

Healing Through Play

A Parent's Guide to Registered Play Therapy (RPT)

As a parent, it can be heartbreaking to watch your child struggle with big emotions, behavior changes, or stressful life events. You might wonder if traditional counseling works for someone so young. Below are the most common questions families ask about how a Registered Play Therapist (RPT) uses evidence-based play to help children heal, grow, and thrive.

Why Choose a Registered Play Therapist?

- **Play is a Child's Natural Language:** Children cannot sit on a couch and articulate their feelings. An RPT uses specialized toys as the child's "words" and play as their "conversation."
- **Advanced Pediatric Training:** General therapists often lack specialized child training. An RPT has completed hundreds of hours of graduate-level education, direct child clinical supervision, and rigorous testing specifically in child psychology.
- **Brain-Compatible Healing:** Behavior and trauma are stored in the lower, non-verbal regions of a child's brain. RPTs utilize experiential tools—such as sand trays, art, and structured pretend play—to safely engage with and heal these areas without retraumatizing the child.
- **Involvement of the Whole Family:** RPTs do not work in isolation. They partner directly with parents, equipping families with systemic, at-home emotional regulation tools to transform the home dynamic.

Frequently Asked Questions

What exactly is a Registered Play Therapist (RPT)?

A Registered Play Therapist is a licensed mental health professional (such as an LPC) who has taken a step further by earning a highly specialized, advanced credential in child psychology and development. While a general counselor relies on adult talk therapy, an RPT has completed hundreds of hours of additional graduate-level training, strict clinical supervision, and rigorous testing focused exclusively on child-centered interventions. We know exactly how to evaluate and treat children using their most natural form of communication: play.

Why play? Why can't my child just talk about their feelings?

Children's brains develop from the bottom up. The areas of the brain that handle logic, reasoning, and complex language are not fully mature. When a child experiences anxiety, trauma, or stress, they cannot sit on a couch and explain it. Toys are a child's words, and play is their language. In a specialized play therapy room, an RPT uses specific toys, sand trays, art, and expressive movement to help children "play out" what they cannot say out loud.

What specific clinical issues does an RPT treat?

An RPT is trained to treat a wide variety of emotional, behavioral, and situational challenges. The most common issues we address include: **Anxiety & Fears** (including phobias, generalized anxiety, panic, and obsessive behaviors), **Separation Anxiety** (helping children safely navigate intense distress when away from parents or entering school), **ADHD & Impulsivity** (teaching children emotional regulation, focus, body awareness, and self-control), **Divorce & Family Transitions** (helping children process grief, loyalty conflicts, and the stress of changing household dynamics), **Grief & Loss** (safely navigating the death of a loved one, a pet, or a major life relocation), **Trauma & Abuse** (processing overwhelming medical trauma, accidents, bullying, or domestic stress without retraumatizing the child), and **Aggression & Behavioral Issues** (getting to the root of frequent tantrums, defiance, biting, or anger outbursts).

What happens during a typical play therapy session?

Every child's treatment plan is unique, but a session generally follows an intentional therapeutic structure: **The Play Space** — The child enters a room intentionally stocked with selected therapeutic tools (expressive puppets, sand boxes, real-life nurturing items, aggressive-release toys, and creative art supplies). **The Intervention** — Depending on your child's needs, the RPT may use Directive Play (guiding the child through specific exercises to build a skill) or Non-Directive Play (allowing the child to lead the play to safely express subconscious conflicts). **The Tracking** — The therapist closely observes, reflects, and co-regulates with the child, helping them learn how to identify and manage intense physical and emotional sensations in real-time.

What is my role as a parent or caregiver?

You are the most important part of your child's healing team! An RPT does not work with a child in isolation. While your child's specific sessions remain a private, safe space for them, we will hold regular parent consultation sessions. During these meetings, I will share general updates on their progress, teach you at-home emotional regulation strategies, and work together with you to ensure your home environment supports their continuous growth.

How long does play therapy take?

Because every child heals at their own pace, there is no one-size-fits-all timeline. Some children show significant improvement in 12 to 20 weekly sessions, while children dealing with deep or chronic trauma may benefit from longer-term care. Consistency is key; weekly sessions allow the child to build the deep trust necessary to do meaningful therapeutic work.