

CREDENTIALING:

Ethically Ensuring Play Therapist Competence

For any professional organization or governing body, the purpose of conferring credentials is to assess and to confirm the qualifications of the applicants seeking said credentials. In so doing, the professional organization attests to the candidate's successful completion of the initial and continuing education and training standards they have set forth.

Offering RPT/S and SB-RPT credentials fits with APT's ends policies to "advance and promote play therapy as a credible mental health treatment" and to allow licensed mental health professionals who have earned them to "display credentials to publicly promote their play therapy expertise" (Ends Policy 5.03).

Credentialing programs are beneficial to associations and to members of those associations who obtain them. For associations, "credentialing programs can enhance the reputation of the association [and] provide a valuable public service" (Hamm, 2007, p. 455). For members, "a well-constructed and well-promoted certification program adds luster to both individual practitioners and to the profession as a whole," because "the entire field benefits markedly as the quality of individual practitioners begins to rise" (Ernstthal, 2001, p. 84).

However, the primary aim of credentialing is to protect the public (Hamm, 2007). APT recognizes the "consumer's right to make informed choices, particularly the choice of the play therapy modality as one treatment option" (APT, 2018, para. 2). APT's intention in conferring RPT/S and SB-RPT credentials is "to better help consumers identify professionals with specialized training and experience in play therapy" (APT, 2018, para. 3) to assist them in making informed choices about their children's mental health care options and providers. This is why APT publishes essential information about play therapy and credentialed play therapists in the Parent's Corner on its home page (<https://www.a4pt.org/page/ParentsCornerHomePag>).

As the longest-standing and most reputable US-based professional play therapy organization, APT is responsible for ensuring that individuals earn a play therapy credential only after demonstrating that rigorous educational and clinical practice standards have been met. Credentialed play therapists are expected to obtain postgraduate-level play therapy training that proffers the most empirically supported, evidence-based, and peer-reviewed content possible. They are also



expected to pursue supervised clinical practice hours from qualified play therapy supervisors. This will become the minimal standard for obtaining play therapy credentials in the near future.

APT expects credentialed play therapists and their credentialed play therapy supervisors to be well-educated in foundational play therapy theory, methods, and skills; well-informed on play therapy best practices; and well-rounded in their own practice of play therapy. An undertaking of this magnitude relies on clinical input and oversight from the Registration and CE Committee, the Credentialing Task Force, and the APT Board of Directors, whose collective participation has been instrumental in determining the revisions necessary to ensure the competent clinical care and practice of play therapy.

Each play therapy credential conferred by APT communicates a certain level of skill, ability, and professional credibility that should only be granted to the most qualified play therapy professionals. Strengthening the RPT/S standards bolsters the credential. Requiring the obtention of the highest quality play therapy training and the attestation of clinical practice from registrants gives the public confidence and peace of mind in knowing that their child's mental health care provider has demonstrated and continues to uphold the highest available standards of their professional license and their play therapy specialization.

References

- Association for Play Therapy. (2018). Approved provider guide. Retrieved from https://www.a4pt.org/resource/resmgr/education_&_training/approved_provider_guide_-_au.pdf
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