Introduction to Play Therapy
by: Anne Lehman

Play therapy is a specialized type of counseling for children in which children can express what’s troubling them in play even when they do not have the ability or the desire to express themselves verbally. Just as adults benefit from talking about what’s bothering them, children benefit from playing. Though play therapy is especially appropriate for children ages 3-12, teenagers and adults can also benefit from play techniques and experiential activities.

Play therapists understand that kids often communicate through their behavior. When children are disturbed, upset or sad, they may let adults know by becoming withdrawn, anxious, impulsive, explosive, or defiant. The behavior is the child’s way of communicating to adults that they are out of solutions and what they are doing is the best way they can think of to get what they want or need.

Through play therapy children become encouraged. They develop the belief in themselves necessary to problem solve, and they are encouraged to experiment and try new ideas and learn new ways of relating to others. Play therapy gives children a way to show what’s happened to them and show what they think of it. Additionally, play therapy provides a safe distance from problems and a safe place to express difficult feelings so children can work through them. In play therapy children are allowed to experiment, discover solutions, rehearse and practice, and then adapt those solutions into lifelong strategies.

Children’s verbal abilities are often inadequate to express the assumptions that they create after observing upsetting life circumstances. So, an attempt to use verbal interventions often doesn’t connect or help the child feel understood or safe. Play therapy helps children feel safe and understood. It also helps parents see their children differently, and helps parents make their children feel safe and understood. When children feel safe and understood, then they can learn to control their behavior.

Play therapists are trained to interact with children and trained to provide therapeutic experiences so that children come to believe in themselves as connected, capable, significant and courageous. Meta-analytic reviews of over 100 research studies show that the overall treatment effect after play therapy is beneficial. Greatest improvements were gained when there was a parent actively involved in the child’s treatment. Consequently, play therapists work closely with parents to help them understand their child’s behavior and recommend solutions to implement at home to extend the benefits of the play therapy sessions.

Introduction to Play Therapy is a hands-on class. Students learn in class through applied play activities, videos, and class discussions. Then students apply what they learn in actual recorded sessions with children that are reviewed by the instructor and classmates to make learning practical and real.

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The class is hybrid, so students get the support they need from the instructor in person, but the online portion of the class allows for each student’s individual circumstances and approach to learning. Online discussions with classmates and the instructor shape the class and the dialog is continued in campus sessions in person.

Anne Lehman, who is an LPC, professional school counselor, and registered play therapist, teaches the Introduction to Play Therapy class. Anne says, “Experiential therapies have always attracted my attention—I guess the education side of me believes that when we get a chance to “do” and “experiment” we change our ideas about what really works. I do believe that children and adults have the answers to their own problems. Before I began play therapy I often came away from sessions feeling like I was babysitting my clients who were children instead of making lasting changes. I often worked tirelessly with children who knew the “right” behavior during sessions, but just didn’t seem to change outside sessions. I wanted to find ways to work with children that made a difference and could impact a child’s life long term. Play therapy was just the approach I was looking for. It helped me see WHY children behave the way they do and helped me to work with them in ways that were effective. Play therapy helps clients re-imagine themselves so that they become more self-competent and courageous. I still have lots and lots to learn, but the more I learn about play therapy, the more I believe in its effectiveness. In fact, the principles I have come to believe in because of play therapy have changed how I view myself as a person, and have improved my counseling with adult clients, even when I am doing talk therapy! Most of Harding’s professional counseling graduate students come to this class with solid, excellent training in the basics—they are ready and enthusiastic about moving from theory to practice. This class is an exposure to a specific approach and practical applications that students find exciting.

Here is what other students who have taken the class have to say about it:

Kristi Johnson says: “Intro to Play Therapy was probably the best class I took in the entire Professional Counseling Program. The class requirements led me to actually apply what I had learned about different theoretical orientations instead of just repeating back a list of basic tenants. I was able to apply my learning immediately in my current role as a school counselor. The Play Therapy class inspired me to advocate for developmentally appropriate activities for children in school! Most of all, Play Therapy reminded me of the magical world of children and gave me tools to see them, communicate with them, and join them in new and more therapeutic ways. The feeling I get when I am with a child who “gets” that I’m “present” with them is indescribable and I attribute that ability to what I learned in Intro to Play Therapy.”

Taunya Yaeger says, “I have to admit I get excited when talking about play therapy and Anne Lehman’s Introduction to Play Therapy course. In the past, one of my challenges with counseling young children was getting beyond behavior modification to core issues like sadness, fear, anger… and to hold the kid’s interest for more than 20 minutes. Taking the play therapy class very quickly helped me build a proficiency with helping kids get in touch with their emotions and now my new challenge is getting the kiddos out of the door after sessions. Anne provided real life examples, demonstrations, and made the class fun.”

Steve Powers says, “Intro to Play Therapy opened my eyes to a whole new world of counseling with children. Anne’s interactive and relaxed style of teaching not only introduced the various theories of Play Therapy, but it also sparked my own independent study after the semester was over. As Garry Landreth states, “Toys are like the child’s words and play is the child’s language.”
Get to Know the Faculty. . . Dr. Kevin Shelby

1) Where were you born? Houston, TX

2) When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up? Professional Basketball Player

3) Siblings: 2 Brothers, Chris and Jeremy Shelby

4) Where did you attend college? Harding University

5) Spouse: Melissa “Edward” Shelby

6) Children: Nora (8), Ethan (7), Millie (5)

7) Somewhere you would like to visit and why? Italy. I love Italian food, particularly pizza, and I’ve heard that it’s a beautiful place to visit. Additionally, I love history and I would really enjoy seeing Rome with all of the great ancient Roman architectural wonders.

8) If you could have dinner with anyone, who would it be and why? Francis Chan, because he seems very passionate about following Jesus no matter the cost.

9) Something not many people know about you: I am a published poet.

10) Favorite color: Blue

11) Favorite movie: The Natural

12) Favorite sport and/or team: Houston, Astros

13) Favorite thing about Searcy: The Harding Campus in the winter when the Christmas lights are hung on the front lawn.

14) Favorite thing about Memphis: Memphis Barbecue, The Grizzlies, and the Blues

15) Favorite book (other than the Bible): The Lord of the Rings Trilogy

16) How long have you been teaching at Harding? I’ve been working for Harding for 4 years

17) Biggest challenge or obstacle: Currently, I think the biggest challenge we face as a community is communicating the gracious and loving message of Christ to a world that is progressively becoming more opposed to Christianity.

18) Proudest moment or accomplishment: My proudest moments were holding each of my children for the first time. The achievement I am most proud of is completing my doctorate.

19) Person who had the biggest impact on your life and why? The person who has had the biggest impact on my life is my father, Len Shelby. He has remained faithful to the Lord’s calling no matter what it has cost him and continues to grow deeper in his faith. It’s rare, in this life, that a father possesses and lives out the qualities of a true disciple of Jesus, but I was blessed with a father who has shown me what discipleship looks like.

20) Favorite scripture: Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Hebrews 12:1-3

21) Words of wisdom for our students: The most important thing about you is not what you achieve but who you become.
**Student Spotlight—Lillian Chen**

I am from Wuhan, China. A lot of people ask me this question, “So how did you end up at Harding or Searcy, Arkansas?” I started my Harding journey 7 years ago when I was a senior in high school, and now, Searcy is where I call home away from China. I come from a small family, and I am the only child. In my spare time, I enjoy traveling with friends and watching Netflix.

One of the biggest motivations for me to become a counselor is to make a difference in people’s lives. My mom is an English teacher, and she has influenced countless parents in their family relationships and education styles. She inspired me to become passionate in counseling. Something I really enjoy in the Professional Counseling Program is the freedom to discover and explore different counseling techniques and fields of focus. The program inspires me to consider and anticipate all the possibilities in my future.

**Student Spotlight—Maekellie Smith**

My name is MaeKellie Marie Smith. I was born in Searcy, Arkansas. I grew up in the small town of Cotton Plant, Arkansas. I am married with one child. I have a Bachelor’s degree in Social Work. I’ve always been passionate about helping people, but I wasn’t sure which population I wanted to work with. After completing my Undergrad internship and working in Mental Health for four years, I decided it was time to further my education in the counseling field. My hobbies include: spending time with my family, going to church, learning, shopping, exercise and fishing. My biggest influences in my life have been my family, close friends, my supervisor and the professors in the Counseling Program here at Harding. I have enjoyed every aspect of this program and have learned so much inside and outside of the classroom. I believe deep down in my heart that the professors in the Counseling Program are compassionate about what they do. I am so thankful for the opportunity to have been in this program.
Alumni Spotlight—Nicole True

My name is Nicole True and I graduated with a Master’s Degree from the Professional Counseling Program in July 2008 and with an Ed. S. in Counseling in December 2009. Currently, I work as a middle school counselor in Cabot, Arkansas. This is my 15th year in education and at Cabot Schools. I started my career as a secondary English teacher at both the junior high and high school levels and spent five years in the classroom before graduating from Harding. While in the counseling program, I had the opportunity to intern as a mental health para-professional with Life Strategies Counseling Inc. in Little Rock as part of my field experience in addition to interning at Cabot High School. Professionally, I have served as a school counselor at Cabot Middle School North, Cabot High School, and Cabot Middle School South where I currently work as a 6th grade counselor. I am a member of our school district’s Crisis Response Team and have served in a variety of situations offering crisis support to students in our school district. In the spring of 2017, I trained with Livingworks to become a registered safeTALK Trainer and have held several suicide prevention training workshops. Also, in spring 2017, I graduated from the Lonoke County Leadership Training Program and now serve as a member of its steering committee. Currently, I am a member of Arkansas State Teachers Association (ASTA) and Arkansas School Counseling Association (ArSCA).

One question I am asked, often, is why I left teaching in order to become a school counselor. I truly believe that I was called to this profession and that my time in the classroom prepared me for the unique challenges and opportunities this career presents. I was the teacher that students would often seek, confide in, and ask for guidance. As someone who listens and is naturally empathetic and fascinated by people, I was drawn to the possibility of turning the gifts I have been blessed with into a fulfilling career. While researching the best programs for this type of training, I was led to Harding because of its proven reputation for academic excellence and for the opportunity to learn in a supportive environment consistent with my values.

I live in Cabot with my husband of 14 years, John, who is a professional engineer. We have been blessed with three children, Mason (8), Carson (6) and Avery (4) who attend Cabot Schools.

When I am not in the counseling center, I enjoy being a mom and taking my three children to their various activities. I also enjoy coffee, cooking, running, reading, watching sports, doing volunteer work, and the very rare spa day.
2017 Marriages & New Arrivals

Sawyer Ray O’Neal was born to Wyndham and Kayli O’Neal on October 10, 2017. He was 8lbs 6 oz and 21” long.


Congratulations, Nicole True
Outstanding Alumni 2017!
Spring 2018 Calendar

Counseling New Student Orientation ................................................................. January 4
Classes Begin .................................................................................................. January 8
MLK Day (no classes) ..................................................................................... January 15
Spring Break ................................................................................................. March 3 - March 11
Spring Sing .................................................................................................... April 12 - 14
Final Exams .................................................................................................. April 30 - May 3
Commencement ......................................................................................... May 5
Extended Summer Session Begins ............................................................... May 7

The Compassion Clinic

We have our clinical resident staffed clinic, The Compassion Clinic, open to see clients from our community! We have some appointment openings for the spring. We have a wonderful play therapy room for children. We also have rooms for assessment, individuals, couples, and groups counseling. Military clients and their families are welcome! The clinic is currently open on Tuesdays from 2 - 8 pm. Call 501-279-5926 to schedule an appointment.

Statement of Purpose: The Compassion Clinic seeks to provide not only a state of the art training clinic for Clinical Residents, but also an outreach mission to the communities we call home. In accordance with the values and mission of Harding University to offer the talents and skills God has blessed us with to the community as a ministry to help those that are hurting. To this end we seek to provide quality services to our clients and a quality education to our students.