

Expressive Therapies

It looks like play- but it's actually therapy!

What expressive therapies are really doing



WHAT PARENTS OFTEN SEE

- PLAYING
- DRAWING
- MAKING MESS
- PRETENDING
- NOT TALKING MUCH

FROM THE OUTSIDE, EXPRESSIVE THERAPY CAN LOOK
SIMPLE — EVEN CONFUSING.

MANY PARENTS WORRY IT'S "JUST PLAY".



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PLAY IS YOUR CHILD'S LANGUAGE



CHILDREN SHOW WHAT THEY FEEL BEFORE THEY CAN
SAY IT

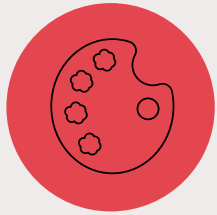
CHILDREN DON'T PROCESS EXPERIENCES THE WAY
ADULTS DO.

THEIR BRAINS USE PLAY, MOVEMENT, AND
CREATIVITY TO COMMUNICATE WHAT WORDS CAN'T
YET HOLD.



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TYPES OF EXPRESSIVE THERAPIES



Art Therapy

Looks like: drawing & painting

Is actually: emotional processing



Art helps children

- Release big feelings
- Externalise emotions
- Reduce overwhelm
- Calm the nervous system

Talking comes after the body feels safe.



Play Therapy

Looks like: toys & pretend play

Is actually: trauma processing



Through play, children can

- Re-enact experiences safely
- Explore power and control
- Express fear and confusion
- Create new, safer endings

This is how healing happens at a child's pace.



Sandtray Therapy

Looks like: playing with sand & mini figures

Is actually: deep emotional processing



Sandtray therapy allows children to create a world that shows what's happening inside them.

Through sand and symbols, children can:

- Express experiences without words
- Explore safety, danger, power, and protection
- Process trauma at a safe distance
- Regain a sense of control and mastery

The tray holds the story until the child is ready.



Movement and Sensory Play

Looks like: jumping, squeezing, rocking

Is actually: nervous system regulation



Trauma lives in the body.

Movement and sensory experiences help children

- Release survival energy
- Feel safe in their bodies
- Regulate emotions
- Reconnect brain and body



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WHY THERE IS NOT MUCH TALKING

AND HOW DO WE KNOW PROGRESS IS BEING MADE?



REGULATION COMES BEFORE CONVERSATION

CHILDREN NEED SAFETY AND REGULATION BEFORE THEY
CAN TALK ABOUT HARD THINGS.

EXPRESSIVE THERAPIES BUILD THE FOUNDATION FIRST —
THEN WORDS CAN FOLLOW.

HEALING MAY LOOK LIKE:

- BETTER SLEEP
- FEWER MELTDOWNS
- MORE PLAY AT HOME
- STRONGER CONNECTION
- EXPRESSING FEELINGS SAFELY

PROGRESS ISN'T ALWAYS OBVIOUS.
OFTEN, HEALING SHOWS UP QUIETLY IN EVERYDAY MOMENTS.



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REMINDERS FOR PARENTS:

- ☐ YOUR CHILD'S THERAPY MAY LOOK DIFFERENT TO YOURS
- ☐ EXPRESSIVE THERAPIES ARE DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE
- ☐ BRAIN HEALING IS POSSIBLE THROUGH PLAY
- ☐ PROGRESS LOOKS DIFFERENT FOR EVERYONE
- ☐ IT IS OK TO ASK YOUR CHILD'S THERAPIST QUESTIONS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND
- ☐ YOUR CHILD DOESN'T NEED TO TALK TO HEAL. PLAY IS THEIR WORK — AND IT MATTERS

