Activities to support connection and relationship building using principles of Theraplay®

Theraplay® is an engaging, playful, relationship-focused treatment method that is interactive, physical, personal, and fun. The following activities are suggestions that fit in with current guidance around physical distancing. Some can be done on a 1:1 as well as in a group context. Select and differentiate activities as appropriate for your children. Play around with them – have fun!

**BUTTERFLY BUBBLES**

Ask the child to hold their hand out so that you can blow pretend butterflies (actually bubbles) to sit on their hand before they pop and disappear. Ask the child to decide what the butterfly will look like; they can pick the colour, if it has spots or stripes and so on. Slow your breathing down, taking a deep breath before slowly blowing a big bubble. Admire the butterfly together before blowing another. Lower your voice to a whisper to make it as magical as possible.

**CREATE A SPECIAL HANDSHAKE**

Make up a special handshake together (mirror actions rather than touching hands), take turns to add new gestures. This can be cumulative over several sessions and can be your beginning or ending ritual.

**HELLO AND GOODBYE SONGS**

To mark beginnings and endings.

**MR BUBBLE WRITING**

Squirt foamy soap e.g. Mr Bubble on a smooth surface like a window or a mirror. Standing apart draw something one part at a time and then ask the child to copy it. When done smear the soap back again and switch the leader, having the child lead if appropriate.

**PAINT A WINDOW**

Mark off an area to be painted (glass window, mirror or large sheet of paper) with long pieces of tape that go from one side to the other. The taped area will create a mosaic of different shapes. Using tempura paints, or poster paint, create artwork within taped lines. You and the child alternate filling in shapes between tape lines. You can remove tape for variation of effect. Can also be done as a group collaboration.

**BUILD A FORT**

Create a fort with pillows and blankets (or anything allowed that would make it comfortable) for the child to hide in. Let the child rest in the fort without seeking or finding them.

**STRAIGHT FACE CHALLENGE**

The child/children have to keep a straight face while you try to make them laugh by making funny faces.

**LAND, SEA & AIR**

Determine which part of the floor is ‘land’ and which is ‘sea’. If you’re using tape, put down a long piece to mark it off. The area in front of the tape is ‘sea’ and the area behind it is ‘land’. You call out one of three directions: Land, Sea or Air. When you say “Land!” the child jumps into the land area. When you say “Sea!” the child jumps into the sea. When you say “Air!” the child jumps as high into the air as he can. Surprise the players with random commands like “Tornado!” and “Earthquake!” where everyone invents their own movements.

**MIRRORING**

Face the child. Move your arms, face, or other body parts and ask the child to move in the same way. For a very active child, you can use slow motion or vary the tempo. Take turns being the leader.

**OLYMPIC STEPS**

The child stands on a line to begin. Have the child take a regular-size step and mark the child’s heel where they land. The child then returns to the line and takes the largest step he possibly can – mark at the heel. Return to the line and ask the child to do a broad jump – mark at the heel. For the last turn, the child jumps as far as he can while you cheer them on loudly. See how much further the child can jump when cheered for.

**FISH AND CHIPS**

Say “fish” and have the child/children say “chips” in just the same way. Repeat 5-10 times varying loudness and intonation. Adapt the pair of words to customs of different countries.

**RED LIGHT GREEN LIGHT**

Ask the children to do something, such as run, jump, move arms. Green light means go, red light means stop.

**FOLLOW THE LEADER**

Form a line (keeping 2m distance!). The first person chooses a particular way to move and all others copy. The leader goes to the back of the line and the new leader demonstrates a different way to move. This can also be done sitting in a circle and moving only the arms, head and shoulders.

**ANTICIPATION**

This is a good activity for the end of the day. Adult states one thing they are looking forward to for the upcoming week. Person on their right states one thing they are looking forward to and so on around the circle.

**BEANIE THROW**

Stand in a circle. Leader calls out the name of a member and tosses a bean bag or beanie toy to them. That person calls another and throws to them. If the group is able, leader introduces 1 or 2 more beanies.

**CLAPPING PATTERNS**

Leader claps pattern on knees and hands. Group imitates clapping pattern. Start with a simple pattern and become more complicated as the group allows.

**COMPLIMENTS**

Sit in a circle. Take turns looking at the person to the right. Say one kind thing about them.

**DIRECTIONS WITH NUMBER FOR BODY PARTS**

Everyone lies down on floor facing up. Leader says that calling out #1 means to raise your right arm; #2 the left arm; #3 right leg; #4 left leg; #5 head. Then the leader calls out one number at a time, mixing them up. Then 2 numbers at a time. Then 3, then all 5!

**IMAGINARY BALL THROW**

Start with group in a circle standing. Pretend to hold a ball and throw to another person. That person changes the ‘ball’ into something else (TV, jelly, spaghetti etc) and throws it in the way you would throw such an object to another person.

References

Norris, V. and Lender, D. (2020) *Theraplay® The Practitioners Guide*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

The Theraplay Institute (2017) *Theraplay® Group Activities Flip Book.*