Which change drivers might rock the play therapy world? APT mines recent mental health intelligence (i.e., publications) and disseminates quarterly Mining Reports with cutting-edge trends, emerging wisdom, and other information to play therapy practitioners, instructors, and supervisors. Consult the publications or links displayed for answers to the questions.

Intelligence

How does autism effect the therapeutic relationship between a child and therapist?

“This study aims to determine the child pre-treatment variables and treatment outcomes associated with early and late alliance in cognitive behaviour therapy targeting emotion regulation for children with autism” (Albaum, Tablon, Roudbarani, & Weiss, 2019, p. 1).

- Quantitative research of 48 children with autism.
- Examined the therapeutic alliance between a therapist and a child with autism and its effects on therapeutic change.
- Child pre-treatment characteristics, such as intellectual functioning, emotion dysregulation, and overall symptom severity, may influence aspects of the therapeutic alliance.


Contributor: Jennifer L. Gregg, EdS, LPC, RPT, NCC, Cullman, AL

Does play therapy aid in the development of social-emotional competencies?

“Parent reports indicated that treatment in both CCPT conditions was correlated with substantial gains in overall social-emotional assets and in the constructs of self-regulation/responsibility and social competence” (Blalock, Lindo, & Ray, 2019 p. 238).

- Randomized control study to investigate if CCPT (both individual and group) helped improve school-age children’s social emotional competencies as measured by the SEARS-Parent and SEARS-Teacher.
- Reported significant findings per parent report but not per teacher report.
- Described the importance of using CCPT (either individual or group) as an effective intervention in the school setting.


Contributor: Pedro J. Blanco, PhD, LPC-S, RPT-S, CHST, The Colony, TX

How does improving parent/child relationship decrease anxiety and improve emotional regulation despite early trauma?

“… parental presence (or a learned maternal odor cue) blocks glucocorticoid elevations and decreases amygdala reactivity in rat pups, thereby decreasing aversive learning. In humans, too, amygdala reactivity is decreased by parent cues (e.g., parent photographs) during childhood, suggesting that the amygdala may be part of the mechanism for parental regulation of child emotions also” (Callaghan et al., 2019, p. 664).

- Examined role of amygdala reactivity in change in parent-reported child anxiety across 3 years.
- Compared children who experienced institutionalization before adoption to children who had not experienced outside care.
- Theorized that positive parent-child relationships decrease amygdala reactivity to parent cues.


Contributor: Tisha Way Gaynor, MSSA, LISW-S, RPT-S, Cincinnati, OH
What are the perceived impacts of natural play spaces on social capital and community health improvement?

“Obesity, loss of social capital, and fewer connections to nature are three community health issues faced by many. A team of concerned individuals attempted to address the spectrum of these health issues by collaboratively engaging communities to plan, design, build and program natural play spaces located in public parks” (Castle, 2019, p. xv).

- Provided a foundation of theory for nature play therapy.
- Suggested the development of community-engaged natural play space for prompting therapeutic responses in the community.


Contributor: Yih-Jiun Shen, DEd, NCC, CSC, Edinburg, TX

What is the effect of play (i.e. semistructured and unstructured) on the effectiveness of Group Social Skills Training (SST) for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

“Overall the primary outcome measures supported the hypotheses that both social competence and social skills of children with ASD would improve following a SST intervention that included play, relative to a wait-list control group. Differences evident between the two intervention groups provided tentative support for the hypothesis that semi-structured play would be superior to unstructured play in promoting change in both social skills and social competence” (Chester, Richdale, & McGillivray, 2019, p. 2238-2239).

- 8-week SST intervention with a play component for children with ASD.
- Forty-five children aged 8–12 years with Three groups: (a) SST with unstructured play; (b) SST with semi-structured play; and (c) waitlist control.
- Outcome measures completed by children, parents and teachers.


Contributor: Stephanie Pratola, PhD, LCP, RPT-S, Roanoke, VA

Which acceptance and mindfulness-based interventions offer bang for your buck?

“Whilst there are clear insights into the effectiveness of A/MBIs, the evidence base on the cost-effectiveness of such interventions is sparse (Edwards, Bryning, & Crane, 2015). Such evidence is important in order to ensure that scarce resources are committed to interventions that represent value for money” (Duarte, Kotas, Andronis, & White, 2019, p. 189).

- ACT, DBT, MBCT, MBSR, MBRP, and other meditation trainings were described in the literature review
- Ten economic evaluations were used to measure cost effectiveness of treatments.


Contributor: Tisha Way Gaynor, MSSA, LISW-S, RPT-S, Cincinnati, OH

Is there evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of individual play therapy?

“This article reports a systematic review of the effectiveness of individual child play therapy with children aged 4-12 on several different presenting concerns. … Across most concerns, play therapy was affirmed as an empirically supported therapy” (Drisko et al., 2019 p.1).

- Systematic review of 17 studies of individual play therapy.
- Authors reported that play therapy is often effective and meets the criteria for an EST or RST.
- Concluded that play therapy is an effective intervention for a wide range of concerns, with a wide range of measures.


Contributor: Pedro J. Blanco PhD, LPC-S, RPT-S, CHST, The Colony, TX
What areas are related to the quality of life in children with autism spectrum disorder in parents’ eyes?

“Quality of life in children with autism spectrum disorder have not previously been explored and there has been no quality of life measure developed for this population” (Epstein et al., 2019, p. 71).

- Reports health and well-being to be an area related to the quality of these children’s life.
- Additional areas include capacity to perform/develop daily-living skills, and connections with community and environment.
- Unique areas include levels of social desire, routine consistency, and time spent outdoors.


Contributor: Yih-Jiun Shen, DEd, NCC, CSC, Edinburg, TX

What are the perceptions of mothers of children diagnosed with ADHD about the play of these children?

“…creative ideas to incorporate physical play in a hot climate need to be developed to provide opportunities for optimal development for children with ADHD” (Jasem & Delport, 2019, p. 42).

- Mothers reported that weather and need for supervision of outdoor play limited outdoor play.
- Mothers reported most inside play involved electronics, due to inattention, lack of persistence, or a consistent need for change.
- Researchers’ findings indicated a limited awareness on the part of the mothers on the significance of play.


Contributor: Laura Tejada, PhD, LMFT, LCPC, Chicago, IL

Why should play therapists care about play-based social interventions for youth with ASD?

“This work is to orient a play-based social intervention study with child-centered play therapy” (MacCormack, 2019, p. 157).

- Discussed the theoretical and pragmatic approaches of play-based and social interventions.
- Demonstrated how permissive and technology-based play materials function.


Contributor: Vanessa Gaona, MEd, NCC, LPC-S, RPT-S, Sugar Land, TX

Are professionals prepared to help bereaved children?

“While children can and do cope with the death of someone important, such experiences have been associated with a range of outcomes that can impact negatively on a child’s psychological wellbeing and educational achievement, both in the short-term and into adulthood” (McManus & Paul, 2019, p. 72).

- Highlights significant reasons teachers and parents hesitate to engage children regarding death.
- Provides an overview of bereavement training programs for school staff of primary and secondary students.
- Insists that all professionals working with children can and should be trained to engage bereaved children.


Contributor: Kenisha Gordon, Ph.D., NCC, LPC-S, ACS, RPT-S, Clinton, MS

How can school-based, integrative, play therapy impact students with Autism and their teachers?

“Instructors described substantial benefits associated with post-PT session debriefings with the play therapist” (Muller & Donley, 2019, p. 123).

- Discussed the positive changes indicated by the Autism Social Skills Profile.
- Examined the improved rapport among the students and teacher.

**Contributor: Vanessa Gaona, MEd, NCC, LPC-S, RPT-S, Sugar Land, TX**

**What are the experiences of play, playfulness and self-efficacy of parents of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) during parent-child play encounters?**

“Perceived ability to interact with the child and positive emotions experienced during play moments were among the main aspects that participants associated with self-efficacy during play. Fathers derived a greater sense of self-efficacy from play encounters while mothers were more likely to identify areas of their own performance that they wanted to improve” (Román-Oyola, et al., p. 7).

- Mothers of children with ASD were more likely to be playful in activities that were part of daily routines.
- Fathers were more likely to play with their children outside of routine daily activities.
- Parents reported efficacy in being involved in positive emotions with their children during play.


**Contributor: Laura Tejada, PhD, LMFT, LCPC, Chicago, IL**

**How might the play of children be evaluated to determine the implementation at a governmental and institutional level of children’s basic human right to play?**

“Playing cannot be a secondary right to be addressed once other children’s rights have been achieved” (Rico & Janot, 2019, p. 14).

- Despite ample research validating the importance of play, few countries had created national recreational policies.
- Authors developed a list of measurable indicators to evaluate the level of implementation of public policies.
- Indicators were grouped in four categories: play time, play spaces, play materials, play companions.


**Contributor: Laura Tejada, PhD, LMFT, LCPC, Chicago, IL**

**What are the ethical considerations for using drawings in play therapy?**

“When (drawings) employed ethically in play therapy practice, they may be useful in helping therapists gain insight about the client’s worldview through assessment, the client’s convictions, or experiences through therapy, or how the therapeutic relationship unfolds through supervision” (Stauffer, 2019, p. 10).

- Describes protocol, process, and use of drawings for assessment with examples of developmental changes.
- Provides rationale for using drawings in practice.
- Describes ways drawings may be used clinically and in supervision.


**Contributor: Elizabeth R. Taylor, LPC-S, LMFT, RPT-S, Fort Worth, TX**

**What are the effects of child-centered group play therapy (CCGPT) on anxiety symptoms and problematic classroom behaviors of preschool children?**

“...our results indicate that CCGPT was a favorable intervention for all participants, with resultant decreases in both anxiety and problem behaviors” (Swan, Kaff, & Haas, 2019, p. 92).

- Single case design of 10 sessions of CCGPT with four participants.
- Outcome measures were parent and teacher rating forms of the Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist.


**Contributor: Stephanie Pratola, PhD, LCP, RPT-S, Roanoke, VA**
Can a manualized, school-based Social Skills Training Curriculum positively impact targeted children who do not have an identified diagnosis?

“… the group curriculum for the Friendship Club was beneficial at facilitating the integration of social skills for children identified as struggling to maintain relationships” (Tillman & Prazak, 2019, p.158).

- Pilot study included 34 children between the ages of six and 12.
- Children participated in 12 weekly hour-long sessions.


Contributor: Stephanie Pratola, PhD, LCP, RPT-S, Roanoke, VA

How can professionals continue to support parents who have children with multiple disabilities when transitioning to the educational setting?

“Caregivers of your children with multiple disabilities will likely experience higher levels of caregiving burden, compared with those whose children are older.” (Waters & Friesen, 2019, p. 21).

- Explained the differences between Parts B and C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA].
- Provided insight regarding parents’ feelings and experiences navigating the special education system.
- Encouraged professionals to improve advocacy and support for families who have children with multiple disabilities.


Contributor: Kenisha Gordon, PhD, NCC, LPC-S, ACS, RPT-S, Clinton, MS

What consequences are our families experiencing as a result of mobile technology?

“Utilized subjective and objective behavioral and self-report measures demonstrate associations between smartphone usage habits and differences in intertemporal preference and reward sensitivity” (Wilmer, Hampton, Olino, Olson, & Chein, 2019, p. 375-376).

- Neuroimaging was completed to determine how these characteristics might relate to variation in white matter connectivity.
- Researchers found that individuals who exhibit a stronger tendency to discount future rewards also tend to be more engaged with their mobile devices.


Contributor: Tisha Way Gaynor, MSSA, LISW-S, RPT-S, Cincinnati, OH

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Reader feedback regarding how these Mining Reports might be improved and made more helpful for play therapy practitioners, instructors, and supervisors is welcomed. Mining Reports are archived in the Members Only section of the APT website (www.a4pt.org).