarily on one app and get deeper into the process.
- Role play; switch users - one person as a client, one as a therapist.
- Change roles within the group if one person wants a chance to experience the roleplay.
- AutPlay sandtray directives are available for the VSA roleplay.
- Apply tenets and TPP components as you play.
LET'S REVIEW AND PROCESS

VSA CASE EXAMPLES

1) teen – highly gifted, maze
2) adult – negotiating the coming-out-to-parents process
3) child – selective mutism, “this is fun!” first words to this therapist
4) child – gifted, ASD, ADHD, created a game with obstacles, mastery, hindering conclusion message
THANK YOU!
Please don’t hesitate to contact me for further information or discussion!
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RESEARCH

- Hancock, Mark, Thomas Ten Cate, Sheelagh Carpendale, and Tobias Isenberg (2010). “Supporting Sandtray Therapy on an Interactive Tabletop.” Web: http://tobias.isenberg.cc/VideosAndDemos/Hancock2010SST.
RESEARCH CONTINUED


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