

# **International Consortium of Play Therapy Associations (IC-PTA)**

## **Play Therapy Education Competencies and Standards of Practice**

A major objective of IC-PTA is to promote quality Play Therapy and Therapeutic Play practice globally. Towards that goal, IC-PTA has adopted educational competencies and best practice standards as a guide for both developing and established Play Therapy associations to use to develop and strengthen their own requirements for Play Therapy practice in their respective countries. This document was developed as a collaborative, international effort and is comprised of general mental health educational competencies as well as Play Therapy specific competencies.

The effective integration of knowledge and skills acquisition in Play Therapy practice is paramount to ethical work with clients of all ages, families, the community, and the profession. Play Therapy practice requires commitment to the development of both personal qualities and professional abilities. The personal qualities support and guide practitioner self-reflection and professional behavior.

The following table differentiates Education-based Clinical Competencies and Best Practice Standards for Play Therapy. Clinical Competencies are measurable behaviors used to assess Play Therapy practice evidenced by educational experiences through university course work and/or approved training experiences. These competencies inform the play therapist's education and supports curriculum development. The Best Practice Standards guides and benchmarks service delivery of Play Therapy within the clinical environment.

Education-Based Clinical Competencies	Best Practice Standards
<b>Theoretical knowledge informing Play Therapy</b>	
<u>Child development theory</u>	
Examine the key theories of child development and apply to child observation.	Applies child development theory to clinical Play Therapy practice with special observation of emotional and relational ability.
<u>Child play development</u>	
<p>Analyze child play development in the context of the conceptual understandings of play and child development.</p> <p>Recognize the importance and meaning of play within the culture: nationally, regionally, and specific locale.</p> <p>Identify theories of typical and atypical play development.</p> <p>Recognize the wide range of diagnosis and implications to practice.</p> <p>Examine assessments tools that may be used to evaluate the child's play.</p> <p>Able to administer assessments reliably and validly (as appropriate to the play therapist's level of training and appropriate to the country-of-practice).</p>	<p>Assesses the child's play development to inform Play Therapy practice.</p> <p>Identifies when further assessment is needed and refer to appropriate professional.</p>
<u>The therapeutic powers of play</u>	

<p>Identify the therapeutic powers of play and its ability to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate communication</li> <li>• Foster emotional wellness</li> <li>• Enhance social relationships</li> <li>• Increase personal strengths</li> </ul>	<p>Communicates the theoretical underpinnings of the therapeutic power of play to parents, paraprofessionals, professionals and other service providers.</p> <p>Integrates therapeutic play principles into clinical practice.</p> <p>Understand the therapeutic metaphor and symbols as a form of communication within the greater scope of treatment.</p>
<p><u>Developmental psychopathology</u></p>	
<p>Describe developmental psychopathology.</p> <p>Identify the clinical needs of specific groups of children affected by disrupted development.</p> <p>Recognize the emergence of psychopathology within human development.</p> <p>Maintains current on mental health diagnosis (ICD/DSM) and appropriate Play Therapy intervention.</p>	<p>Remains current with developmental psychopathology literature and practice.</p> <p>Assesses clients according to developmental psychopathology. Or refers for assessment, based on best practices of the country in which the play therapist practices.</p> <p>Provides appropriate Play Therapy intervention based on developmental psychopathology needs.</p> <p>Makes recommendations to appropriate service providers based on assessment.</p>
<p><u>Broad theoretical knowledge</u></p>	
<p>Review a broad range of theories and disciplines relevant to Play Therapy including but not limited to mental health, attachment, neuroscience, social and emotional wellbeing, disability, and trauma.</p>	<p>Selects and integrates appropriate theoretical knowledge and therapeutic frameworks to inform Play Therapy practice.</p> <p>Monitors therapeutic changes within each intervention.</p> <p>Reflects on the Play Therapy interventions based on the chosen theoretical framework.</p>
<p><u>Play Therapy theory and models of practice</u></p>	
<p>Critique a range of theories informing Play Therapy practice; for example, psychoanalytic, humanistic,</p>	<p>Based on assessment the play therapist combines and integrated appropriate Play Therapy theories and techniques within an</p>

<p>psychodynamic, systems theories, attachment theory, cognitive theories, behavioral theories, and developmental psychology.</p> <p>Examine various models that review the therapeutic change process in a Play Therapy intervention.</p> <p>Identify appropriate models of Play Therapy within a cohesive theoretical framework, including directive, non-directive, integrative, and developmental approaches.</p>	<p>individualized clinical Play Therapy intervention and/or treatment plan.</p> <p>Provides (and/or combines and integrates) a model or models of Play Therapy practice, based on a theoretical framework, for individualized clinical Play Therapy interventions.</p>
<p><u>Bio-ecological systems theory and social constructionist theories of society</u></p>	
<p>Distinguish how the wider systems of family, religion and/or spirituality, community, culture, and government policy impact on children, young people and families.</p> <p>Consider how different cultures value and view play across the lifespan.</p> <p>Integrate systems thinking and analysis into therapeutic practice.</p>	<p>Applies multiple systems theories to Play Therapy practice where appropriate.</p> <p>Integrates systems theory into Play Therapy practice, including assessment, therapeutic intervention, recommendations and multi-directional feedback.</p> <p>Incorporates systems theory to engage the child’s family in Play Therapy practice, particularly when working with avoidant or resistant families.</p> <p>Informs organizational policy to incorporate systemic Play Therapy practice.</p>
<p><b>Clinical Play Therapy Practice and Therapeutic Skills</b></p>	
<p><u>Play Therapy assessment</u></p>	
<p>Assess the physical, behavioral, emotional, psychological, religious, spiritual and social needs of clients and formulate appropriate therapeutic objectives.</p>	<p>Undertakes thorough assessment of the child, from multiple perspectives, within the family and community contexts.</p> <p>Undertakes thorough assessment of the child’s play ability.</p> <p>Utilizes a range of standardized and non-standardized play assessments to inform practice.</p>

Refers on to other professionals for further assessment when required.	
<u>Play Therapy treatment plan</u>	
Formulate clear, meaningful and appropriate therapeutic treatment plan, including therapeutic goals, structure and boundaries.	<p>Establishes treatment plan for a Play Therapy intervention, including appointment scheduling and approximate number of sessions required.</p> <p>Identifies goals for Play Therapy in conjunction with child and their family/carer.</p> <p>Explains Play Therapy structure and boundaries in age appropriate language for child and their family/carer.</p> <p>Informs family, paraprofessionals and professionals of ways to assist the therapeutic process.</p>
<u>Therapeutic relationship/alliance</u>	
Describe the benefit of forming a therapeutic alliance/relationship.	Engages the client in a safe and secure, playful and therapeutic relationship.
Establish and reestablish broken therapeutic alliances.	Maintains clear professional, personal and therapeutic boundaries.
Demonstrate effective engagement and facilitation of the therapeutic relationship with clients.	Forms therapeutic alliances/relationships and uses appropriate therapeutic boundaries for safe clinical practice.
Articulate and translate Play Therapy practice and process with the child's parent/carer or significant other, when appropriate.	Sustains important therapeutic alliance with primary caregiver.
<u>Communication skills</u>	

Communicate effectively, through non-verbal and verbal expression, with clients and significant others.

Use a range of therapeutic person-centered skills, including:

- active listening
- attunement
- empathic responding
- questioning
- mirroring
- containing
- exploring
- making meaning
- paraphrasing
- tracking
- reflection
- summarizing
- and unconditional positive regard

Communicates effectively and integrates person-centered skills.

Identifies emotional affect of client and reflects accordingly.

Maintains a non-judgmental, playful and curious attitude towards the client.

#### Inter-personal communication

Demonstrate and facilitate a range of verbal, non-verbal and symbolic communication using a variety of play and therapeutic resources with children, young people, adults, and families.

Provides therapeutic skills to support and foster the therapeutic relationship.

Closely observes and attends to verbal, non-verbal and symbolic communication.

Understands and engages in play in the context of the therapeutic process.

#### Inter-professional relationships

Collaborate and communicate with other professionals.

Work effectively as part of a systemic team around the child, young person, adults, and family.

Maintains professional systemic practice.

Acknowledges limitations of service delivery and seeks external support and guidance to maintain healthy working relationships.

#### Therapeutic endings

Provide planned and coherent opportunities to enable work with clients to end in a therapeutic manner.	Prepares the child and their family for therapeutic ending of the Play Therapy intervention.
<u>Reflective practice</u>	
Demonstrate ability to be self-reflective on practice.	Uses self-reflection within clinical practice and supervision.
Completes required hours of supervision to reflect on professional practice.	Initiates to undertake training in areas identified as a result of reflecting on practice.
Promote Play Therapy practice through reflecting upon the <u>Personal Qualities</u> of a Play Therapy practitioner.	Possesses and demonstrates the <u>Personal Qualities</u> of a Play Therapist.  Accesses personal therapy when required.
Integrate personal therapy to enhance reflective practice, as appropriate to the play therapist's country and/or professional requirements.	
<u>Clinical supervision</u>	
Use clinical supervision to promote and ensure ethical Play Therapy practice.	Accesses clinical supervision by an approved supervisor.
Differentiate clinical and managerial supervision.	Critically appraises strengths and weaknesses in Play Therapy practice.
Review and consider own strengths and limitations of play therapy practice within a supervision relationship.	Continuously maintains a log of supervision undertaken (hours and type).  Refers to policy and supervision requirements.
Comply with applicable ethical code's supervision requirements.	
Supervisors to refer to additional documentation.	
<u>Continuing professional development</u>	
Maintain Continuing Professional Development (CPD) or Continuing Education (CE) in accordance with specific country's requirements.	Continuously maintains a log of professional development/education undertaken.  Records Play Therapy specific or associated categories of professional development/education.

<u>Autonomous practice</u>	
Demonstrate ability to work independently, set priorities, plan and manage own workload and organizational tasks efficiently.	Works independently and manages and prioritizes clinical workload.
<b>Professional Practice and Conduct</b>	
<u>Rights of the child</u>	
Demonstrate knowledge about children’s rights as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, 1989).	Actively advocates for the Rights of the Child when breaches are observed.
<u>Legislation and policy in context</u>	
<p>Ability to locate and translate current legislation and policy relating to the practice of Play Therapy in the context of government informed departments of health and education (as well as country, state and territory policies specific your location).</p> <p>Define when and how to proceed in mandatory reporting based on current legislation.</p>	<p>Practices Play Therapy within the legal parameters within the state, territory or country where clinical practice takes place.</p> <p>Reports suspected child abuse or neglect to relevant authority and adheres to mandatory.</p> <p>Reporting legislation related to your state or territory or country.</p>
<u>Anti-discriminatory practice theory</u>	
Understand principles of anti-discriminatory practice in relation to children, young people and their families within the context of a diverse society.	Integrates anti-discrimination principles within clinical practice.
<u>Culturally appropriate practice</u>	



<p>Work in a culturally sensitive and inclusive way with a diverse range of children, young people, adults and families, considering the individual's identity and cultural needs.</p> <p>Apply principles of cultural competence and inclusive practice to location of service.</p>	<p>Integrates and promotes cultural competence within own practice and as appropriate to community where the practice takes place.</p> <p>Seeks and undertakes additional training in relation to cultural populations within community where practice takes place.</p> <p>Seeks supervision or forward referral for cross cultural practice when knowledge deficit identified.</p>
<p><u>Record-keeping and writing skills</u></p>	
<p>Accurately records Play Therapy interventions and work within the requirements of one's own country, state and territory policies specific your locality.</p> <p>Communicate effectively in writing through clinical records, written assessments and reports of therapeutic progress.</p>	<p>Maintains a professional standard of record keeping.</p> <p>All records and written communications are documented in a respectful and considered manner.</p>
<p><u>Ethics and values in practice</u></p>	
<p>Integrate ethical principles into Play Therapy practice to ensure protection of children, young people, adults, families and the public.</p>	<p>Practices within an ethical framework and scope of Play Therapy practice.</p>
<p><u>Confidentiality and privacy</u></p>	
<p>Maintain the confidentiality and privacy required by clients and significant others.</p> <p>Meet applicable legal and ethical standards specific to government jurisdiction.</p> <p>Recognize the limitations of confidentiality in relation to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.</p>	<p>Continuously maintains confidentiality and privacy.</p> <p>Maintains up to date knowledge of legal and ethical standards relevant to your work.</p>

<u>Play Therapy research</u>	
Identify and critically evaluate current research and integrate into Play Therapy practice.	Accesses current literature and research in the field of Play Therapy and applies to practice.
Demonstrate that Play Therapy practice is informed by contemporary evidence based research.	Maintains regular updates on evidence assessments and techniques in Play Therapy.
Demonstrate an understanding of research methods and the application of research methods within clinical contexts.	Attends relevant training and conferences for the updating of knowledge to inform practice.
	Practitioner undertaking research in practice seeks and adheres to ethical guidelines.
<u>Play Therapy environment</u>	
Demonstrates knowledge for developing and maintaining a safe Play Therapy environment, including applicable health and safety rules and regulations.	Applies knowledge for developing and maintaining a safe Play Therapy room or space.
Selects and maintains play materials, performs risk assessment of the environment and takes appropriate steps to ensure safety.	Chooses toys and expressive materials based upon child development theories and Play Therapy theories.
Ensures privacy during sessions and preserves confidentiality in use and storage of therapeutic materials produced in sessions.	Stores the client’s artefacts (e.g. all art and craft work and photographic images), that are produced within the Play Therapy sessions in a confidential and safe manner.
<u>Diverse settings</u>	
Considers the complexity of integrating Play Therapy practice within diverse contexts.	Provides an appropriate Play Therapy service when working in environments which at times have complex or competing agendas.
Demonstrates understanding of functions and priorities in diverse settings.	Provides an appropriate Play Therapy service based on the work setting and/or across multiple locations.

## Personal Qualities

**Empathy:** To empathize with the emotional and psychological expressions, experiences and needs of clients and significant others.

**Sincerity:** Commitment to being authentic and genuine to self and others.

**Honesty:** To act truthfully and with integrity towards self and others.

**Respect:** To acknowledge and show acceptance towards other people's understanding, experiences and abilities.

**Ethical:** To be committed to ethical practice and able to comply with the ethical code and values defined by the relevant board/licensing body/association wherein the play therapist is practicing.

**Knowledgeable:** To be able to apply knowledge, evidence and experience critically.

**Self-awareness:** To assess, review and consider own competencies, strengths and weaknesses as a Play Therapist.

**Self-responsibility:** To operate and practice efficiently within own level of competencies.

**Congruence:** To be authentic and genuine in conduct with clients and significant others.

**Compassion:** To be emotionally warm, caring and concerned towards others.

**Critical reflection:** To critically reflect upon the emotional, social and psychological world of clients, significant others and the Self and to integrate reflection into practice.

**Commitment to professional development:** To continue professional development as a play therapist in a responsible and effective manner.

**Commitment to personal development:** To be reflexive, to integrate personal insights into future practice, to continue personal development in a responsible and effective manner.

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