

DR LISA CAMERON MP
East Kilbride, Strathaven & Lesmahagow
Email: lisa.cameron.mp@parliament.uk



East Kilbride Office: MP Offices, Civic Centre, Andrew Street, G74 1AB **Tel** 01355587430
Strathaven Office: 32 Waterside Street, Strathaven, ML10 6AW **Tel** 01357520879

Article by Dr Lisa Cameron MP of the role of Play Therapy in the Covid-19 Recovery.

“One of the key issues as we try to learn lessons from the pandemic by COVID-19 is how to best support the mental health and wellbeing of children.

With colleagues within Parliament, I have urged the Government to do more to help the many children who have found their existing mental health conditions deteriorating because of the effects of the pandemic; or are struggling with new ones because of successive lockdowns; breakdown in support networks, trauma, bereavement and being the recipients of domestic violence and abuse.

This has led to a growing concern that children in the UK have been disproportionately affected by the psychological, educational and economic effects of the pandemic.

One promising intervention comes in the form of Play Therapy which is an internationally recognised and highly effective health intervention for children (including those who are very young) for whom talking therapies like counselling are not always appropriate.

Research compiled by ‘Play Therapy UK’ and ‘Play Therapy International’ from over 60,000 pre and post assessments completed by the referrers shows that between 73%-84% of children have derived great benefit from it. It is especially effective in early diagnosis; detecting symptoms that if untreated, can escalate during the life course with adverse health consequences for the individual and a further economic burden on the NHS.

I was therefore extremely disappointed to see this excellent therapy being ridiculed at TV peak viewing time on 19th August when a character in the UK’s best-loved and longest-running series, ‘Coronation Street’ dismissed it as ‘touchy, feely, new age rubbish.’

As a consequence, these words completely undermined the fantastic work being done daily by highly qualified Play Therapists for and with children and their families.

Essentially such incorrect and ill-informed portrayal of Play Therapy may serve to persuade decision makers that Play Therapy is an expendable extra rather than an essential lifeline for children that is extremely cost-effective in the long term in comparison with other treatments.

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The ‘Coronation Street’ producers should now show that they understand the value of Play Therapy by apologizing and presenting it in a positive light at the next suitable opportunity.

I would also like to take this opportunity to put on record my own support and thanks for the work of ‘Play Therapy UK’, ‘Play Therapy International’ and the professional, highly-trained Play Therapist workforce who are supporting some of our most vulnerable children.

The Government too must now acknowledge the vital role of Play Therapy in its Covid Recovery Programme and ensure that it 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”.

Dr Lisa Cameron MP

Chair of All-Party Parliamentary Group on Psychology.