

Can Play Therapy help Children affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic?

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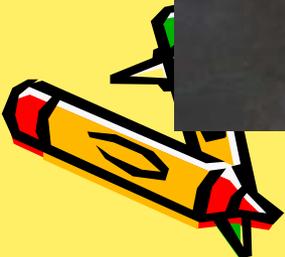
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What is Play Therapy?



What is Play Therapy?



Cattanach (2003) argues that:

'When children play imaginatively, in whatever context, they create a fictional world, which can be a way of making sense of their real world'

Children affected by the HIV/Aids pandemic have much to make sense of



What is Play Therapy?



- Play therapy offers the opportunity for children to play with a trained therapist in order to work through difficult feelings and experiences within a contained and safe environment
- Children often find this beneficial, as play is the natural way for children to express themselves.
- Children rarely act out actual experiences and there is no pressure on children to play at or with anything they are not comfortable with.
- The therapists role is to attend to the play and offer opportunities for the child to make sense of his or her world.
- Children are offered a choice of play including drawing and painting, stories, make believe, sand and water and modelling.
- The therapist will join in the play if invited to do so.
- Children sometimes make up stories jointly with the therapist.



Why Play?

Play is the natural means of expression and sense making for a child:

" Play is a unique experience in our lives that has a reality of its own, an activity in which human beings explore their worlds and their identity in relation to other worlds and identities. Play is the place where children first recognise the separateness of the self from others and begin to develop a relationship with the world beyond self. "
(Cattanach,1995)



Why Play?

'Children playing in therapy create a symbolic or metaphoric world where the power to change or reconstruct events belong to the children. In this play space, the children make acts of representation through which they can interpret or re-interpret their own experiences by playing imaginary worlds' (Cattanach,1995)



Can play therapy help children affected by the HIV/Aids Pandemic?



In 2004, KAPC launched its first training in Play Therapy in the belief it could help -not only children affected by HIV/Aids but all children in distress



How Can it Help?



Axline argues that:

'The overall objective is probably basic to all procedures: namely, to provide a relationship with the client that will enable him to utilise the capacities that are within him for a more constructive and happier life as an individual and as a member of society.' (Axline, 1982, p 121)

Or, to link to Cecilia's opening comment:

To offer therapeutic love in the journey to self-healing



Does it work in Kenya?



Of the little research that has been conducted in Kenya - Nonie Cohen and Kathryn Hunt - it seems to - in theory at least. What we desperately need is to hear case studies from Kenyan Play Therapists working with Kenyan children.

In the absence of case study outcome research, the 2006 cohort in Kisumu were asked to fill in an open ended questionnaire regarding their motivation to do the course and the perceived usefulness of the training and play therapy as a useful therapeutic tool.



Results:

8 questionnaires were returned out of a possible 14

All viewed the training as positive and felt that play therapy was a useful and appropriate tool to help Kenyan children

This is, perhaps, unsurprising, as they were investing time and money in the training!



Results: 'Why did you choose to take this course?'



Desire to help children

'I feel children have been left out'

'To use play therapy to help children'

'To enhance my skills in working with children'

Personal Goals

'For my own personal development'

'To enhance understanding of myself'

'To improve my curriculum vitae'



Results: 'Is PT an appropriate way to help children in Kenya?



1. It is appropriate because through play a child is enabled, express freely, experience control of self
2. I feel yes, as the child is able to project his/her feelings/issues in play therapy
3. Yes it is because when using play a child experiences his/her own world that he/she can understand best. Children have their own boundaries, no pulling or pushing of these is what children like
4. It is. Children don't go for adult counselling and therefore in most cases are not attended to appropriately -an appropriate way to help children come to terms with themselves especially at this time when there is rampant abuse and violations of children's rights



Results: 'Is PT an appropriate way to help children in Kenya?



5. Very appropriate -Kenyan children need to play
6. Very appropriate. It seems quite a natural way of overcoming their issues with no stresses. It is 'motivating' because it requires no explanations, just action through playing
7. Yes. It's part of growth, treatment, health and a way of counselling a needy child
8. Yes, children culturally are limited/inhibited. Centres of play therapy would support individual needs, just as counselling is nowadays encouraged for support



Results: What would be the difficulties in offering play therapy in Kenya?



1. Having stake holders understand its usefulness and paying for the service as the majority of children in distress are orphaned or parents very poor.
2. - lack of awareness -being deemed childish - Availability of suitable play materials (toys) for the African child
3. The difficulties will be the availability of a play room, variety of toys
4. - lack of enough play therapists-Ignorance of how it works, what it entails from the general public-training facilities- expensive to set up the facility and maintain it- having play therapists to practice



Results: What would be the difficulties in offering play therapy in Kenya?



5. People don't understand what it is. No one puts value in Psychological therapy in Kenya - unless there's HIV involved - because of lack of information
6. A lot of awareness needs to be created on its importance in the majority. It is new.
7. Since it's a new course, the authority might not understand what it is. The course needs clarification e.g. from the Ministries
8. Acceptance of therapy as a form of counselling -
Availability of rooms-Professional child play therapists -
Confusion of play therapy with just any play-Capitol to start therapy



Way Forward

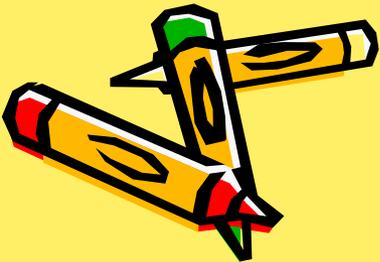


For me, the heart of all therapy lays in helping us to make meaning out of loss -loss of important people through bereavement, loss of self, loss of innocence, loss of childhood.

Black, (1996) argues that we cannot:

"afford to ignore the needs of bereaved *children* [when] interventions exist that can alleviate the immediate distress of childhood *bereavement*"

That seems to me to be true of all loss issues and makes the development of play therapy a priority



Way Forward

The difficulties the Kisumu group identified are echoed in their answers to 'where now'

They believe the way forward for play therapy in Kenya is to address similar issues to those faced when counselling in Kenya was developing



Way Forward



- Create awareness
- Conferences/ Workshops/ Seminars
- Training others / TOT/ KAPC initiate
- Lobbying for its recognition and registration with the rebuilt ministries
- Develop supervision
- Refresher courses/ conferences
- Reading a lot / doing research/ consulting
- Continuous practice
- Going for higher courses - Diploma, MA
- Exchange visits



Conclusions

We need all that and we need play therapists to be in practice and researching and reporting on whether and how play therapy works.

We need to work together to help our hurt children remember how to love and be loved and to set them free to dance



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