

## Preface

**B**etween the two of us, we have taught introductory play therapy classes an innumerable number of times. (Okay, it's not really *innumerable*, but it's *a lot*.) And both of us have longed (yes, *longed*—not just wanted or wished to have—but *longed*) for a different kind of introductory play therapy book designed for folks who wanted either to learn play therapy or to deepen their play therapy expertise. We longed for a book that helped readers to examine their own beliefs about people and how they change—as a vehicle for helping them choose a theoretical orientation that would serve as a foundation for their play therapy practice. We longed for a book that featured practical information about the various skills, strategies, and techniques that make up play therapy. We longed for a book that addressed using play therapy with children, adolescents, adults, families, parents, and teachers. We longed for a book that described tools for building a relationship with clients; exploring their issues and underlying dynamics; helping them gain insight into their issues and underlying dynamics; and working with them to make changes in cognitive, emotional, behavioral, interpersonal, attitudinal, and bodily patterns. We longed for a book that inspired play therapists to be intentional and systematic in their work with clients. We longed for a book that gave readers permission to give themselves permission to adapt techniques for specific clients and to “make stuff up” for the playroom. We knew that was a lot, and we believe all of those elements are essential for exemplary practice of play therapy. We never found such a book, so we decided to write it. This is the book you have in your hands (or on your tablet if you are e-reading).

We framed this book around the story of Zan, a student (or maybe an experienced mental health or school professional) you'll meet in the

prelude who wanted to learn play therapy. She (or maybe he—we want to acknowledge that not all play therapists are female, and alternating pronouns is confusing, so we are just using the feminine pronoun for simplicity) represents our students and the readers of this book. She is meant to embody our desired audience—learners who, like Zan, love to tell stories, have adventures, dance, hear stories, make up songs, build worlds in the sand, do art, and generally love to play—folks who want to learn to use all those loves to help clients through the process of play therapy.

In working to help you learn how to do play therapy (or how to deepen your practice of play therapy), we first wanted to explicate the basics of play therapy (the what, who, where, and how)—that’s in Chapter 1. We also wanted to cover counseling theories applied to play therapy—we think having a theoretical orientation or a systematic way of conceptualizing clients and developing treatment plans is important to becoming an effective play therapist. In order to help you explore this approach, we have included a chapter on theory applied to play therapy and on how to decide on a theory that will work for you (Chapter 2). Chapter 3 contains an overview of the broad strategies that play therapists can use throughout the play therapy process—we have techniques from each of those broad strategies in the five chapters that are about some things you can do in the playroom (Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8). In Chapter 4, we describe the basic play therapy skills and techniques for building the relationship in play therapy, which is foundational for everything else you do, regardless of your approach to play therapy. Chapter 5 is about exploring clients’ interpersonal and intrapersonal issues—deciding whether and how to go about investigating “what’s up” with your clients. For those play therapists who believe it is important for clients to gain insight into their patterns of thinking, behaving, and feeling, Chapter 6 is designed to give you ideas for helping clients begin to understand themselves (and maybe even others) better. Chapter 7 is about helping clients make changes; it is filled with skills and techniques designed to give you a plethora of directive (and some not-so-directive) methods for assisting clients to move forward with shifts in behavior, thinking, feeling, attitudes, and so forth. There is also a chapter (Chapter 8) with practical suggestions and activities for including parents and families (and teachers, when appropriate) in the play therapy process. Chapter 9 covers what to do when challenging situations come up in the playroom. Interspersed between the chapters, we have also included small bites of knowledge (or maybe even wisdom—we aren’t sure which) on a number of topics designed to inspire you to be present, intentional, creative, and innovative; we called these small bites “Interludes.”

As far as the techniques/activities go, certain things were important to both of us: (1) providing activities that could be used across several theoretical approaches to play therapy; (2) keeping the “mechanical

communication” (S. Riviere, personal communication, September, 2015) aspect of each technique as the primary focus of the intervention—paying attention to what the client is *doing*; (3) encouraging readers to be intentional in their play therapy process—to think about what they want to accomplish with each activity they use with their clients; (4) supporting play therapists in balancing goal-directedness and flexibility both within and across sessions; (5) providing enough concrete detail in our descriptions that you can actually use these interventions in your practice; (6) creating an atmosphere of permission so you feel comfortable adapting the activities to your population and your practice; (7) challenging you to keep in mind the interests, talents, preferences, passions, likes, and dislikes of your clients as you choose activities tailored to appeal to and work with individual clients; (8) encouraging/inspiring you to invent your own activities; and (9) modeling how, with some clients and some interventions, asking questions can facilitate optimal growth, and with other clients and other interventions, not asking questions can facilitate optimal growth.

There are many, many skills and techniques/activities scattered throughout the book. We want to remind you (probably over and over and over again) not to consider the skills and techniques as recipes. There is no “right way” to do an activity. How each technique should be delivered “depends.” It depends on you (and your ideas about how people grow and change) and on the client (and what is going on with him or her right then in the session and in general). Even though we have provided you with skills and intervention techniques, it is up to you to custom-design the application for the specific clients with whom you are working. We believe a big part of the play therapist’s job is to tailor interventions to meet the needs and interests of individual clients. It is our conviction that paying attention to what is important to specific clients, paying attention to their preferred ways of expressing themselves, and paying attention to the best way to engage them in directive activities are all key elements to being successful and congruent in play therapy.