

MP information and calls to collaborate, a resource document for Registrants to use in their letters/meetings.

Dear Registrants,

Below we have outlined different parts of our campaigning for you to write to your MPs about. This will all be familiar to you from our regular 'Good To Knows', but here it all is in one place as a resource for you.

PTUK continue to campaign for children's rights to a qualified therapist, if and when they need one, to be supported by law.

In this document you have:

1. The Child Mental Health Charter's 6 aims.
2. Our EDM #414, calling for Play Therapy to be a core service for child mental health provision.
3. Three questions that MPs could 'table' in parliament which back up our EDM and Charter.
4. Text from the 'About' pages on our new website, which describe and explain Play Therapy.

1. The Child Mental Health Charter

Play Therapy UKs work over 20 years has time and again proved to us that we must have children's Mental Health protected by law. That their right to a trained, appropriate therapist be enshrined in law. To this end, in 2019, Play Therapy UK began the sponsorship of the Child Mental Health Charter childmentalhealthcharter.com The aims of the Child Mental Health Charter are to:

- 1.) Focus on the needs of children. Children's voices must be heard and their dignity and human rights upheld. Within school, the curriculum must embed within it an understanding of emotional wellbeing, the principles of good mental health and the certainty of therapeutic help for the children who need it
- 2.) Protect children. Any individual who works therapeutically with children must be registered through an independent government-approved agency such as the Professional Authority's Accredited Register programme or the Health and Care Professions Council. Children are currently insufficiently protected because too many unqualified and unsupervised people are practising
- 3.) Invest in a properly qualified workforce. Level 7 postgraduate training is essential and the main obstacle to a properly trained workforce is the lack of financial support. Accessible, high-quality and recovery-focused mental health services require personnel whose appropriate training is not solely dependent upon their own financial resources. All professionals (including teachers) who work with children must be trained in mental health awareness.
- 4.) Ensure policy is informed by the best available and appropriate evidence and adequately funded. Practice-based evidence uses continuous measurements obtained from real life practice and should inform an 'evidence base' for working therapeutically with children
- 5.) Focus on the needs of parents and carers. There must be high quality support for parents and carers to help them to better understand and support their child with schools promoted as effective, familiar, accessible and empathetic service delivery channels.
- 6.) Make policies work. 'Joined up working' would prioritise appropriate data-sharing between all agencies concerned with child welfare. The responsibility for children's mental health would encompass all relevant Departments in addition to the Department for Health and Social Care.

2. The Early Day Motion #414

From these vital goals, **Dr Lisa Cameron MP has recently tabled for us in the House of Commons EDM 414** <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/58879> , the text of which is:

“That this House recognises the importance of play therapy in helping children who are experiencing mental illness or trauma and considers that therapy to be an essential component of the covid-19 recovery programme; notes that play therapy is an internationally recognised and highly cost effective health intervention for children for whom talking therapies like counselling are not always appropriate; further notes that play is essential to every child’s social, emotional, cognitive, physical, creative and language developmental needs, assisting the learning process for all children and young people including those for whom verbal communication may be challenging; commends the role of organisations such as Play Therapy UK, Play Therapy International and the professional, highly-trained UK play therapist workforce who are currently supporting some of our most vulnerable children; and calls on the Government to acknowledge the vital role of play therapy in its covid-19 recovery programme and ensure that play therapy is one of the core services provided by the new and developing network of family hubs recently announced by the Minister for Children and Families.”

3. The Questions to table

Perhaps your MP would consider tabling for oral questions to the House of Parliament the following three questions, rooted in the goal of having children’s mental health needs and provision written into the new Mental Health Act next year.

1. With Gillian Keegan’s appointment as Minister of State for Mental Health and Care, and the draft Mental Health Bill set to be introduced to the House in 2022; have consultation contributions on the White Paper, such as ours from PTUK, been taken into account? **Are the rights of children to a qualified therapeutic practitioner, such as a Play Therapist, going to be part of the new Mental Health legislation?**
2. **What is the Government going to do to increase the number of therapists to include play therapists?**
NHS statistics show that in June 2021, only 45% of children with NHS mental health appointments had a face-to-face interview, despite more than 2,200 children being referred for urgent mental health treatment, the highest figure on record. ‘Virtual’ appointments are financially low-cost and supposedly enable more people to be seen. However, 32% of children surveyed by MIND said that ‘onscreen’ appointments had caused their problems to worsen. A growing child mental health crisis is being fuelled because the Government is opting for a ‘cut-price’ service that will cost more in the long term as problems become entrenched, worsen and persist to darken the life course.
3. **Why has none of the money that the Government has announced for NHS and Social Care recovery been earmarked for children’s mental health?**
According to the latest NHS data, in 2020, 1 in 6 children or young people had a mental health problem; an increase from the 1 in 9 recorded before the pandemic. In addition, children responding to Children’s Commissioner, Rachel de Souza’s ‘Big Ask’ project have expressed high levels of concern about their mental health.

In the 3 points above, we lay out what is needed for providing help to children who need it. We are responding to this need being widely reported, and having worsened since the pandemic. We are responding to findings that early intervention is economically beneficial as well as of course ending suffering for our youngest citizens earlier than if help is only provided later on. So, if early intervention is both sensible and kind, what approach do we know works? **Play Therapy.**

4. What is Play Therapy?

Play Therapy is a type of therapy where play and art materials are used as the main way for people to express themselves. Using play in therapy helps people to express themselves in their own way; especially if they are struggling to understand how they are feeling, or are finding it hard to put their experiences into words.

Play Therapy can be a particularly helpful approach for children in need of therapeutic support.

Using play means that the child can explore their thoughts and feelings in creative and dynamic ways, without having to use words to articulate themselves. In Play Therapy sessions, children explore their own creativity and express themselves using media such as: drawing and painting, water and clay, sand tray and miniatures, guided imagery and relaxation techniques, drama and puppetry, poetry, movement and music.

Talking about problems can be hard for children. A child may not have the words to describe how they are feeling, or why they are behaving as they do. A child may not be able to recognise what they find difficult, or explain it to someone if asked. Play Therapy provides the expertise and time to do this through play. Play Therapy sessions aim to build a child's ability to develop healthy and resilient relationships, and to work through traumatic experiences which may be preoccupying them. Pre-occupying difficult feeling can make learning at school or managing feelings impossible. Addressing difficult emotions through play provides a layer of story or metaphor to what is being shared and felt. Metaphor can provide a degree of removal from experience for the child. It can feel safer and less intense for a child to express themselves or explore their experiences through play.

PTUK therapists undertake rigorous academic and clinical training before qualifying. To be registered with PTUK, all our therapists must: have qualified via our university approved postgraduate courses, be Clinically Supervised by a Certified Supervisor, attend regular accredited professional development courses and have an enhanced DBS check. Our practitioners are registered with the Professional Standards Authority, an independent organisation regulating and monitoring health care providers.

PTUK Play Therapists measure their work and share the results. Linking to our careful accreditation process for our clinicians, is our recording of practice data. Every Play Therapist records anonymised data from their work, which is collated and analysed to produce up-to-date research papers about our work. Our next analysis and publication is planned for late 2021.

How does Play Therapy work?

Play is important. Play is a child's natural way of experimenting, learning, rehearsing, and mixing real with fantasy. It is an integral part of childhood development across physical and cognitive domains, and is a vital part of all our lives whatever our age.

Using play as the medium to express themselves and what they are experiencing, makes sense to children.

Children can play what they struggle to say, children can play to explain their way. Through play children can discover and rehearse different ways of understanding and coping with difficult feelings, leading to a healthier and happier way of being.

Feelings are important. Recognising and understanding them is important too. Emotions give us information about what is happening to us, so that we can plan what action to take. The origin of the word emotion implies action, coming from 'motere', the Latin verb 'to move', plus the prefix 'e' to 'move away' (Goleman 1995, p6).

Understanding what they are feeling and why, means that a child can decide more consciously what they want to do, before they do it. This reduces the likelihood of acting impulsively or getting stuck in unhealthy patterns of behaviour.

Tuning into, recognising, and understanding thoughts and feelings is central to Play Therapy. In a child's session they can make sense of their emotions, and so choose what actions to take that will provide healthy growth and development. Rehearsing these skills in the safety of the therapy room support and bolster this growth, paving the way for the child to then put these new strategies into practice in their lives outside of their sessions.

The therapeutic relationship is important. It has specific qualities to it, designed to support and sustain such self-discovery. Each Play Therapist has undertaken extensive academic and clinical training, with close clinical supervision and monitoring. Playing together in the therapy room with the full ToolKit of play and art materials creates the facilitative environment for the reflective discovery of therapeutic change. The therapeutic relationship means that crucially the child is not alone with their experiences. With the therapist holding the session via the predictable boundaries and materials and by creating a containing experience for the child's emotional experience. This means that the child feels supported, understood, safe and able to approach deep and strong feelings.

Emotions, thoughts and learning are physical, brain-shaping events. As synapse's fire, neural pathways are made and sustained, and a child's cerebral resources are formed.

Children's experiences and relationships affect their brain organisation, structure and development (Riggs 2006, Fishbein 2007). Research shows that when a child is helped to link words to feelings, cerebral pathways linking higher and lower brain structures are strengthened. This increases their ability to manage strong feelings and stress later in life, skills vital for socio-emotional success (Hariri 2000, Pennebaker 1993, Fossati 2003). Play Therapy provides many opportunities for such learning to take place, developing and discussing experiences and feelings within the metaphor of the narrative. Play Therapy provides opportunities for children to explore parts of their identity within the safety of the therapeutic space, leading to make positive changes in their lives.

Being aware of what we are feeling, when we are feeling it, is important. High emotional arousal without self-awareness can overwhelm a child, leading them to either block out the feeling and so miss out on learning what it could mean – or developing unhealthy responses and becoming stuck in unhelpful patterns. Self-awareness is paying continual attention to one’s internal states in the present moment, and is sometimes called “mindfulness” (Goleman 1995, Latieri 2008, Brantly 2007, Goleman 2003).

Self-awareness is the precursor to empathy, which creates the capacity to care. (Zinker 1977, Sunderland 2006).

Social and emotional learning is the ability to integrate thinking, feeling and behaving to achieve crucial life tasks. Such self-reflective capacities and empathic ability are the foundations of emotional intelligence. Children with these skills can ‘put themselves in someone else’s shoes’ and can imagine different points of view to their own. Children with these skills can understand themselves and those around them better.

During their Play Therapy sessions our goal is for children to develop an understanding of their own feelings and where they come from, to practice healthy and appropriate actions to take in response to them.

The therapeutic space and therapeutic relationship in Play Therapy aims to create the environment for self-discovery and growth for children who attend.