

# Using Play Therapy to Strengthen The Parent-Child Relationship

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# Objectives:

- Describe some of the difficulties facing parents with Intellectual Disabilities in typical parenting programs
- Learn 5 concepts and skills that are introduced to parents in play therapy or filial play therapy
- Describe how to modify an evidenced based model play therapy model to meet the individual needs of parents in a play setting
- Understand how play based interventions can improve the parent child relationship

# CASE EXAMPLE 'LAURA'

- Laura was diagnosed with mild intellectual disabilities
- She had 2 children, both seen as “typical”
- She maintained both children in her custody until they started school and then problems started to develop
- Her children were placed in foster care and after 2 years a failed attempt to terminate her parental rights, Laura was referred to me for “parenting”

# AND THEN WHAT...

So, in the context of the conference theme,

## A Chance to Parent

We begin a discussion about using play therapy to help improve the parent child relationship

# The Arc Strategies for Successful Supports

- Responsive to individual needs
- Long-term, ongoing supports
- Consider special needs of the parent. Learning IN the home with little or no reading

# The Arc Recommendations

- In home (In the setting where parents will use them)
- Parenting Groups (Teaching discipline, safety)
- Center Based Program (Parent and Child Together)

# HOW DOES PLAY THERAPY FIT INTO THIS

- Play therapy is a PERSON CENTERED approach not a problem centered approach so it is always individualized
- Play Therapy is a WAY OF BEING rather than just a skill so it is life-long and grows naturally with the client
- Play Therapy is a HANDS-ON approach and requires no reading

# CPRT Specifically ...

- A Play therapy model (CPRT) involves play sessions occurring IN THE HOME
- But also, involves participation in 10 group parent coaching sessions that talk about DISCIPLINE
- And allows for individual interaction with the therapist through booster sessions (PARENT AND CHILD TOGETHER) in the office for further practice

# And...

CPRT is becoming evidenced based. In reviews of research studies, it appears to have a LARGE treatment effect

## Research Analysis

And yet...I couldn't find any that supported using play therapy with AN adult with intellectual disabilities

# What Happened Next?

- Obtained informed consent to TRY a version of CPRT with Laura despite obstacles for implementation that were identified from the beginning
- TRANSPORTATION
- VISITATION SCHEDULES
- CASEWORKER ISSUES
- LACK OF RESOURCES

# WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN

- Child Parent Relationship Training (CPRT) is a 10 session group therapy model in which parents are expected to learn skills in a group setting and then practice them with their child for 30 minutes once per week.
- Parents videotape their play session for review during the group setting for feedback and further assistance from the therapist and other parents
- Topics include Reflecting Feelings/Emotions, Choice Giving, Limit Setting, and Praise

# WHAT DID HAPPEN

- Caseworker could find no way to get Laura transportation to a group
- Paraprofessionals (different ones each week) were supervising visits and unable to assess for skills learned
- Children were brought to the office for therapy/visitation and the mother was expected to learn parenting skills during sessions
- We decided to use a version of CPRT...more filial therapy following the CPRT components

# The Plan Was

- Each week has lesson content, videos, etc and is designed to be done in a group setting
- For Laura, we covered the material individually for 15-20 minutes before the children arrived.
- Then we had a 30 minute play session where Laura was able to practice those skills
- And then we had a 15 minute review of the visit individually after the children left
- The caseworker was supposed to follow up to make sure that the skill of the week was being used in other visits in the home.

# Session 1

- Reflective Responding
- Labeling Feelings and Emotions
- 30 Second Bursts of Attention
- Picture of Child
- Notice a new characteristic

# Session 2

- Say what you see and tracking statements
- Teaching “Be With” Skills rather than focusing on parent teaching skills or correcting behaviors
- Resolving concerns of “being watched”

# Session 3

## Concepts Introduced: DO

1. DO set the stage
2. DO let the child lead
3. DO join in the child's play
4. DO verbally track child's play
5. DO reflect child's feelings
6. DO set firm and consistent limits
7. DO salute the child's power and encourage efforts
8. DO be verbally active

## Skills Introduced: DON'T

1. DON'T criticize behavior
2. DON'T praise the child
3. DON'T ask leading questions
4. DON'T allow interruptions
5. DON'T give information or teach
6. DON'T preach
7. DON'T initiate new activities
8. DON'T be passive or quiet

# Session 4-9:

1. Limit Setting
2. Choice Giving
3. Encouragement vs. Praise
4. Self Esteem Building Statements

# Session 4: Limit Setting

**A:** Acknowledge the feeling

“You are really angry”

**C:** Communicate the Limit

“But I am not for hitting”

**T:** Target acceptable alternatives

“You can choose to hit the doll as me or stamp the egg carton”

# Session 5-6: Choice Giving

- Choices either for Empowerment or Discipline

“You can choose to have an apple or a banana for your snack? Which one would you like?” (empowerment)

OR

“Adam, if you choose to have dinner now, you choose to have dessert. If you choose not to have dinner now, you choose not to have dessert. The choice is yours.” (Discipline/Boundaries)

# Session 7: Self Esteem Building

- Self esteem building response encourage independence and self confidence
- Allow for appropriate developmental expectations

## EXAMPLES:

“You figured it out.”

“You like the way it turned out.”

“You did it!”

“You kept trying until you figured it out.”

# Session 8:

## Encouragement vs. Praise

### Encourage the Effort

- “You worked really hard on that.”
- “You were really trying and didn’t give up.”
- “You used lots of different colors in your drawing”
- “You were really concentrating on that part.”

### Praise the Product

- “Good Job!”
- “You are so smart”
- “Your picture is beautiful”
- “I love it”

# Encouragement Vs. Praise

## Encouragement

- Recognizes effort and improvement rather than achievement
- Shows an appreciation for the contribution
- Shows faith in children so that they become able to believe in themselves

## Praise

- Imposes Conditions on Accepting Child
- Limits Child's Self Confidence, Creativity, and Motivation

# Session 9: Generalizing Skills

- Problem Solving Difficult Situations
- Review of Other Ways to Respond
- Focusing on One Behavior at a Time
- When Choices Are Working: Parents get to Choose
- Enforcing Consequences for Breaking Limits

# Session 10: Wrap-Up

- Planning for booster sessions
- Encouraging continued sessions
- Writing notes to the child

So, how did Laura Do?

Struggles

Successes

Stuck Points

# Future Considerations

- Implications of  
“THE SYSTEM”
- Additional research
- Need for training

Questions?