



AutPlay® Therapy Theoretical Underpinnings and Research

AutPlay® Therapy is an integrative family play therapy approach for working with autistic and other neurodivergent children, as well as children with developmental and physical disabilities. An integrative approach is defined as a progressive form of psychotherapy that combines different therapeutic tools and approaches to help address the mental health needs of the individual client. The theoretical underpinnings of AutPlay include humanistic, family systems, developmental, and cognitive behavioral theory. Play therapy theories/approaches and interventions are also integrated into AutPlay protocol along with evidence-based practices.

- Underpinnings/integration from play therapy theories and approaches include:
 - Child Centered Play Therapy (research support for addressing various mental health needs of autistic and neurodivergent children).
 - Filial Therapy (research support for addressing various mental health needs of autistic and neurodivergent children).
 - Theraplay (empirically supported as a therapy approach for working with autistic children and their families).
 - Cognitive Behavioral Play Therapy (research supported and incorporates multiple evidence-based practices for addressing various mental health needs of autistic children).
- Underpinnings from family systems, developmental, and cognitive behavioral theory:
 - Wide research support and multiple evidence-based practices for addressing mental health needs of autistic children, neurodivergent children, and their families.

The National Professional Development Center (NPDC) on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and the National Standards Project (NSP) reviewed literature to establish evidence-based practices for autistic individuals between the ages of birth and 22 years. Literature reviews included literature up to and including 2007 and applied rigorous criteria when determining which studies would be included as evidence of efficacy for a given practice.

In 2015, the NPDC conducted an expanded and updated review, which yielded a total of 27 evidence-based practices. AutPlay protocol incorporates several of the 27 identified evidence-based practices for working with autistic children. Practices incorporated into AutPlay protocol include: Cognitive Behavioral Intervention, Modeling, Naturalistic Intervention, Parent-Implemented Intervention, Reinforcement, Scripting, Self-Management, Social Narratives, Social Skills Training, and Visual Supports. The full results and criteria used by the National Professional Development Center (NPDC) can be found on their website NPDC – Autism Spectrum Disorder. The full results and criteria used by the National Standards Project can be found on their website

National Autism Center - www.nationalautismcenter.org.

It is important to remember that an autistic child does not need any particular therapy just because they are autistic. Instead, what are the therapy needs of the autistic child?

Several case studies and clinical outcome trials have been conducted using AutPlay protocol. Results have shown significant gains and improvements in targeted therapy goals. Parent reports have also been positive and supported therapy gains for their child, parenting skill gains, and improvements in the child/parent relationship.

Play Therapy and Autism Research

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