

Using Play Therapy for Treatment of Childhood Sexual Abuse

Practice Parameters for Children & Adolescents with PTSD (*American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2010*)

- Routinely screen for trauma & PTSD symptoms
- Formally evaluate for PTSD as indicated
- Consider differential diagnosis
- Comprehensive treatment based upon severity & degree of impairment of PTSD
- Include interventions for comorbid psychiatric disorders
- Trauma-focused psychotherapies should be considered first-line treatment
- SSRIs can be considered
- Medications other than SSRIs may be considered
- School-based accommodations may be necessary
- Restrictive & coercive interventions are not endorsed
- School- or community-based screening for PTSD should occur if a traumatic event affects a significant number of children

Best Practices for Treatment of Complex PTSD (*Cloitre, Courtois, Charuvastra, Carapezza, Stolbach, & Green, 2011*)

First phase

- Patient safety
- Symptom stabilization
- Improvement in life competencies

Second phase

- Exploration of traumatic memories to reduce emotional distress
- Reappraising meaning of traumatic memories
- Integrating traumatic memories into a coherent, positive identity

Approved Interventions

- Anxiety/stress management
- Cognitive restructuring
- Bilateral stimulation
- Case management
- Education about trauma & its impact
- Emotion-focused interventions
- Interpersonal effectiveness training
- Meditation/mindfulness
- Narration of trauma memory
- Sensorimotor/movement therapies

<u>Symptom</u>	<u>First-line interventions</u>	<u>Top second-line interventions</u>
Reexperiencing	Education about trauma Narration of trauma memory	Cognitive restructuring Emotion regulation Anxiety/stress management
Avoidance/constriction	Education about trauma Emotion regulation interventions	Cognitive restructuring Narration of trauma memory Meditation/mindfulness Interpersonal skills training
Hyperarousal	Education about trauma Emotion regulation interventions Anxiety/stress management	Narration of trauma memory Cognitive restructuring
Affect dysregulation	Education about trauma Emotion regulation interventions	Cognitive restructuring Meditation/mindfulness Anxiety reduction Narration of trauma memory Interpersonal skills training
Relationship difficulties	Education about trauma Interpersonal skills training Cognitive restructuring	Emotion regulation interventions Narration of trauma memories
Disturbances in meaning	Education about trauma Cognitive restructuring	Narration of trauma memories Emotion regulation interventions
Behavioral dysregulation	Education about trauma Emotion regulation interventions	Cognitive restructuring Interpersonal effectiveness Meditation/mindfulness
Attentional dysregulation	Education about trauma Emotion regulation interventions	Meditation/mindfulness Anxiety/stress management Narration of trauma memory
Somatic symptoms	Education about trauma Anxiety/stress management	Emotion regulation interventions Narration of trauma memory Cognitive restructuring
Dissociation	Education about trauma Emotion regulation interventions	Narration of trauma memory Anxiety/stress management Meditation/mindfulness
Identity disturbance	Education about trauma	Emotion regulation Meditation/mindfulness

(Cloitre, Courtois, Charuvastra, Carapezza, Stolbach, & Green, 2011)

Core Components of Trauma-Focused Interventions (*National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2018*)

- Motivational interviewing
- Risk screening
- Triage to different levels & types of intervention
- Systematic assessment, case conceptualization, & treatment planning
- Engagement/addressing barriers to service-seeking
- Psychoeducation about trauma reminders & loss reminders
- Psychoeducation about posttraumatic stress reactions & grief reactions
- Teaching emotional regulation skills
- Maintaining adaptive routines
- Parenting skills and behavior management
- Constructing a trauma narrative
- Teaching safety skills
- Advocacy on behalf of the client
- Teaching relapse prevention skills
- Monitor client progress/response during treatment
- Evaluate treatment effectiveness

Ice Breaker: A modified version of the board game Don't Break the Ice™ (Milton Bradley), players share information about themselves based on the color of the sticker on the underside of the game's ice cubes.

What Did You See?: (*D. Monroe & S. Yeung, personal communication, June 9, 2011*) As a therapeutic tool to assist individuals in understanding that trauma can be experienced, remembered, perceived, & recalled in various ways, players try to recall/remember approximately 15 miscellaneous items on a tray.

Making a List & Checking it Twice: The client and therapist create a ranked list of issues to be addressed in treatment.

Figuring Out the Puzzle: A puzzle created out of accurate statements about the traumatic event is assembled.

It's Not That Simple: This intervention acknowledges and explores the dynamic of secrecy inherent in sexual abuse and normalizes obstacles to disclosure. A small magnet represents the child, a large magnet represents help, and Play-Doh® represents obstacles to disclosure.

Feelings Hide-&-Seek: This technique is a therapeutic version of the childhood game hide-&-seek in which feelings start hidden and, through the course of hide-&-seek, are found and discussed.

Revealing Your Feelings: Players take turns coloring in shapes with Switcher Markers™, revealing the feeling word written inside the shape.

On a Scale of 1 to 10: The client ranks the intensity of their emotions by placing index cards with various feelings on a rating scale created vertically on the wall.

Pushing My Buttons: Specific emotions are processed based upon the color of “button” a player selects.

Relaxation Memory: The childhood game “memory” is played using cards related to the “Complete Muscle Relaxation” (Koeppen, 1993) script. You Tube video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aaTDNYjk-Gw>

Positive & Negative Thinking: Index cards with positive and negative cognitions are selected by players, read out loud, and categorized as a positive thought or a negative thought.

I Think I Can!: After reading “*The Little Engine that Could*” (Piper, 2005), players take turns selecting index cards and identifying general statements pertaining to positive self-talk each time a blank index card is selected. Following the game, the client uses art material to create a poster with examples of positive self-talk.

The Double-Edged Sword: Benefits and drawbacks of sexual abuse disclosure/discovery are processed. Dice are rolled. Players identify a benefit of disclosure if an even number is rolled and a drawback if an odd number is rolled.

Unpacking My Baggage: The client selects colored index cards and processes aspects of traumatic/abusive events based upon the color of the card selected (e.g. emotions, thoughts, causality, meaning, memories).

Who, What, Where, & When: Players select index cards and determine whether the situation written on the card is an appropriate time to discuss private/sensitive information.

My Neighborhood Helpers: Based on mandated child abuse reporting laws, a neighborhood is created to depict the “neighborhood helpers” who will believe children and take steps to stop child abuse.

From Start to Finish: A chain of paper people is created to represent the client’s therapeutic growth.

Figuring Out the Puzzle

A. Sexual Abuse

Inaccurate Statements About Sexual Abuse

1. Now that the sexual abuse is over, I should try and forget about it.
2. Everyone is upset because I told.
3. I will never feel better.
4. No one can help me.
5. The abuse is my fault because I didn't stop it from happening.
6. It is my fault the abuser got into trouble.
7. If I wouldn't have told about the sexual abuse, my family and I wouldn't be going through all of this.
8. Because I have been sexually abused, there must be something wrong with me.

Accurate Statements About Sexual Abuse

1. The abuser is older than me and is responsible for what happened.
2. Because sexual abuse is confusing, sometimes it takes kids a while to tell.
3. With help, I can feel better again.
4. It is important to talk about the sexual abuse.
5. It is okay that I told the truth.
6. The older person made the sexual abuse happen.
7. The changes that are happening are because of the abuse – not because I told.
8. The abuser is in trouble because what they did was wrong.

B. Divorce

Inaccurate Statements About Divorce

1. I could have stopped the divorce from happening.
2. My parents divorced because of me.
3. One of my parents is good and the other is bad.
4. I can only love one of my parents.
5. I have to choose between my parents.
6. I can fix things so that my parents get back together.
7. Since my parents stopped loving each other, they will stop loving me, too.
8. I feel like I did something that caused the divorce.

Accurate Statements about Divorce

1. It is okay to talk about the divorce with a safe adult.
2. I can love both of my parents.
3. People in my family can have different feelings about the divorce.
4. Because divorce can be confusing, it is important that I talk about my feelings.
5. It is not my responsibility to fix my parents' marriage.
6. My parents got divorced because of grown-up problems.
7. When parents get divorced, they still love their kids.
8. Nothing I did or said caused the divorce.

Relaxation Full Body Script

We're going to be doing some exercises that actually help relax your body and help you feel more calm. So, what I'd like for you to do is get comfortable in your chair, if you can, in your couch there,

I'm going to have you put your feet in front of you.

And if you can, have your hands relaxed to your side

You can lean back a little bit if you want.

It's going to be important to do what I say even if it may seem silly sometimes.

I'm also going to ask that you really pay close attention to how your muscles feel — how your muscles feel when they're tense, and how your muscles feel when they're relaxed.

I'm also going to ask that you close your eyes when we do this.

I'm going to be doing the exercises along with you, but I'm not going to have my eyes closed because I'm going to be reading this piece of paper in front of me that tells us about the exercises we're going to be doing.

Close your eyes.

The first thing I want you do to ...

Physical Relaxation Script with Imagery

We are going to begin to tense and relax the muscles of your body ...

Pretend you have a whole lemon in your left hand ... Now squeeze it hard ... Try to squeeze all the juice out ... Feel the tightness in your hand and arm as you squeeze ... Now, drop the lemon ... Notice how your muscles feel when they are relaxed ...

Take another lemon, and squeeze it ... Try to squeeze this one harder than you did the first one ... that's right ... Really hard ... Now, drop your lemon and relax ... See how much better your hand and arm feel when they are relaxed ...

Once again, take a lemon in your left hand and squeeze all the juice out ... Don't leave a single drop ... Squeeze hard ... Good ... Now relax and let the lemon fall from your hand.

Now pretend you have a whole lemon in your right hand ... Now squeeze it hard ... Try to squeeze all the juice out ... Feel the tightness in your hand and arm as you squeeze ... Now, drop the lemon ... Notice how your muscles feel when they are relaxed ... Take another lemon, and squeeze it ... Try to squeeze this one harder than you did the first one ... That's right ... Really hard ... Now drop your lemon and relax ... See how much better your hand and arm feel when they are relaxed ... Once again, take a lemon in your right hand and squeeze all the juice out ... Don't leave a single drop ... Squeeze hard ... Good ... Now relax and let the lemon fall from your hand.

Pretend you are a furry, lazy cat ... You want to stretch ... Stretch your arms in front of you ... Raise them up high over your head ... Way back ... Feel the pull in your shoulders ... Stretch higher ... Now, just let your arms drop back by your side ... Okay kitten, stretch again ... Stretch your arms out in front of you ... raise them over your head ... Pull them back, way back ... Pull hard ... Now let them drop quickly ... Good ... Notice how your shoulders feel more relaxed ... This time let's have a big stretch ... Try to touch the ceiling ... Stretch your arms way out in front of you ... Raise them way up high over your head ... Push them way, way back ... Notice the tension and pull in your arms and shoulders ... Hold tight now ... Great ... Let them drop very quickly and feel how good it is to be relaxed ... It feels good and warm and lazy.

Now pretend you are a turtle ... You're sitting out on a rock by a nice peaceful pond, just relaxing in the warm sun ... It feels nice and warm and safe here ... Uh-oh! ... You sense danger! ... Pull your head into your house ... Try to pull your shoulders up to your ears and push your head down into your shoulders ... Hold in tight ... It isn't easy to be a turtle in a shell ... The danger is past now ... You can come out into the warm sunshine and once again you can relax and feel the warm sunshine ... Watch out now! ... More danger ... Hurry. Pull your head back into your house and hold it tight ... You have to be closed in tight to protect yourself ... Okay ... You can relax now ... Bring your head out and let your shoulders relax ... Notice how much better it feels to be relaxed than to be all tight ... One more time now ... Danger! ... Pull your head in ... Push your shoulders way up to your ears and hold tight ... Don't let even a tiny piece of your head show outside your shell ... Hold it ... Feel the tenseness in your neck and shoulders ... Okay ... You can come out now ... It's safe again ... Relax and feel comfortable in your safety ... There's no more danger ... Nothing to worry about ... Nothing to be afraid of ... You feel good.

You have a giant jawbreaker bubble gum in your mouth ... It's very hard to chew ... Bite down on it ... Hard! ... Let your neck muscles help you ... Now relax ... Just let your jaw hang loose ... Notice how good it feels just to let your jaw drop ... Okay, let's tackle that jawbreaker again now ... Bite down ... Hard! ... Try to squeeze it out between your teeth ... That's good ... You're really tearing that gum up ... Now relax again ... Just let your jaw drop off your face ... It feels so good just to let go and not have to fight that bubble gum ... Okay, one more time ... We're really going to tear it up this time ... Bite down ... Hard as you can ... Harder ... Oh. You're really working hard ... Good ... Now relax ... Try to relax your whole body ... You've beaten the bubble gum ... Let yourself go as loose as you can.

Here comes a pesky old fly ... He has landed on your nose ... Try to get him off without using your hands ... That's right wrinkle up your nose ... Make as many wrinkles in your nose as you can ... Scrunch your nose up real hard ... Good ... You've chased him away ... Now you can relax your nose ... OOPS! ... Here he comes back again ... Shoo him off ... Wrinkle it up hard ... Hold it just as tight as you can ... Okay, he flew away ... You can relax your face ... Notice that when you scrunch up your nose, that your cheeks and your mouth and your forehead and your eyes all help too ... And that they get tight too ... So, when you relax your nose, your whole face relaxes too, and that feels good ... Uh-oh! This time that old fly has come back, but this time he's on your forehead ... Make lots of wrinkles ... Try to catch him between all those wrinkles ... Hold it tight now ... Okay, you can let go ... He's gone for good ... Now you can just relax ... Let your face go smooth, no wrinkles anywhere ... Your face feels nice and smooth and relaxed.

Hey, here comes a cute baby elephant ... But he's not watching where he's going ... He doesn't see you lying there on the grass, and he's about to step on your stomach ... Don't move ... You don't have time to get out of the way ... Just get ready for him ... Make your stomach very hard ... Tighten up your stomach muscles real tight ... Hold it ...

It looks like he's going the other way ... You can relax now ... Let your stomach go soft ... Let it be as relaxed as you can ... That feels so much better ... Oops, he's coming this way again ... Get ready ... Tighten up your stomach ... Real hard ... If he steps on you and when your stomach is hard, it won't hurt ... Make your stomach into a rock ... Okay, he's moving away again ... You can relax now ... Kind of settle down, get comfortable and relax ... Notice the difference between a tight stomach and a relaxed one ... That's how we want it to feel ... Nice and loose and relaxed ... You won't believe this ... But this time he's really coming your way, and no turning round ... He's headed straight for you ... Tighten up ... Tighten up ... Here he comes ... This is really it ... You've got to hold on tight ... He's stepping on you ... He's stepped over you ... Now he's gone for good ... You can relax completely ... You're safe ... everything is okay and you can feel nice and relaxed.

This time imagine that you want to squeeze through a narrow fence and the boards have splinters on them ... You'll have to make yourself very skinny if you're going to make it through ... Suck your stomach in ... Try to squeeze it up against your backbone ... Try to be as skinny as you can ... You've got to get through ... Now relax ... You don't have to be skinny now ... Just relax and feel your stomach being warm and loose ... Okay, lets try to get through that fence now ... Squeeze up your stomach ... Make it touch your backbone ... Get it real small and tight ... Get as skinny as you can ... Hold it tight now ... You've got to squeeze through ... You've got to get through that skinny little fence with no splinters ... You can relax now ... Settle back and let your stomach come back out where it belongs ... You can feel really good now ... You've done fine.

Now pretend you are standing bare foot in a big, fat mud puddle ... Squish your toes down deep into the mud ... Try to get your feet down to the bottom of the mud puddle ... You'll probably need your legs to help you push ... Push down, spread your toes apart ... and feel the mud squish up between your toes ... Now step out of the puddle ... Relax your feet ... Let your toes go loose and feel how nice that is ... It feels good to be relaxed ... Back into the mud puddle ... Squish your toes down ... Let your muscles help you push your feet down ... Push your feet ... Hard ... Try to squeeze that mud puddle dry ... Okay ... Come back out now ... Relax your feet ... Relax your legs ... Relax your toes ...

It feels so good to be relaxed ... No tenseness anywhere ... You feel kind of warm and tingly.

In a moment, I will count backwards from four to one ... When I reach one I want you to open your eyes and lie still for a while before you begin to move around again ... You will feel pleasantly relaxed and refreshed ...

Four: begin to feel more awake ...

Three: get ready to start moving again ...

Two: you are now aware of your surroundings ...

One: open your eyes feeling relaxed, alert and awake.

Follow Up and Processing

I want you to stay as relaxed as you can. Let your whole body go limp and feel all the muscles relax. In a few moments, I will ask you to open your eyes, and that will be the end of our session. As you go through the day, remember how good it feels to be relaxed. Sometimes you may have to make yourself tighter before you can be relaxed, just as we did in the exercises. Practice these exercises every day to get more and more relaxed. A good time to practice is at night, after you've gone to bed and the lights are out, and you won't be disturbed. It will help you sleep. Then, when you're really good and relaxed, you can help yourself relax at school. Just remember the elephant, the jawbreaker, or lemon. Like we talked about earlier, you said you also feel nervous when you speak before a crowd. Before you go up, you can practice some of these exercises without anybody seeing -- if you just do the lemon next to your side. You did a really great job today, and I'm really proud of you. When you're ready, you can open your eyes.

You did a great job! How do you feel?

(Koeppen, 1993)

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