

## **Connecting with Children in Therapy**

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As you do your practicum work and get a feel for what population (or populations) you prefer to work with, don't forget the children. Now this recommendation goes for anyone, but a special note goes out to the men out there—children are literally starving for healthy, positive relationships with males. We recognize this inherently in children who come from homes of divorce where mothers are often the primary caregiver. However, in my work with many children from two parent homes, I recognize this same dearth of male role models and adults in general with whom children can connect.

If your intention is to wrestle with managed care in a private practice setting, you may also be interested to know that in my experience with insurance companies, you have a much wider berth and much more leeway in terms of sessions and treatment length if you are contracting for sessions with a child patient. Practitioners in general just don't know what to *do* with kids when they get them into therapy. If it is in your very nature to relate well to children, it would greatly enhance your practice and the demand for your services if you were to have clinical training in working with them.

What to look for in terms of your training are techniques and models rooted in proven, widely known and accepted general psychological theory. The modality you choose should recognize children as something other than “little adults,” and should focus on understanding the child in his or her context as opposed to making a child fit a category or label that is diluted down from an adult diagnosis. The modality should include a way to perceive the child, his surroundings, and those significant in his life from the perspective of the child. It should offer techniques and therapeutic interventions that would interest, motivate, and appropriately challenge the child to learn new ways of thinking and behaving while honoring his or her feelings.

Play therapy is apparently the way to go, with a huge following both nationally and internationally. Training is available in just about any modality, from person-centered to systemic to cognitive behavioral play therapy, Adlerian, Psychodynamic, family play therapy, and working with traumatized or special-needs children. I have received no fewer than 15 referrals from managed care companies who specifically were looking for someone trained in play therapy. For more information on play therapy, you may contact me via e-mail or visit: [www.a4pt.org](http://www.a4pt.org).

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