

## INFORMATION FOR PARENTS ABOUT PLAY THERAPY

### **What Is Play Therapy?**

Play therapy is to children what counseling is to adults. Play is the child's natural way of communicating just as talking is the adult's natural way of communicating. In the playroom, toys are used like words and play is the child's language. Children are provided special toys in play therapy to enable them to say with the toys what they have difficulty saying with words. When children can communicate or play out how they feel to a trained counselor who understands, they feel better because the feelings have been released. As a parent, you have probably experienced the same thing when you were bothered or worried about something and told someone who really cared about you and understood, then you felt better and could handle the problem better. Well, play therapy is like that for children. They can use the dolls, puppets, paints, or other toys to say what they think or how they feel.

### **Does My Child Need Play Therapy?**

In the process of growing up, most children experience difficulty coping at some time (at home, at school, with divorce and separation, with other children, etc.), or they exhibit behaviors which concern their parents or teachers. Some children may need more help than others in some areas. Generally, if you, your child's teacher, or pediatrician is concerned about your child's behavior or difficulty adjusting, play therapy is the recommended approach to help your child.

### **What To Tell Your Child About Play Therapy**

You may tell your child that he/she will be coming to be with Elizabeth in a special room every week where there are toys. If your child wants to know why she/he is going to the playroom, you may say something like, "When things are hard for you at home (or at school), sometimes it helps to have a special place to play."

### **What To Do For Each Session**

1. Have your child wear play clothes.
2. Take your child to the restroom before each session.
3. Reassure your child that you will be waiting when he/she comes out of the playroom.

### **After Each Session**

Refrain from asking questions about what your child did, what happened, or was it fun. Just say, "Hi. We can go home now." Listen carefully and allow your child to lead the conversation. Sometimes your child may take a painting or drawing home. Instead of praising the item, simply describe what you see, such as: "You used lots of colors. There's some blue, and green, and a lot of brown all the way across the bottom of the picture," or "You drew a picture of three people."

(Excerpted from Garry Landreth (1991). *Play Therapy: The Art Of The Relationship*. Muncie, IN: Accelerated Development.)

### *Other Thoughts:*

Elizabeth will not only allow your child to play, but in most cases she will talk to your child about what is going on in his/her life. If something is pertinent, she will save time to call you in at the end of the session or ask you to make a separate session for yourself. Elizabeth has seen that many times children work out issues without having to talk with the parents about each issue.

Elizabeth has found that parents who are willing to change themselves and look at their own issues greatly helps to support the counseling sessions and shortens the time needed with the child.

Please email Elizabeth with your thoughts or concerns that may help her to better counsel your child.