

## **Information for Parents and Carers about Emotional and well-being support in School**

### What is Play Therapy?

Play Therapy is a professional intervention that uses play as a way of helping children to express themselves. Imagine you had a problem and wanted help to sort it out or to come to terms with it. What would you do? If the problem was too big for you and wouldn't go away or it was affecting your life or work; you would find someone you could talk to. Play is a child's equivalent of talking and can help them to work through all sorts of problems and concerns. It can help to change challenging behaviours and improve your child's confidence and self esteem. Play Therapy is an extension of the excellent pastoral care provided by the school and is provided by Mo Perkins a highly qualified Play Therapist and Family Coach who specializes in working with children aged 4 – 12 years.

### Why have a Play Therapist in School?

Few of us are able to work well when we are stressed or unhappy. Children can feel the impact of distressing or difficult situations even more powerfully. This is partly because they have less control over their own lives and partly because they haven't yet learned the strategies that adults have learnt over the years. And of course, their developmental level, they are still children. There is a lot of evidence to show that when children are sad, stressed, upset or have low confidence or poor self esteem this makes it more difficult for them to cope with the demands of school life. The evidence shows that their ability to think, learn and retain information is reduced. Schools with a high emphasis on both pastoral care and academic achievement are aware of this and as a result offer Play Therapy as a positive intervention. Mo is the member of the school team who specializes in the child's emotional needs so that the teaching staff can focus on the child's educational needs.

### Why has my child been referred for Play Therapy?

It could be for any number of reasons. You may have brought concerns about your child to the attention of the teaching staff. For example your child may have experienced a trauma, bereavement or other family issues. The teachers may have noticed that your child is distracted or seems distant in class, is tearful or their behaviour has changed. They may be falling out with their classmates more than usual. It could even be that your child has talked to the teacher about something that your child finds distressing and the teacher feels they need more support than can be given in the classroom setting. Please don't feel that you have failed in any way because your child is talking to someone outside the family. It's often harder to talk to someone close to us about our big worries.

### Where does the Play Therapy take place?

School will have a designated room with space to move around and play. The room used will provide a safe and confidential place for your child to explore their issues and concerns. It will be a private space free from interruptions. Sessions are usually provided on the same day of the week. Depending on the timetable, the sessions will be at the same time each week or may be varied. Each session lasts around 40 minutes. Sometimes your child might be seen as part of a small group but usually it will be one to one.

### What happens in the session?

This can vary from child to child and from week to week depending on the needs of your child at the time. The same therapeutic toys are available each week. This might include art materials, therapeutic games and books, puppets, small objects for playing out scenes and lots more. Play therapy is largely non-directive. This means that your child can talk about what they choose to talk about and can choose which toys to play with. Mo will help your child through the

play, to express their feelings and work through problems. This expression might be verbal or non verbal. Sometimes the sessions are more directed for example if we need to work on anger then we might take a workbook approach and continue in a more structured way. Play Therapy evolves within the time and safe space available and within the context of a nurturing relationship with Mo. It might seem strange that your child is “just” playing but it is a very specialized intervention and not the sort of play they would do with their friends. Younger children don’t always realize it’s any sort of therapeutic intervention. They often think of it just as “Special Play” or “Golden Time”. What they do realize is that they enjoy the special attention and the trusting relationship that builds up where they feel free to share their concerns and where they feel understood.

#### Will I be told what my child has said in the session?

A key feature of Play Therapy is that it’s a confidential space for the child. They need to know that they can discuss their concerns without fear of what they’ve said being passed to school or home. Building a relationship where there is trust is vital. However, if there is any serious concern about the well being of your child then this will be brought to the attention of the designated person at school and we might ask you to come into school so that we can discuss things further. Because we are dealing with young children we won’t keep anything from you that we think you should know as a parent. The best interest of your child is our main concern. How the sessions are going will be communicated to the designated person from time to time. There may even be suggestions given to you or the teacher about how to manage specific behaviours at home or in the classroom.

#### How can I help?

Once you have given consent for the sessions to commence, we’ve found that one of the most helpful things you can do is to support the process and show an

acceptance of Play Therapy as a normal and useful activity. Show an interest if your child wants to talk about the sessions but don't press them if they don't. Mo sometimes seems like the child's favourite person or best friend for a while. Just like how younger children sometimes 'love' their teacher. This is a normal part of the bonding that takes place in therapy and after a while the sessions often lead to more openness at home and of course a resolution or improvement of the referral issues. Additionally, the development of emotional intelligence is a skill for life. Good emotional intelligence is linked to good self-esteem, self-confidence, self-awareness and the ability to communicate feelings and understand the feelings of others. Every parent wants their children to develop these skills.

#### What if my child doesn't want Play Therapy?

The choice to have Play Therapy is entirely voluntary. Young children (and adults) can sometimes be anxious when they don't know what is going to happen so we would encourage your child to meet with Mo to see how they feel. However, if after a session or two your child says they don't want any more sessions we would respect that. Sometimes it's just about timing and they might feel differently a term or two later.

#### What if I don't want my child to have Play Therapy?

You need to give your consent so of course we would respect your wishes. However, school will have suggested the intervention for clear reasons that they will discuss with you. You are welcome to meet with Mo to talk through your concerns and often this resolves any worries. In fact we are very warm to the idea that parents would benefit from a meeting with Mo before she meets with your child. This can be a huge support to you as well as helpful for your child. You might also be interested to know that Mo has no connection at all to Social Services or Child and Adolescent Mental Health. That means that your child does

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not enter “the system” when they see Mo. Other agencies are only involved when it’s absolutely necessary and this would be fully discussed with you. However, if you are still against the idea, school will discuss other options with you.

Want more information?

If you would like any further information please do not hesitate to contact school. If you’d like to email Mo directly you are welcome to do so please email [mo@moperkins.com](mailto:mo@moperkins.com)