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MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY MANKATO

An In-Depth Look at Filial Play Therapy

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Purpose

This project explores the various aspects that make up the filial play therapy model. Filial play therapy is an evidenced-based intervention that has been proven to work with a variety of different populations and can be applied in a variety of different settings. The purpose of this project is to give the Vision therapists at Headway a practical toolkit that can be applied in their therapeutic practice. The therapeutic toolkit contains practical therapeutic skills and techniques that can easily be applied within the Vision program.

Methodology

An extensive literature review was conducted. The literature review served as the basis for constructing the therapeutic toolkit. The format for the literature review consisted of an abstract, introduction, body, and conclusion (Board of Regents, 2009). The following databases were searched for this project: PsychINFO, Social Service Abstracts, Eric, ASSIA, Google Scholar, and ProQuest. Two texts by Dr. Rise Van Fleet supplemented the literature review as the foundation for the therapeutic toolkit.

Key Research Questions

- What is filial play therapy? Who developed it? Why was it developed? What's the theory behind it?
- What specific techniques are applied with filial play therapy?
- How has filial play therapy been utilized with diverse populations?
- Is filial play therapy an evidence-based practice?
- What is the agency context for applying filial play therapy?

Literature Review

Results of the literature review revealed the following:

- ✓ Filial play therapy is a “strengths-based clinical approach wherein parents are taught how to be the therapeutic change agents with their children by learning how to conduct child-centered playtimes with them at home” (Wickstrom, 2010, p. 187).
- ✓ Filial play therapy was developed by Louise and Bernard Guerney during the 1960s (Guerney, 1964; as cited in Wickstrom, 2010).
- ✓ It is believed that if a therapeutic relationship can be established by the parent they have the potential to be more effective than a therapist (Guerney, Guerney, & Andronico, 1970; as cited in Glazer-Waldman, Zimmerman, Landreth, & Norton, 1992).
- ✓ According to Bernard Guerney (1964), filial play therapy was developed out of a client-centered therapeutic modality.
- ✓ Many different techniques are applied during in filial play therapy which include restatement of content, clarification of feelings, encouragement, role playing, and displaying unconditional positive regard (Guerney, 1964; Bavin-Hoffman, Jennings, & Landreth, 1996; Ryan & Madsen, 2007).
- ✓ Filial play therapy has been proven to be effective with a wide range of populations and in a variety of different settings (Bavin-Hoffman et al., 1996).
- ✓ Children that participate in filial play therapy have been found to have “reduced physical and behavioral symptom, reduced levels of stress, increased academic performance, increased harmony in parent-child relationships, mirrored expressions of affection, more positive self-esteem, and improved psycho-social adjustment” (Bavin-Hoffman et al., 1996, p. 47).
- ✓ A therapeutic modality like filial play therapy would give the Vision therapists at Headway an additional resource to access and apply when traditional therapeutic modalities are not adequately addressing the needs of the children they are working with.

References

References are available from the author upon request.

Four Main Skills of Filial Play Therapy

Structuring

· Helps the child understand what the layout of the play therapy session will look like and help to avoid any potential conflicts (Vanfleet, 2000).

Empathetic Listening

· Displays sensitivity, understanding, and unbiased attention to the child in a way that shows acceptance of the child's feelings and needs (Vanfleet, 2000).

Imaginary Play

· The parent allows themselves to accept and act out various different roles as assigned by the child (Vanfleet, 2000).

Limit Setting

· Are utilized to help create a safe environment for the child and holds the child responsible for breaking any limits (Vanfleet, 2000).

Recommendations

Filial play therapy would be a beneficial intervention for Headway to promote to their Vision therapists. Having this resource available will provide families with an effective intervention they can apply outside of the Vision program. This intervention helps families to lessen their level of dependence on their therapist and instead fosters a sense of independence. The therapeutic toolkit will be introduced to the Vision therapists at their monthly team meeting. A PDF version of the toolkit will be placed on Headway's S-Drive to give the Vision therapists quick and easy access to the toolkit. Paper copies of the toolkit will be available to the Vision therapists upon request.