



## **Sample Syllabus:**

### **Advanced Graduate Play Therapy Course**

*Note: This is a sample syllabus with recommended prerequisites, readings, and activities. Each instructor should tailor the syllabus to their University requirements and the needs of their students. These activities and objectives can be utilized to assist you in developing in*

*The intent of this syllabus is to provide ideas, concepts, and supports for faculty engaging in the training of play therapists. The purpose is to augment and not replace.*

#### **Section A. Introduction**

In this advanced course, students will further develop their knowledge and skills of play therapy, building upon material taught in Introduction to Play Therapy. Within this course, students will deepen their play therapy skills through engaging in direct play therapy experience with children from diverse backgrounds and identities, as well as caregivers to establish effective parent consultation practices. as well as expanded discussion and readings in play.

Students will receive supervision of their play therapy skills, as well as participate in peer supervision activities. As a result of this course, students will demonstrate proficiency in play therapy skills, assessment of progress, goal setting and treatment planning, and parent consultations. Students are expected to identify and align with a theory of play therapy and counseling, and demonstrate this theoretical alignment within play therapy sessions, supervision, case conceptualization and treatment planning, and parent consultations.

Instructors should address and elaborate on 6-8 topics. These include and are not limited to areas of play therapy training such as: play therapy theories, increased proficiency in limit setting, play themes, stages of play, research and recent innovations in play therapy, teleplay therapy, neurobiology and play therapy, trauma and play therapy, working with aggression in play therapy, legal/ethical dilemmas specific to play therapy, Sandtray, diversity and multicultural play therapy, assessment of baseline behaviors and play therapy outcomes, group play therapy, play therapy in diverse professional settings, research in play therapy, play therapy and mental health issues, documentations in play therapy, play therapy across the life span, therapeutic play and disaster response work, and self-development as a play therapist.

Students will have the opportunity to expand on their basic play therapy skills and engage in play therapy experiences with children from diverse backgrounds and expanded discussion and readings in play therapy (add skills related to involving parents and caregivers in the play therapy process or parent consultations). It provides a multicultural perspective throughout the course and to acknowledge the potential impact on diverse populations.

Students will also have the opportunity to receive supervision of their play therapy skills, as well as participate in peer supervision activities. Instructors should choose 6-8 topics such as: play therapy theories, increased proficiency in limit setting, play themes, stages of play, research and recent innovations in play therapy, teleplay therapy, neurobiology and play therapy, trauma and play therapy, working with aggression in play therapy, legal/ethical dilemmas specific to play therapy, Sandtray, diversity and multicultural play therapy, assessment of baseline behaviors and play therapy outcomes, group play therapy, play therapy in diverse professional settings, research in play therapy, play therapy and mental health issues, documentations in play therapy, play therapy across the life span, therapeutic play and disaster response work, and self-development as a play therapist.

## **Section B. Course Description**

Instructors may insert the emphasis of their Advanced Course in Play Therapy with the following course description template:

This course employs a variety of teaching methods, such as experiential, hybrid, online, and lecture approaches, to deliver advanced knowledge and skill competencies in play therapy. Students will engage with the material through didactic and experiential learning, including course discussions, individual and group supervision, peer consultation, practicum experiences, reflection papers, observations, and presentations. The course is designed to prepare students to apply play therapy skills effectively in various settings such as schools, clinical environments, and homes.

Aligning with theory, students will gain knowledge and skills through, direct play therapy instruction, client contact, and supervision. Client engagement will include assessment, intervention, and the healing process from a trauma informed and social justice lens, assisting students' development in core competencies of effective play therapy services.

## **Section C. Course Prerequisites**

Minimally, students are expected to have successfully completed graduate level coursework in introduction to play therapy, child and/ lifespan development, multicultural counseling, ethics, counseling theories, and basic counseling skills (appropriate to their profession, e.g., social work, marriage & family therapy, counseling, psychology, or school counseling).

## **Section D. General Play Therapy Readings**

### **Advanced Play Therapy Course Required Readings:**

- Crenshaw, D. A., & Stewart, A. L. (2016). *Play therapy: A comprehensive guide to theory and practice*. The Guilford Press.
- Goodyear-Brown, P. (2010). *Play therapy with traumatized children: A prescriptive approach*. Wiley.
- Goodyear-Brown, P. (2019). *Trauma and play therapy: Helping children heal* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351216869>
- Homeyer, L. E., & Bennett, M. M. (2023). *The guide to play therapy documentation and parent consultation*. Routledge.
- Kaduson, H. G., & Schaefer, C. E. (2015). *Short-term play therapy for children* (3rd ed.). The Guilford Press.
- Kottman, T. (2016). *Partners in play: An Adlerian approach to play therapy* (3rd ed.). American Counseling Association.
- Ray, D. C. (2021). *Advanced play therapy: Essential conditions, knowledge, and skills for child practice* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Ray, D. C., Ogawa, Y., & Cheng, Y. (2022). *Multicultural play therapy: Making the most of cultural opportunities with children*. Routledge.
- Schaefer, C. E., & Kaduson, H. G. (2021). *Play therapy with children: Modalities for change*. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000217-000>
- Sweeney, D. S., & Homeyer, L. E. (2022). *Sandtray therapy: A practical guide* (4th ed.). Routledge.

### **Recommended Readings:**

- Carmichael, K. D. (2006). *Play therapy: An introduction*. Pearson Education, Inc.
- Drewes, A. A., & Schaefer, C. E. (Eds.). (2010). *School-based play therapy* (2nd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Gil, E. (2016). *Play in family therapy* (2nd ed.). The Guilford Press.
- Gil, E., & Johnson, T. (2006). *Sexualized children: Assessment and treatment of sexualized children and children who molest*. Launch Press.
- Homeyer, L. E., & Lyles, M. N. (2021). *Advanced sandtray therapy*. Routledge.
- Kindlon, D., & Thompson, M. (2009). *Raising Cain: Protecting the emotional life of boys*. Ballantine Books.
- Landreth, G. L. (2001). *Innovations in play therapy: Issues, process, and special populations*. Routledge.
- Marks-Tarlow, T., Solomon, M., & Siegel, D. (Eds.). (2018). *Play & creativity in psychotherapy*. W. W. Norton & Company.

- McGuire, D., & McGuire, D. (2001). *Linking parents to play therapy*. Routledge.
- Moustakas, C. E. (1959). *Psychotherapy with children*. Harper & Row.
- O'Connor, K. J. (2000). *The play therapy primer* (2nd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- O'Connor, K. J., Schaefer, C. E., & Braverman, L. D. (2015). *Handbook of play therapy* (2nd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Schaefer, C. E. (1993). *The therapeutic powers of play*. Jason Aronson.
- Schaefer, C. L., & Carey, L. (1994). *Family play therapy*. The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
- Sweeney, D. S., & Homeyer, L. E. (Eds.). (1999). *Group play therapy: How to do it, how it works, whom it's best for*. Jossey-Bass.
- Sweeney, D. S., Baggerly, J. N., & Ray, D. C. (2014). *Group play therapy: A dynamic approach*. Routledge.
- Terr, L. (2008). *Too scared to cry: Psychic trauma in childhood*. Basic Books.

#### Recommended Chapters and Journal Articles:

- Axline, V. (1948). Some observations on play therapy. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 11(2), 61–69. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0058189>
- Brody, V. (1992). The dialogue of touch: Developmental play therapy. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, 1(1), 21–30. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0089304>
- Ceballos, P. L., Post, P., & Rodríguez, M. (2021). Practicing child-centered play therapy from a multicultural and social justice framework. In E. Gil & A. A. Drewes (Eds.), *Cultural issues in play therapy* (2nd ed., pp. 13–31). The Guilford Press.
- Courtney, J. (Ed.). (2021). *Infant play therapy: Foundations, models, programs, and practice* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Gil, E., & Drewes, A. A. (Eds.). (2021). *Cultural issues in play therapy* (2nd ed.). The Guilford Press.
- Goodman-Scott, E., Burgess, M., & Carlise, R. (2017). How school counselors implement school stories: Results from a qualitative study. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Counseling*, 3(2), 101–116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23727810.2017.1351774>
- Green, E. J., Fazio-Griffith, L., & Parson, J. (2015). Treating children with psychosis: An integrative play therapy approach. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, 24(3), 162–176. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0039026>
- Kestly, T. (2014). *The interpersonal neurobiology of play: Brain-building interventions for emotional well-being*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Kordbacheh, S., Safarzadeh, S., & Alizadeh, M. (2022). Effects of Brain Gym Exercises and Filial Play Therapy on emotion management skills of students with specific learning disorder. *International Journal of School Health*, 9(4), 241–248. <https://doi.org/10.5812/intjsh-124858>
- Myrick, A., Green, E. J., & Fazio-Griffith, L. (2017). Fostering reconnection and resilience in complex traumatized youth: Integration of play into empirically supported treatment. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Counseling*, 3(2), 120–128. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23727810.2017.1320623>
- Olson-Morrison, D. (2017). Integrative play therapy with adults with complex trauma: A developmentally-informed approach. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, 26(3), 172–183. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pla0000036>
- Parker, M. M., Hergenrather, K., Smelser, Q., & Kelly, C. T. (2021). Exploring child-centered play therapy and trauma: A systematic review of literature. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, 30(1), 2–15. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pla0000146>
- Renshaw, K. L., & Parson, J. A. (2023). Tele-play therapy: Principles of remote interventions using the therapeutic powers of play. In I. Cassina, C. Mochi, & K. Stagnitti (Eds.), *Play therapy and expressive arts in a complex and dynamic world: Opportunities and challenges inside and outside the playroom* (pp. 69–95). Routledge.
- Stagnitti, K., & Pfeifer, L. I. (2017). Methodological considerations for a directive play therapy approach for children with autism and related disorders. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, 26(3), 160–171. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pla0000049>
- Vicario, M., Tucker, C., Smith Adcock, S., & Hudgins-Mitchell, C. (2013). Relational-cultural play therapy: Reestablishing healthy connections with children exposed to trauma in relationships. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, 22(2), 103–115. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032315>

## Section E. Learning Objectives

As you review the learning objectives listed below, select the ones that best align with your course content, instructional goals and the focus of your training. These objectives are linked to specific Play Therapy Competencies and are intended to support consistency and clarity across our educational offerings.

1. Students will infuse theory, development, identity, evidenced based, and trauma informed practices into considerations throughout their play therapy practice, including treatment planning, skills, and documentation. (Play Therapy Competency 1i, 1d, 1j, 2c 2d 2e).).
2. Infuse relevant \_\_\_\_\_ (ACA, APA, NASW, Etc.) ethical principles, legal considerations into play therapy practice (Play Therapy Competency 1f, 2i, 3h).
3. Students utilize relevant research and evidenced based practices to guide their practice (Play Therapy Competency 1g, 2g, 3e).
4. Identify and demonstrate the use of developmentally appropriate play therapy materials with diversity in racial/ethnic and gender identities and a reduction in prescribed gender roles (including sand tray, puppets, bibliotherapy, creative arts materials, etc.) that can be incorporated into either a permanent or traveling play room for the purposes of both assessment and treatment in various settings, including schools, child advocacy centers, and crisis response settings. (Play Therapy Competency 1e, 1k, 2c, 2j).
5. Consider and integrate issues of diversity and their impact on the play therapy process, including materials, and caregiver/client interactions and engagement (Play Therapy Competency 2i, 3h).
6. Identify the minimal training/supervision guidelines and play therapy best practices outlined by the Association for Play Therapy (Play Therapy Competency 3c, 3e).
7. Student will demonstrate a deep level of self-reflection with a focus on how internal experiences and personal and professional value systems interact with one's way of being in the therapy process (Play Therapy Competency 2h).
8. Students will have a working knowledge of parent intakes and parent consults (Play Therapy Competency 2b, 2d).
9. Students will identify and analyze the process of teleplay, in terms of conducting a mock teleplay session, demonstrating play therapy skills utilizing a virtual platform (Play Therapy Competency 3b).

## Section F. Suggested Instructional Components

These instructional components may be adapted or expanded upon by the instructor to better reflect the unique scope and depth of their course content.

1. Instructor Designated Projects. Students will design independent (or group) projects aimed at demonstrating their understanding of the theories and principles of human development, play, and play therapy. **These may include, but are not limited to:**
  - develop a play therapy treatment plan specific to a real or fictitious clinical case and include discussion of the following:
    - population characteristics, including 1) developmental characteristics, 2) strengths of client and associated systems, 3) diversity considerations;
    - presenting problem characteristics including 1) description of symptoms, and 2) baseline, formative, and summative assessments; and 3) goals for treatment
    - play therapy integrated treatment grounded in theory 1) interventions and 2) objectives supported by evidence-based research; and 3) legal and ethical concerns;
    - general treatment considerations
    - theoretical approach will be considered and woven throughout the assignment
  - creation (maybe adaptation) of a documentation system for the play therapy process specific to unique professional settings,
  - engage in research endeavor in play therapy and practice quantitative/qualitative research skills,
  - make a professional contribution in the field of play therapy through a poster presentation, conference/workshop presentation, and/or peer-reviewed article on issues and topics in play therapy,
  - research of play therapy approaches to a specific behavioral/emotional disturbance / population in order to articulate and argue the benefit of this treatment modality toward this population/presenting concern

- develop case conceptualization of an actual or fictitious clinical case in which mental health issues are discussed, play themes are analyzed, theory is applied, treatment plan is incorporated, and assessment measures are included,
- create a metaphorical or symbolic self-reflection (such as an art project or sand tray) in which the student reflects on how he/she is changing as an individual and play therapist, experiencing the play therapy relationship with a client, and/or encountering a problem in play therapy,
- observe play therapists providing play therapy from various theoretical orientations or professional settings and compare and contrast the therapeutic characteristics, qualities, and outcomes of each model.
- Journal Assignment: Students will keep a journal exploring their reactions to a book of their choice (with instructor approval) that documents the effectiveness of play therapy. Students' journals should include thoughts and feelings about the content of the book. You should also explore what you have learned from reading this book.

## 2. Play Therapy Sessions.

- Transcription and Reflection of Play Therapy Sessions. Students will record and transcribe two play therapy sessions and include a reflection that highlights the student's strengths and points for growth from the session as well as discuss possible play themes and alternative play therapy responses.
- Demonstrate advanced play therapy skills in sessions with a non-clinical child volunteers or actual clients and video tape the session for review in class and/or receive live observation and individual/group supervision. Student will discuss their intentionality and alignment to one's theoretical approach.
- Students will create a script/preparatory document to discuss child progress through counseling sessions in order to prepare for mock or actual parent consultation.
- Students will record a mock intake session with a parent where they will practice:
  - Building rapport with a parent
  - Gaining pertinent background and developmental information about a child
  - Gathering goals for treatment
  - Discussing the process of play therapy (respective to their theory)
  - Answering relevant parent questions about treatment and next steps

## 3. Demonstration of skills and case conceptualization:

- Students will complete two videotaped demonstration of advanced play therapy skills, using a child who is NOT a relative or client and between the ages of 4-17. Videotaped demonstrations should be between 30-40 minutes in length. You will demonstrate basic and advanced play therapy skills and interventions during your sessions. After you have completed the play therapy sessions, you will write a 2-4-page paper discussing the approach you utilized during your session.
- Students will create a brief presentation (5-8 minutes), for class presentation regarding your video and client including demographic information, interventions, theoretical orientation, and treatment plan. Please include at least 3 professional journal references, published within the last five years, for each paper and the paper should follow APA 7<sup>th</sup> edition format.
- Create a full developmental assessment (evidenced with specific examples), for your child or adolescent that you select to work with this semester. Please include the following: presenting issues to be addressed by play therapist (top 3 issues), and a treatment plan with developmentally appropriate therapeutic goals and techniques/strategies. The developmental assessment should include the following areas: (i.e., psychosocial, physical, cognitive, spiritual/moral, cultural/gender, efficacy expectancy, and attachment). Please use the attached form as an outline. You can compile some of this information through observation and during your initial interview with the child and parent/guardian.
- Discuss disparities that exist when serving a diverse population in play therapy. Brainstorm what kind of individual and organizational actions can advance the elimination of such inequity issues in the field of play therapy.

## Section G. Teaching Methods

The methods for delivery of this course may include lecture, assigned readings and discussion, small and large role plays, individual or group presentations, videos and/or demonstrations of play therapy basic skills, journaling, case consultation, experiential activities skill-building, and observations of the instructor and/or expert play therapists providing play therapy. and student self-assessments. It is expected that students be prepared for each class by

reading required assignments prior to class. Students will use knowledge from reading for in-class discussions and assignments.

## **Section H. APT Credentialing Requirements**

The Association for Play Therapy (APT) offers three credentials by which licensed mental health professionals and school counselors/psychologists might demonstrate and promote their specialized play therapy knowledge and training.

- Registered Play Therapist (RPT)
- Registered Play Therapist-Supervisor (RPT-S)
- School Based-Registered Play Therapist (SB-RPT)

Please visit the [Play Therapy Credentials](#) section of our website for more information. For questions concerning the Credentialing Program, contact APT 559-298-3400.

## **Section I. Acknowledgments**

Play therapy has a rich history rooted in theory, clinical practice, and the evolving needs of children and families. Over time, the field has grown more sophisticated—integrating advancements in evidence-based practices, neuroscience, trauma-informed care and identity work. This syllabus reflects that ongoing evolution and is intended to serve as a flexible, living document that supports both consistency and innovation in training. As the field continues to grow, instructors are encouraged to adapt and expand upon the components provided to best meet the needs of their learners and the populations they serve.

APT gratefully acknowledges and appreciates the contributions of these Professional members to the development of these syllabus guidelines:

Update July 2025: *Chair* Maggie Parker, PhD, LPC, RPT-S, CCPT-S, George Washington University, Washington DC, Play Therapy Space and the APT University Education Committee.

Update August 2024: *Chair* Kasie Lee, PhD, LPC-MHSP, RPT-S, Lipscomb University, Nashville, TN and the University Education Committee.

Initial Design September 2018: *Chair* LeAnne Steen, PhD, LPC-S, RPT-S, Loyola University, New Orleans, LA and the University Education Committee.

## **Appendix A – A Message for Instructors**

In order to satisfy its mission *to promote the value of play, play therapy, and credentialed play therapists*, the Association for Play Therapy (APT) wishes to increase the availability of graduate-level play therapy instruction at colleges and universities. The committee does not intend that this document be disseminated among universities whose mental health faculty members have not yet completed formal play therapy training.

The term *mental health* refers to the psychology, social work, counseling, marriage and family therapy, and other mental health disciplines as well as those who research, practice, and teach them.

These syllabus guidelines provide an overview of the essential elements and principles of play therapy, including history, theories, modalities, techniques, applications, and skills. Further, an experiential component focuses on basic play therapy skill development within the context of ethical and diversity-sensitive practice. The syllabus is meant to be inclusive while providing for flexibility. Instructors are not bound to require every suggested reading or assignment, but these readings and assignments are indicative of those the committee knows to facilitate student development into play therapists with adequate foundational knowledge.

While it is expected that instructors will adapt these guidelines to fit their own course time frame (e.g. semester, quarter, week-long, weekends, etc.), it is highly recommended that those teaching in the latter format will consider dividing the course in half, roughly along the lines of theory and practice. It is also recommended that all content be ultimately taught, should shorter formats be used.

Students are best served by an instructor who, if not currently a RPT/S, is a licensed mental health practitioner and is either pursuing play therapy credentialing or is a practicing play therapy practitioner with formal play therapy training.

## **Suggestions for Promoting University Play Therapy Training and Education**

Presuming that a nominal relationship has been established between the RPT/RPT-S designee and either a university mental health faculty member or a graduate mental health program coordinator:

- Offer to meet with interested mental health faculty members or administrators to discuss the merits of a play therapy course.
- Offer to meet with interested graduate students to assess and cultivate interest in play therapy.
- Offer to disseminate a survey intended and designed to ascertain interest in a play therapy course.
- Offer either an off- or on-campus play therapy demonstration for mental health faculty members and/or students.
- To supplement your descriptions of the value of play, play therapy, and credentialed play therapists, utilize the informational brochures and animations entitled *Why Play Therapy?* and *About APT* produced by and available at APT. The latter can be played live via the Play Therapy and About APT sections of the APT website, [www.a4pt.org](http://www.a4pt.org).

## **Appendix B – Play Therapy Competencies**

The competencies listed below are from the APT Credentialing Standards for the Registered Play Therapist™ and are coded to be considered for inclusion in each syllabus.

**(F)** – Foundational Play Therapy Course Syllabus Objectives

**(A)** – Advanced Play Therapy Course Syllabus Objectives

**(F/A)** – Relevant to both Foundational and Advance Course Levels

### **Competency 1: Knowledge & Understanding of Play Therapy**

The play therapist will:

- 1a. Demonstrate knowledge of the history of play therapy **(F)**
- 1b. Demonstrate understanding of the therapeutic powers of play **(F)**
- 1c. Demonstrate knowledge of the therapeutic relationship in play therapy **(F)**
- 1d. Demonstrate knowledge of seminal/historically significant play therapy theories and models **(F)**
- 1e. Apply theories and stages of childhood development in play therapy **(A)**
- 1f. Identify and apply ethical practices in play therapy **(F/A)**
- 1g. Demonstrate an understanding of the play therapy treatment process (e.g., treatment goals and plans, documentation, intake/termination, and tracking of treatment progress) **(F)**
- 1h. Demonstrate knowledge of family & systemic theories in play therapy **(A)**
- 1i. Demonstrate knowledge of childhood-related problems and mental health diagnosis/disorders **(F)**
- 1j. Demonstrate an understanding of the diverse impacts of childhood trauma (e.g., neurobiological, systemic, social) and the implications in play therapy **(A)**
- 1k. Demonstrate knowledge of assessment in play therapy **(F/A)**

### **Competency 2: Clinical Play Therapy Skills**

The play therapist will:

- 2a. Apply and articulate the therapeutic powers of play **(F)**
- 2b. Demonstrate relationship and rapport building skills (e.g., empathy, safety, unconditional positive regard) by utilizing 'self' in relationships with children, caregivers, stakeholders in play therapy **(F)**
- 2c. Apply assessments that highlight various aspects of the child and/or system and the play therapy process (e.g., conceptualization, diagnosis, family dynamics, treatment suitability and effectiveness, termination) **(A)**
- 2d. Articulate and explain the play therapy process **(F/A)**
- 2e. Demonstrate basic play therapy skills (e.g., tracking, reflection of feeling, limit setting, pacing with the client) **(F)**
- 2f. Identify play dynamics (e.g., types of play, themes, stages) and incorporate clinical considerations in treatment **(F/A)**
- 2g. Develop play therapy treatment goals and plans congruent with theoretical orientation **(F/A)**
- 2h. Demonstrate understanding of own cultural and social identity and its influence in the play therapy process **(F/A)**
- 2i. Exhibit multicultural orientation to diversity, equity, and inclusion through a culturally and socially diverse playroom and play therapy process **(F/A)**
- 2j. Demonstrate play therapy treatment skills congruent with theoretical orientation (e.g., conceptualization, interventions) **(F)**

### **3: Professional Engagement in Play Therapy**

The play therapist will:

- 3a. Maintain play therapy credentials and involvement in professional play therapy organizations **(A)**
- 3b. Consistently evaluate and adjust play therapy practices to meet state and discipline ethical guidelines and codes **(F/A)**
- 3c. Apply ongoing integration of APT's guidelines within the Best Practices and Paper on Touch **(F/A)**
- 3d. Recognize and adhere to the limits of professional scope of competence in play therapy **(F/A)**
- 3e. Seek and integrate play therapy-specific continued education, research, and literature **(A)**
- 3f. Seek and integrate play therapy-specific supervision and consultation **(A)**
- 3g. Practice self-care to maintain quality play therapy services **(F/A)**
- 3h. Seek and integrate ongoing knowledge regarding cultural and social diversity in play therapy **(A)**

During each phase, supervision should include discussion and assessment based on these competencies.