

Parenting the Theraplay® Way

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Parenting Goals:

- Felt Safety {These happen in connection
- Felt Worth with caring other(s)}
- HOW? Think what occurs in healthy, “good enough” parent-infant interaction. (list items)

- With babies, we focus on **CONNECTING**
- With older children, we begin to focus on **CORRECTING**

- But....correcting works better when we first **CONNECT** (e.g., see Purvis & Cross, Siegel)

Theraplay® goals:

- Building better family relationships and strengthening the bond between parents and children by
- doing the really important work of play (ted.com,cf. Stuart Brown, “Play is More than Fun”; Steve Keil, “A Manifesto for Play”; at youtube, “Piano stairs-the fun theory”)
- responding to needs of the child, not just managing behavior

Theraplay® Characteristics:

- Modeled on “good enough” parenting of infant
- Involves interactive, physical play with the goal of shared joy (closeness, touch, enjoyment of each other)
- Involves noticing, valuing, and nurturing the child
- Parent is actively involved and is the leader: to insure “No hurts! Stick together! Have fun!”
- Simplicity! (Props used only to enhance engagement)
- The focus is on the “here and now” (NOT on recalling the past, talking about the future, remembering rules, or doing elaborate strategy or pretend games)
- Geared toward child’s emotional level, younger kinds of activities, supportive/partnering manner

Adapting playful engagement to meet the needs of the older child:

- **PRACTICE ACTIVITY: LET’S SEE HOW IT WORKS TO TRANSLATE A BABY ACTIVITY INTO SOMETHING AN OLDER CHILD CAN ENJOY** Hand clapping games are popular from the earliest months right up through early teen years. There must be something in them that appeals. Let’s try them out and see why they are so popular.
- **DEMONSTRATE:** Patty cake, Sailor Went to Sea
- In order to do this you need to get in synch, look at each other and share a lively experience.
- Set up in pairs. Take turns being the adult
- What benefits does the child, the parent, the relationship get from such an activity?

4 Dimensions of Care

- Structure: making the world feel safe and organized
- Engagement: connecting with the child
- Nurture: helping child feel physically good
- Challenge: encouraging growth through success
- PLAY: giving experiences of Shared JOY!

Needs/Dimensions

- playing
- pick up
- talk/sing/read to
- dance/move with
-
- rhythm
- sequence
- routine
- rituals
- intro & encourage new things:

ENGAGEMENT

STRUCTURE

NURTURE

touching
cuddling

- Since Theraplay is modeled on the healthy parent-child relationship, let's remind ourselves of what that is like:
- (LIST ACTIVITIES THAT PARENTS DO WITH THEIR SOCIABLE 6 MONTH OLD BABIES)

How Play Fits In:

- As part of the routine, it repeatedly works on helping parent & child feel better about each other and themselves
- Chosen by dimension, it helps child learn important patterns and skills
- Active physical movement and fun help the brain work better
- A playful approach lowers resistance



Joy changes the brain in positive ways
and counter-acts negative emotions

- J. Panksepp, researcher on genetics of play

Needs/Dimensions

- playing
- pick up handshake) **ENGAGEMENT (4-part**
- talk/sing/read to
- dance/move with
-
- rhythm
- sequence **STRUCTURE (hand stack)**
- routine
- rituals
- intro & encourage new things:

Reasons for Misbehavior

- Mismatch in developmental expectations
- Overwhelmed by sensory stimulation
- Having HALTS issues (hungry, angry, lonely, tired, sick/stressed/too serious)
- Too much discipline/regimen, not enough connection/joy/playfulness
- Child feels bad about self

Developmental Age:

- Children can develop unevenly in the different domains (e.g., intellectually 6, emotionally 3)
- If hungry, angry, lonely, tired, sick, stressed, overstimulated, will act younger
- If ADHD, consider at least 33% younger developmentally than chronological age
- Gear limits/supervision to developmental age

Pre-consequences:

- Calm YOU first: put on your own oxygen mask before trying to deal with your child
- Connect BEFORE correcting: until calm, people do not hear/think/speak/do well!
- Remember: tension is contagious!
- So...watch your own volume, tone, facial expressions, sighs, body stance/movements

Consequences:

- Use logical/natural consequences (cf., "Parenting with Love and Logic" for ex.)
- "Upping the ante" de-motivates
- Empathize with matching intensity
- Try distraction (Theraplay games, looking at something together, an interesting fact)
- Use proximity, reassurance and rechecks, real choices, re-do's, compromise

“Time In” vs “Time Out”

- Time-ins keep child close vs separating, so offer support and aid until calm and regulated
- They are not rewards or consequences for the behavior but are learning experiences
- Time-outs work best if used sparingly and for calming and thinking, not as punishment

For Dangerous Behavior

- Use planted stance and firm authoritative voice (but without anger!)
- Stop behavior w/o inflicting hurt. This means physically lifting down a child who is standing on a tall piece of furniture, firmly grasping a child's wrist who is trying to hit or use a dangerous object, “corralling” an out of control child into a smaller, less stimulating, safer room such as a bedroom. Giving the child a “bear hug” (holding him from behind) until he is safe is better than spanking.
- State firmly: “Whoa! I will help you with what you need, but you need to think of a better way and use your words.”

Core Attitude: ACE (after calming)

- Accept (though not approve of) the child's behavior
- show Curiosity (not disapproval) about why she behaved that way (that is, try to figure out what the child was feeling),
- provide Empathy for the child's motivations
- This avoids triggering the child's sense of shame.

Discipline = teach

- Goal is teaching better behavior
- Learning occurs by Doing/ Experiencing
- Restitution/repair is better than punishment
- As you increase discipline (structure), equally increase nurture and engagement (NOTE: motivation to do good requires more positive than negative interactions)
- Note patterns and try to anticipate and intervene early

Application

- What is one thing you will plan to do differently this week to begin this Theraplay® way of parenting?
- Think PLAY :-)

You're never too old...
to have some fun, play a game,
make a connection!
We ALL need it!

Resources:

- Theraplay: Helping Parents and Children Build Better Relationships Through Attachment-Based Play, 3rd edition, by Phyllis B. Booth and Ann J. Jernberg
- Parenting the Theraplay® Way: 214 Engaging, Fun Activities to Create Joyful Connectedness, ed. by Gayle Christensen
- Fun to Grow On, by Virginia Morin
- The Connected Child, by Karyn Purvis & David Cross
- The Whole-Brain Child, by Dr. Dan Siegel
- Growing An In-Sync Child, by Carol Kranowitz
- The Out-of-Sync Child Has Fun, by C. Kranowitz
- Parenting With Love And Logic, by Foster Cline, MD, & Jim Fay