

Children's Therapy Playful Steps

INFORMATION BOOK

2025



ABOUT

INTRODUCTION

At Playful Steps Children's Therapy, children are supported to express their feelings, work through difficulties and explore their world through play. With a passion for helping children connect and thrive, Cathi creates time and space for them to grow and heal in a safe and supportive environment.

With over 30 years of experience in Early Childhood Education as a Teacher, Inclusive Support Teacher and Advisor Cathi transitioned to Early Intervention, where she works closely with families, supporting children through keyworker and play therapy sessions. She also provides guidance to Early Childhood Services and Schools. Cathi believes connection with children is the first step to understanding and meeting their needs to support them to grow and heal.

Her qualifications include:

- Master of Child Play Therapy (Deakin University)
- Bachelor of Special Education (Monash University)
- Diploma of Teaching Early Childhood (Melbourne University)
- Children's Yoga Teacher Training
- Cert IV in Training and Assessment
- Lego Facilitator Training
- Sand Tray Therapy Training

Professional registration: The Victorian Institute of Teaching,
Play Therapy Practitioners Association



KEYWORKER

WHAT IS A KEYWORKER?

A Keyworker acts as the primary point of contact for a child and their family, connecting all services supporting the child, introducing new services as needed and ensuring that the participant's needs are met through the implementation of their NDIS plan.



As an Early Childhood Keyworker/ Specialist Teacher/ Play Therapist Cathi

1. Provides play therapy or therapeutic support through play to promote development and emotional growth and wellbeing. Therapy may be provided in clinic, at home or at school, kindergarten or childcare.
2. Creates and coordinates individualised plans: She helps develop and tailor NDIS plans to meet the child's specific goals and needs.
3. Liaises with service providers: Cathi collaborates with various service providers (e.g., therapists, educators, support workers) to ensure all supports are in place and being delivered effectively, calling in different disciplines for consultations as needed.
4. Advocates for the child and family: She can assist in navigating the NDIS system, ensuring the child receives the services and supports they are entitled to.
5. Monitors progress: Cathi tracks the child's progress and may help adjust the plan if needed, ensuring it remains aligned with individual goals.
6. Provides guidance to families: Cathi offers guidance and emotional support to families, helping them understand how best to support the child's development.

Keyworker support can be weekly or fortnightly and last from one term to a year or more, depending on the needs of the child and family.

PLAY THERAPY

WHAT IS PLAY THERAPY?

Play therapy is a developmentally appropriate, evidenced based approach, in which a trained therapist provides a permissive and safe environment for children to explore their inner world, thoughts and emotions. There is a focus on the relationship to ensure children feel heard and understood and work through their difficulties through play, the natural language of a child.

Play therapy can:

- Develop a child's ability to communicate
- Improve the child's ability to self-regulate
- Reduce the frequency and intensity of meltdowns or challenging behaviors
- Assist the child in processing and coping with traumatic experiences
- Foster the development of social and play skills
- Strengthen the attachment and family relationships
- Enhance the child's self-esteem and sense of identity

Who can benefit from play therapy?

Children experiencing difficulties with:

- Confidence
- School and social skills
- Communication
- Connection
- Anxiety and depression
- Grief and loss
- Chronic illness
- Sleep
- Out of Home Care
- Coping with change
- Emotional regulation
- Sensory processing
- Processing trauma
- Play skills
- Behaviour

Children with a diagnosis of:

- Autism
- ADHD
- Global Development Delay
- Communication delays and disorders
- Cerebral Palsy
- Down Syndrome
- PTSD
- plus more...





LEARN TO PLAY

"Learn to Play is a practical hands-on therapy which aims to develop the enjoyment and the ability of a child to engage in pretend play to further supports other areas of development, including speech and language, narrative understanding, creativity, social competence and emotional regulation." (Stagnitti,K., 2021).

Learn to play is a more directive approach which involves supporting children to learn how to initiate, imitate and engage in pretend play. While many children can engage in play independently, some require guidance to demonstrate and teach them how to play in order to develop the more advanced skills necessary for lifelong learning.

Learn to Play Therapy is often suitable for children who experience difficulties with:

- Social environments
- Managing emotions
- Rigid or inflexible behaviours
- Connecting with peers
- Playing on their own
- Imagination or pretend play
- Confidence

During Learn to Play sessions, Cathi will select and direct the play activities to scaffold children's play and help them to develop their play skills. The play activities will increase in complexity as the therapeutic process continues. Initially Cathi leads the play, with the view of the child initiating and leading the play as sessions progress.

What does Learn to play involve?

- An intake session with the parent(s) to gain information about the child and understand parent goals
- An assessments of the child's play ability
- 10 -12 Learn to Play Sessions
- A meeting midway and at the end to reflect with parents and provide further recommendations.

Total: 14-16 sessions depending on the needs of the child.

CHILD CENTRED PLAY THERAPY

"Enter into children's play and you will find the place where their minds, hearts, and souls meet"

Virginia Axeline

Through Child-Centered Play Therapy, a therapist creates a safe environment where the child can explore thoughts and feelings through play. By building a trusting relationship, the therapist attunes to the child's needs, offering time and space to help them feel heard and understood. The child leads the play, expressing emotions through words, actions, or toys, while the therapist reflects the child's feelings without prompting or suggesting. The approach views the child as capable of resolving their challenges, with basic limits in place to ensure safety in the playroom.

Cathi uses knowledge of child development and psychosocial theory to observe play patterns, gaining insight into the child's inner world. Child Centred Play therapy is a gradual, patient process, allowing children to work through their thoughts and feelings at their own pace.

Who can benefit from Child Centred Play Therapy?

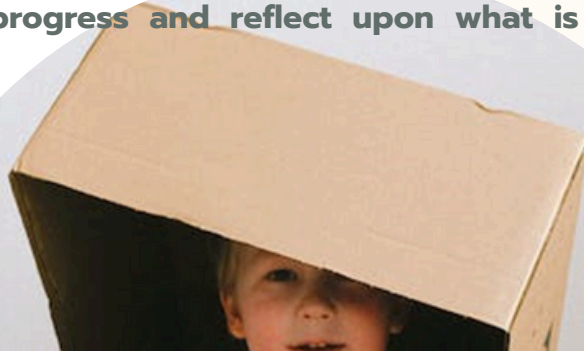
Children experiencing:

- emotional and behavioural issues
- anxiety
- attachment difficulties
- difficulties at school
- difficulties with communicating or engaging in social situations
- loss, family separation and breakdowns
- illness or have a sibling with an illness or disability
- have witnessed domestic violence or substance abuse
- abuse, neglect, or trauma

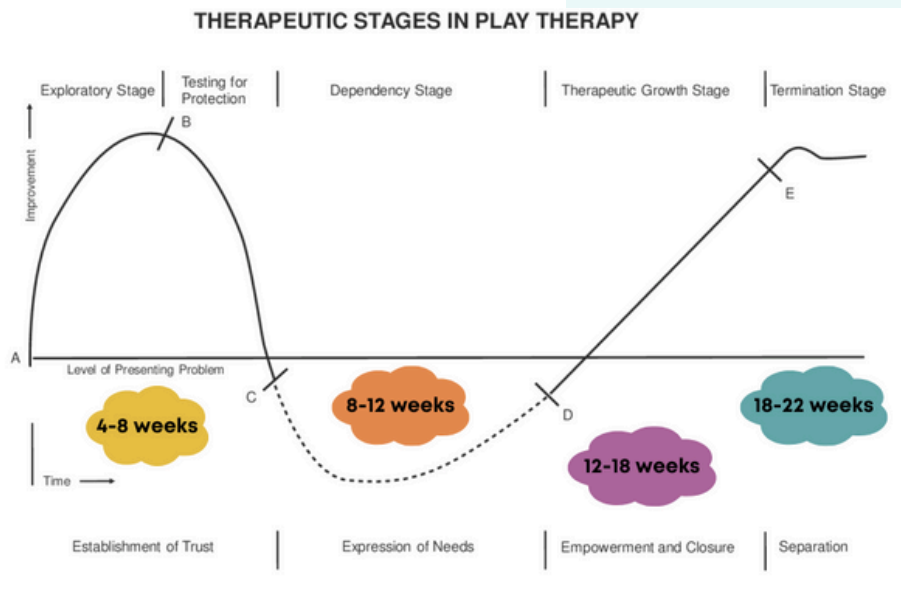
Short term interventions may require around 15 sessions, however some children require longer interventions. Cathi meets with parents every 5-6 sessions to share progress and reflect upon what is happening in the child's world.

Play session structure:

1. Intake
2. Child Sessions 1-5
3. Parent/Carer update
4. Child Sessions 6-10
5. Parent/Carer update
6. Written Report (if requested)
7. Repeat.



THE PLAY THERAPY PROCESS



IN CHILD CENTRED PLAY THERAPY IT TAKES AN AVERAGE OF 20 SESSIONS FOR MOST CHILDREN TO COMPLETE THEIR THERAPEUTIC GOALS (CARMICHAEL, 2006; LANDRETH, 2002)

1. Exploration and engagement (trust building stage) 1-4 weeks

Focus: building rapport and creating a safe space

Characteristics:

- the child may be curious about the environment
- initial hesitation, shyness or testing of boundaries

The therapist establishes trust by being consistent, accepting and non-judgemental

Therapeutic role:

- allow the child the freedom to explore toys and experiences
- mirror the child's actions and provide gentle reflections to validate feelings

2. Testing and Dependency 4-8 weeks

Focus: Assessing boundaries and deepening the relationship.

Characteristics:

- The child may test the therapist's responses to actions or behaviors.
- Increased dependence on the therapist for reassurance and guidance.
- Expression of some guarded emotions or behaviors.
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Therapeutic Role:

- Maintain consistent boundaries to foster safety.
- Offer empathy and support while allowing the child to lead the play.



THE PLAY THERAPY PROCESS

3. Emotional Expression and Working Through 8-12 weeks

Focus: Expressing emotions, conflicts, and concerns through play.

Characteristics:

- Emergence of themes or symbolic play related to inner struggles.
- Acting out scenarios reflecting real-life challenges or anxieties.
- Displays of strong emotions, such as anger, sadness, or fear.

Therapeutic Role:

- Help the child name and process emotions using reflections and language.
- Support the child's exploration of difficult experiences or feelings.
- Introduce coping strategies or tools if appropriate.

4. Development of Insight and Empowerment 12-18 weeks

Focus: Gaining self-awareness and practicing new skills.

Characteristics:

- The child begins to understand their emotions, behaviors, and choices.
- Role-playing or problem-solving scenarios emerge in play.
- A shift toward more constructive and goal-directed play.

Therapeutic Role:

- Encourage reflection and recognition of progress.
- Introduce new strategies for coping and problem-solving.
- Reinforce positive changes in play and interactions.

5. Independence and Closure 18-22 weeks

Focus: Consolidating gains and transitioning out of therapy.

Characteristics:

- The child exhibits confidence in handling emotions and challenges.
- Themes of resolution and closure appear in play.
- Less reliance on the therapist and increased self-direction.

Therapeutic Role:

- Celebrate the child's progress and successes.
- Gradually reduce the frequency of sessions.
- Provide tools and resources for continued growth outside therapy.



FILIAL (FAMILY) THERAPY

FILIAL THERAPY

"Filial Therapy strengthens the parent-child relationship directly, and this has far-reaching benefits for the child, the parent and the entire family"

(Vanfleet, R., 2022)

Filial Therapy uses play therapy to support families to make changes at home to build stronger connections and communication. Parents or guardians learn to see the world through the eyes of their child. Filial Therapy supports parents and carers to become the therapeutic agents for change for their children by learning basic skills of Child Centred Play therapy with a trained play therapist in order to conduct their own play sessions at home. This strengthens the parent child relationship and developing skills to support connection and consistency in parenting which will continue long after the intervention has concluded (Van fleet et al), 2010).

Filial Therapy takes place over 16 or more sessions and is tailored to meet the needs of each family. After getting to know the family and establishing some shared goals for therapy, the therapist then teaches the parents/carers how to use therapeutic skills with their own children. Parents/ carers are then supported to have one-on-one play sessions with their children supervised by the Play Therapist. Once parents or carers are ready, the Play Therapist will then support parents or carers to consider how to apply the knowledge and skills into home life.

Please note that both parents/ carers (if applicable) are required to attend all sessions, with some sessions being without children. Some sessions can be online at a time that suits parents or in clinic at organised times.



CONSULTANCY

EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANCY

*EMPOWERING EDUCATORS WITH KNOWLEDGE,
SKILLS, AND RESOURCES NEEDED TO CREATE
NURTURING AND STIMULATING ENVIRONMENTS THAT
PROMOTE INCLUSIVE LEARNING AND OPTIMAL
DEVELOPMENT FOR YOUNG CHILDREN.*

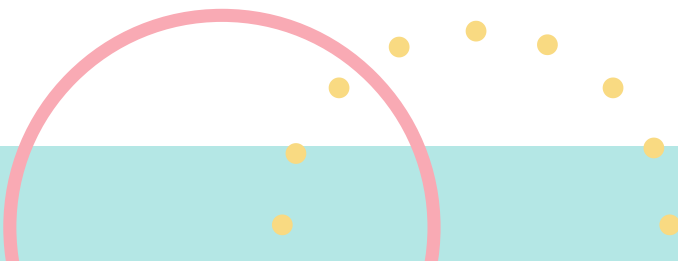


With three decades of experience in early childhood education, Cathi is dedicated to fostering excellence in educational environments. She engages with kindergartens, schools, and early learning centres, partnering with educators to leverage their strengths and achieve the best possible outcomes for children and families.

Consultation sessions and presentations support:

1. Reflecting on the classroom environment
2. Providing inclusive practice
3. Strengthening relationships with children and families
4. Learning some non-directive techniques to support better connection and engagement with children

Consulting and training packages can be tailored to individual services. Please contact Playful Steps Children's Therapy for costing and more information.



GROUP THERAPY

COMING SOON...

- Children's Yoga
- Lego Therapy
- Social Connection
- Creative Therapy
- Fun with Food



PLAY THERAPY SESSIONS

Play therapy sessions run for 45mins minutes with 15mins reflection and note taking at the end.

- **Setting:** In play therapy, toys are carefully selected to serve therapeutic purposes and meet the specific developmental, emotional, and social needs of children. Toys are grouped into categories based on their function in therapy, with each category targeting particular areas of growth or expression. The environment is designed to feel safe and inviting.
- **Initial Check-In** to note how the child is feeling.
- **Free Play:** The child is encouraged to play freely with the materials available. This play is a form of communication; the child may act out scenarios, express emotions, or demonstrate relationships through their play.
- **Therapeutic Interventions:** By fostering a supportive and non-directive environment, the therapist empowers the child to express themselves, build self-awareness, and develop the internal resources needed for healing and growth. This is done through following the child's lead, reflecting and validating emotions, setting limits when necessary, observing and interpreting play, and facilitating problem solving and coping skills.
- **Closure:** 5 mins warning is provided, and the best rule of the playroom is the child does not need to clean up! This approach emphasises giving the child full autonomy and freedom within the therapeutic space.
- **Parental Involvement:** Parents are not usually involved in child-centred play therapy sessions however feedback sessions without the child occur every 6 weeks or so.

This structure helps create a secure environment where children can express themselves and work through challenges at their own pace.



HOW CAN PARENTS SUPPORT?

Parents play a crucial role in supporting their child's play therapy journey. Here are some ways parents can support play therapy:

- Maintain open communication with the play therapist, sharing relevant updates about your child. This helps the therapist understand your child's needs better.
- Ensure consistent attendance for therapy sessions to build trust and familiarity.
- Create a supportive home environment where your child feels comfortable expressing themselves through play.
- Respect session confidentiality; avoid pressuring your child to share what happens in therapy.
- Encourage unstructured play at home and participate when appropriate to strengthen your bond.
- Collaborate with the therapist to apply supportive strategies at home.
- Seek support for yourself, recognising that the therapy process can also be challenging for parents.
- Consult the play therapist for specific guidance tailored to your child's needs.

REMEMBER, EACH CHILD'S PLAY THERAPY JOURNEY IS UNIQUE, AND IT'S IMPORTANT TO CONSULT WITH THE PLAY THERAPIST FOR SPECIFIC GUIDANCE ON HOW TO BEST SUPPORT YOUR CHILD'S INDIVIDUAL NEEDS.



NOTE ON CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality means that what happens during play therapy stays private between the child and the therapist. It is a key part of ensuring the child feels safe to express their thoughts and feelings freely. Here's how confidentiality is maintained and what it means:

Privacy for the Child: The therapist will not share what the child says or does during play therapy with others unless the child gives permission. This helps the child feel secure and builds trust.

Exceptions to Confidentiality: There are some important situations where the therapist may need to break confidentiality: If the child says something that suggests they are in danger or someone else is in danger (for example, if they are being hurt or are planning to hurt themselves or others). If the law requires the therapist to share information.

Involvement of Parents or Caregivers: While the details of play therapy stay private, parents or caregivers will receive general feedback on how the child is doing. The therapist might discuss themes or progress, but specifics of the child's play and words remain confidential unless the child wants to share them.

Trust and Safety: Confidentiality helps children feel safe to explore their emotions, knowing that their play and feelings will be respected and protected. This understanding of confidentiality helps foster a trusting relationship in the playroom, supporting the child's emotional and therapeutic growth.

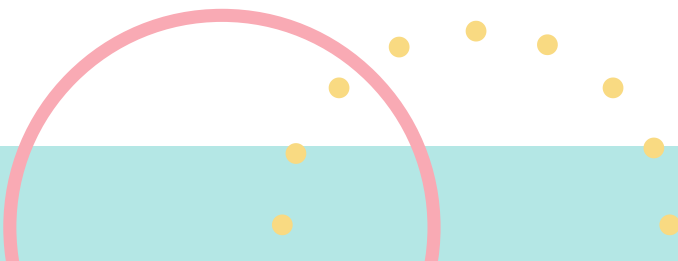


HOW TO PREPARE YOUR CHILD FOR PLAY THERAPY



How can you prepare your child for play therapy?

- Explain Play Therapy in simple terms. Tell your child they are going to meet a counsellor who works and plays with children.
- A social story will be provided to support.
- Create a positive environment: "This is a special time just for you where you can play, and Cathi will be there to help and listen to you."
- Reassure them you will be just outside the playroom, if needed





Contact Details

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Private and NDIS
(Plan managed and self-managed)
clients welcome