



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.

Section A. Introduction

This course is designed for the advanced study of play therapy and builds upon material taught in Introduction to Play Therapy. In this advanced class, students will have the opportunity to expand on their basic play therapy skills through actual play therapy experiences with children. It is important to provide 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. Students will study play therapy theories as well as other topics, which may include increased proficiency in limit setting, play themes, stages of play, research and recent innovations in play 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, play therapy across the life span, 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 is taught through – (experiential, hybrid, online, lecture, etc.) methods to provide advanced knowledge and skill competencies in play therapy as a therapeutic intervention for children and families. This course provides students with learning on (outline of each major course content topic) through a variety of assessment measures, such as (individual supervision in play therapy, group supervision in play therapy, peer consultation in play therapy, practicum experience in play therapy, reflection papers, presentations, etc.). This course prepares students to (course outcomes specific to each major content area) to provide play therapy services in the (school, clinical, home, etc.) setting.

Section C. Course Prerequisites

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

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*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Goodyear-Brown, P. (2010). *Play therapy with traumatized children: A prescriptive approach*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Kottman, T. (2016). *Partners in play: An Adlerian approach to play therapy* (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
- Kottman, T. (2014). *Play therapy: Basics and beyond* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
- O'Connor, K. J., & Braverman, L. D. (Eds.) (2009). *Play therapy theory and practice: Comparing theories and techniques* (2nd ed). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons. (possibly Advanced?)

- Ray, D. (2011). *Advanced play therapy: Essential conditions, knowledge, and skills for child practice*. New York: Routledge.

Recommended Readings:

- Axline, V. (1947). *Play therapy*. Cambridge, MA: Houghton-Mifflin.
- Carmichael, K. D. (2006). *Play therapy: An introduction*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Drewes, A. A., & Schaefer, C. E. (Eds.). (2010). *School-based play therapy (2nd ed.)*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Marks-Tarlow, T., Solomon, M., & Siegel, D. (Eds.) (2018) *Play & Creativity in Psychotherapy*. New York: Norton & Company.
- McGuire, D. & McGuire, D. (2001). *Linking parents to play therapy*. New York: Rutledge.
- Moustakas, C.E. (1959). *Psychotherapy with children*. New York: Harper and Row.
- O'Connor, K. J., Schaefer, C. E., & Braverman, L. D. (2015). *Handbook of play therapy (2nd ed.)*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- O'Connor, K. (2000). *The play therapy primer (2nd ed.)*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Ray, D. (2011). *Advanced play therapy: Essential conditions, knowledge, and skills for child practice*. New York: Routledge.
- Schaefer, C. E. (1993). *The therapeutic powers of play*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.
- Schaefer, C. L., & Carey, L. (1994). *Family play therapy*. Lanham, MD: 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*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.
- Sweeney, D. S., Baggerly, J. N., & Ray, D. C. (2014). *Group play therapy: A dynamic approach*. New York: Routledge.

Section E. Learning Objectives

Note to Instructors: These are suggested learning objectives that should be adjusted for the content emphasized in their unique Advanced Play Therapy course.

1. Students will compare and contrast characteristics and theoretical tenets of alternative theories in play therapy including - (*Adlerian Play Therapy, Child-Centered Play Therapy, Cognitive-Behavioral Play Therapy, Ecosystemic, Jungian Play Therapy, Prescriptive, etc.*). Students will explain a theoretical rationale for behavioral change, purpose in the utilization of play therapy for the presenting problem, goals and objectives of play therapy, treatment planning in play therapy, role of the play therapist, significance of the therapeutic relationship, use of insight, kind and/or degree of structuring and purpose, participating in the child's play and rationale for position, and purpose of allowing or encouraging the child to act out through play.
2. Demonstrate counseling skills used in play therapy to facilitate helping relationships with children and reach treatment goals and counseling outcomes.
3. Identify relevant _____ (ACA, APA, NASW, Etc.) ethical principles, legal considerations in working with children and appropriate multicultural considerations in the playroom.
4. Examine the evolving body of qualitative and quantitative play therapy research and develop a general treatment plan with respect to a specific client population.
5. Identify and demonstrate the use of developmentally appropriate play therapy materials (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.
6. Identify and differentiate the stages within the play therapy process from intake to termination.
7. Demonstrate play therapy skills with clients or non-clinical volunteers including (but not limited to) structuring, tracking, reflection of content and process, returning responsibility, facilitating self-advocacy, and limit setting.
8. Consider and integrate issues of diversity and their impact on the play therapy process, including choice of materials and the relationship with the client.
9. Identify the minimal training/supervision guidelines and play therapy best practices outlined by the Association for Play Therapy.
10. Conceptualize a client's presenting mental health issue(s) and psychosocial problem(s) through a developmental and theoretical play therapy framework.
11. Identify various supervision models and how these models may be adapted for play therapy training, education, and supervision.

12. Students will be knowledgeable about the impact of trauma on the developing brain and how play therapy can best be utilized in cases of trauma.
13. Students will have opportunities to engage in 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.

Section F. Instructional Components

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;
 - 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
 - creation 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,
 - provide supervised supervision in play therapy in which supervision skills are demonstrated and practiced,
 - 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,
 - 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.
2. **Play Therapy Sessions.** Students will:
 - Transcription and Reflection of Play Therapy Sessions. Students will record and transcribe their 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 which could have been used.
 - Demonstrate advanced play therapy skills in sessions with a non-clinical child volunteers or actual clients and video tape it for review in class and/or receive live observation and individual/group supervision.

Section G. Teaching Methods

The methods for delivery of this course may include lecture, assigned readings, small and large group discussion of assigned readings, role plays, individual or group presentations, videos and/or demonstrations of play therapy basic skills, journaling, skill-building and observations of the instructor and/or experts at play or doing 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. Additional Courses

Additional play therapy courses that might be offered a) for graduate credit leading to a master's or doctorate degree or b) as part of a continuing professional education certificate program within the university for non-matriculated students or practicing professionals include:

1. **GROUP PLAY THERAPY:** Students will learn various group theoretical models and will practice group play therapy skills for a range of emotional/behavioral problems. **Or Activity Group Therapy:** Students will learn the use of expressive arts and directed activities with older children and adolescents in the group work context.
2. **THEORY SPECIFIC PLAY THERAPY COURSES:** Students will receive in-depth knowledge on the origins, principles, and practical application of play therapy models, such as Adlerian, Client-Centered Cognitive-Behavioral, Developmental, Ecosystemic, Jungian, and Gestalt, etc.
3. **FAMILY PLAY THERAPY:** Students will learn the systemic applications of play therapy for families and the diverse applications within the home, office, school, foster home or hospital.
4. **PLAY AND PLAY THERAPY ACROSS THE LIFE SPAN:** Students will learn principles and applications of play therapy with adolescents, adults, and the aging population.
5. **PLAY THERAPY IN THE SCHOOLS:** Designed for school counselors, students will learn play therapy application within the contextual adjustments for the school setting and how to integrate play therapy with the ASCA national model.
6. **PLAY THERAPY WITH SPECIAL POPULATIONS:** Students will learn theoretical and applied play therapy skills for the assessment and treatment of clients with mental health issues associated with trauma and complex trauma, medical illness and co-morbid diagnoses, developmental considerations (such as Autism Spectrum), psychosis, and other types of psychopathology.
7. **SANDTRAY IN PLAY THERAPY:** Students will learn the principles of sandtray for use in assessment, incorporation with a variety of theoretical models in mental health treatment, and application for individuals, families, and groups.
8. **PLAY THERAPY WITH INFANTS, TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS:** Students will learn the unique developmental, psychosocial, and neurological implications and considerations for this population in conjunction with play therapy principles and techniques.
9. **MULTICULTURAL PLAY THERAPY:** Students will learn play therapy techniques and interventions within a variety of cultural contexts and special populations. Students will integrate knowledge of values, culture, meaning, and other factors of diversity into their understanding of the play therapy process and will demonstrate culturally-sensitive application.
10. **ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT PLANNING IN PLAY THERAPY** – Students will learn diagnostic issues and differential diagnosis, assessment methods, case conceptualization, goal formation, and intervention planning within a play therapy framework.
11. **PLAY THERAPY SUPERVISION:** Students will learn supervision theories, techniques, gatekeeping measures, and skill assessment specific to the supervision of play therapists.
12. **PLAY THERAPY PRACTICUM:** Students will apply play therapy skills in a supervised, clinical, play therapy experience.
13. **ADVANCED PLAY THERAPY:** Advanced skill development and further exploration of theories and applications.
14. **ADDITIONAL TOPICS:** Animal-Assisted Play Therapy, Filial Therapy, CPRT

Section I. 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 K. Acknowledgments

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

Initial Design September 2018:

- *Chair* LeAnne Steen, PhD, LPC-S, RPT-S, Loyola University, New Orleans, LA
- Sinem Akay-Sullivan, PhD, LPC-S, RPT, The Woodlands, TX
- Staci Born, EdD, LMFT, RPT-S, South Dakota State University, Brookings, SD
- Kristy A. Brumfield, PhD, LPC-S, NCC, RPT-S, Equilibria Psychological and Consultation Services, Philadelphia, PA
- Elizabeth Burgin, MA, NCC, LPC Intern, University of North Texas, Fort Worth, TX
- Yi-Ju Cheng, PhD, LPC, NCC, RPT, Rider University, Lawrenceville, NJ
- Kim Coggins, PhD, PPC, Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, TN
- Rebecca Dickinson, MSW, LISW, RPT-S, Covenant Family Solutions, Coralville, IA
- Kimberly Feeney, MSW, LISW, RPT-S, Life Connections, Davenport, IA
- Yvonne Garza, PhD, LPC-S, MSW, CHST, RPT-S, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX
- Hilda Glazer, EdD, PCC-S, RPT-S, Capella University, Columbus, OH
- Laura Griffith, PhD, LPC-S, LMFT, RPT-S, Southeastern Louisiana University, Baton Rouge, LA
- Elizabeth K. Hartwig, PhD, LPC-S, LMFT, RPT-S, Texas State University, San Marcos, TX
- James Jackson, PhD, LPC-S, NCC, RPT-S, Alliance Counseling Solutions, LLC, Montevallo, AL
- Kimberly Joiner-King, PhD, LPC-S, RPT-S, University of North Texas, Denton, TX
- Jennifer Lefebre, PsyD, RPT-S, Healing the Child Within, LLC, New Hartford, CT
- Elizabeth Limberg, PhD, RPT-S, Contra Costa Interfaith Housing, Pleasant Hill, CA
- Tiffany McNary, PhD, LPC, CPCS, RPT-S, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA
- April Megginson, PhD, Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, MA
- Kristi Perryman, PhD, LPC-S, RPT-S, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR
- Corie Shoeneberg, EdS, LPC, NCC, RPT-S, University of Central Missouri, Whiteman AFB, MO
- Robyn Simmons, EdD, LPC-S, NCC, RPT-S, Liberty University, Decatur, AL
- Danyale Weems, MSW, LCSW, CCTP, RPT-S, Waves Counseling Services, LLC, Carrollton, GA
- Stephanie Williams, MSW, LCSW, RPT-S, Fenton, MO

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 but offer flexibility at the same time. 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, quartermester, 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.