

Group Play Therapy for Behavioral Problems in Students

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Abstract: *This literature review aims to map play therapy used in a group of students with behavioral problems. School-age children show behavioral problems that can cause families, schools, and communities to face some problems. Play therapy is one of the methods that use games to carry out therapy. There are some approaches used for play therapy, such as child-centered play therapy, Adlerian play therapy, cognitive-behavioral play therapy, and gestalt play therapy. Group play therapy is a play therapy that aims to help children in learning, participating, showing respect, being responsible, accepting self and others, expressing emotions, and improving behavior. Some studies show that there are several approaches to group play therapy to reduce behavioral problems.*

Keywords: group play therapy, behavioral problem, student

Introduction

Children in their development process have learning assignments that will be carried out in the learning process at school. However, some children have behavioral problems when in school in the form of lying, hyperactivity, and disruptive behavior (Robl, Jewell, & Kanotra, 2012). Some of them show symptoms of emotional problems or behavioral problems and indicate psychosomatic problems. Behavioral problems in students are usually inappropriate behaviors because their desires are not met or rejected by others. Students who are absent from school or avoid school are associated with poor mental health. In the development of a student, attending school can develop students' abilities in social life (Knollmann, Knoll, Reissner, Metzelaars, & Hebebrand, 2010).

At school-age, children show behavioral problems, and some of these problems do not get a diagnosis from family or teacher. While children with behavioral problems cause families, schools, and communities to face some problems and these children will face problems when they are teenagers or adults (Zare & Ahmadi, n.d.).

Children and adolescents with behavioral problems have negative feelings and engage in unwanted behavior with others. Students with behavioral problems will be rejected by the teacher and classmates; one of the problems of behavior in children is disruptive behavior. When students do disruptive behavior, the relationship between the teacher and students will be damaged or stretched (Myers & Pianta, 2008). When children with destructive behavior are not treated well, the teen or adult child can experience antisocial behavior, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, or violence (Barkley & Cox, 2007; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003).

Both children and adolescents need appropriate therapy to support their emotional and social development. In the US, the use of psychotherapy for children or adults has been widely used (Blanco, Ray,

& Holliman, 2012; Olfson, Druss, & Marcus, 2015). Children have limitations in the ability to express feelings or thoughts verbally.

One of the therapeutic techniques used for children is play therapy because the technique used by researchers is effective for children in various problems. Play therapy is not only effective as behavioral therapy for children aged 4-10 years with the problem of difficulty controlling emotions, but it is also effective for individual therapy in 12-year-old girls diagnosed with conductive and emotional disorders (Dutta & Mehta, 2006). Therefore play therapy allows children to express both verbally and non-verbally and to show their expressions. So the purpose of this article is to map play therapy used in groups for students with behavioral problems.

Play Therapy

Play therapy is one of the therapy methods that uses games to carry out therapy. Most of them use child-centered play therapy (Blanco & Ray, 2011). However, there is another approach namely cognitive play therapy for children who do not want to go to school (Pearson, 2008). Play therapy is used to carry out therapy in children with emotional or behavioral problems because it is very responsive to the uniqueness and developmental needs of children. Children use play materials in play therapy as a symbol of expressing thoughts and feelings (Connor, 2001). Playing a bridge, for instance, children can gain understanding and experiences; thus, children can understand insight, problem-solving, learning, mastery, and coping.

Landreth said that when playing, children can express their feelings even more powerful than the actual situation (Landreth, 2002). This happens because when playing, children feel more confident and have the opportunity to control their lives. By playing, children can also release negative emotions and bring out self-esteem which is important in positive self-development.

Child-Centered Play Therapy

Child-centered play therapy is the development of client-centered therapy. Child-centered play therapy deals with children’s emotions and behaviors by acknowledging their ages and culture to be well-adjusted with self-actualization (Cochran et al., 2011). During the therapy, children could build unconditional positive regards, empathy, and genuineness (Cochran, Cochran, Nordling, Mcadam, & Miller, 2010).

Several studies have shown that child-centered play therapy can reduce disruptive behavior in students (Cochran & Cochran, 2017), slightly change the behavior of students with ADHD (Robinson, 2015), and be able to change academic intervention in students (Blanco, Muro, Holliman, Stickley, & Carter, 2015).

Gestalt Play Therapy

Gestalt play therapy is a form of therapy which uses the principles of Gestalt and allows students to express their problems symbolically in the form of verbal or non-verbal. The purpose of gestalt play therapy is to increase the awareness and consolidation function of the healthy person in the individual itself. The concepts used in gestalt play therapy are an organism, totalism, vital balance, awareness here and now, and self-regulation (Van Zijl & Sloboda, 2010).

Several studies have shown that gestalt play therapy is effective in reducing dysthymic disorder in female 4th-grade elementary school students (Farahzadi, 2013). Also, board games become one of the methods of assessment in gestalt play therapy (Botha & Dunn, 2004)

Cognitive-behavioral Play Therapy

Cognitive-behavioral play therapy is a development of cognitive-behavioral therapy, which in its use is difficult to apply to children or students. Therefore the use of stuffed animals, puppets, and play can be used in cognitive models, such as boasting positive self-statements and countering maladaptive beliefs (Janatian, Nouri, Shafti, Molavi, & Samavatyan, 2009). When playing, children can change cognitive views by trying different views in one situation.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy can develop a sense of control and trust in children with Down Syndrome (Kahveci, n.d.). In addition to cognitive behavioral therapy, it can also reduce symptoms in students with the oppositional defiant disorder (Vatanbaaf, Shahsavari, Azizi, & Hosseini, 2015). Ghodousi et al. conducted experiments on 40 street children where cognitive-behavioral play therapy was able to reduce external behaviors such as aggressive behavior and unlawful attitude (Ghodousi, Sajedi, Mirzaie, & Rezasoltani, 2017). Besides, cognitive-behavioral play therapy is also able to overcome the problem of external behavior in children (Akbari & Rahmati, 2015).

Adlerian Play Therapy

Adlerian play therapy is a development of Adlerian therapy which is suitable for use in children who need to improve power and control, have poor self-control, have experienced a traumatic event, have poor cooperation skills, and/or weak social skills. The process used in Adlerian play therapy gives children both direct and indirect opportunities to practice changing attitudes, behaviors through language and metaphor perception (Kottman, n.d.).

Research using Adlerian play therapy shows a decrease in students' disruptive behavior (Meany-Walen, Bratton, & Kottman, 2014), changing in the behavior of children with externalizing behavior in school (Meany-Walen, Kottman, Bullis, & Dillman Taylor, 2015), as well as changing externalizing behavior and poor social skills in students (Meany-Walen & Teeling, 2016).

ANALYSIS

Group Play Therapy

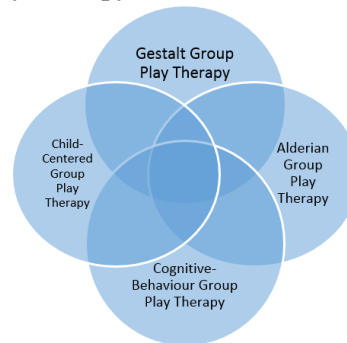


Figure 1. Group play therapy

Group play therapy is a play therapy that aims to help children in learning, participating, showing respect, being responsible, accepting self and others, expressing emotions, and improving behavior. Jarareh, Mohammadi, Nader, and Moosavian (2016) stated that group play therapy could increase creativity and reduce aggression in preschool children.

Research conducted by Ariapooran and Eskandari shows that group play therapy can reduce the symptoms of ADHD, oppositional defiant, and behavior disorder in ADHD children (Ariapooran & Eskandari, 2016). Besides, male students with behavior problems are also given interventions with group play therapy showing a reduction in internalizing behavioral problems (Bagheri, Shehni, Alipour, & Zarghar, 2017).

Group play therapy with a child-centered approach also impacts on improving the social-emotional well-being of children. Forty-three participants from kindergarten students were identified as experiencing lacking social-emotional experienced an increase in social-emotional after being given client-centered group play therapy (Cheng & Ray, 2016). Also, Shoaakazemi, Javid, Tazekand, Rad, and Gholami said that group play therapy with a child-centered approach was also able to reduce separation anxiety disorder.

This study involved 20 students who experienced separation anxiety disorder (Shoaakazemi, Javid, Tazekand, Rad, & Gholami, 2012). Problematic behaviors and symptoms of anxiety can also be intervened by using client-centered group play therapy (Swan, Kaff, & Haas, 2019).

Another approach that uses group play therapy is Adlerian group play therapy. Where Jamaluddin, Johari, Amat, and Lee researched 66 neglected children. The results of the study mentioned that Adlerian group play therapy is effective in increasing holistic wellness in neglected children (Jamaludin, Johari, Amat, & Lee, 2018). Also, children with off-task behavior can be intervened by using Adlerian group play therapy (Meany-Walen, Bullis, Kottman, & Dillman Taylor, 2015).

Cognitive-behavioral group play therapy is used to reduce oppositional defiant disorder in elementary school students. A total of 20 students followed the experimental process for ten therapy sessions. The results of this experiment are cognitive-behavioral group play therapy able to reduce oppositional defiant disorder signs in students (Vatanbaaf et al., 2015).

Gestalt group play therapy can also reduce behavioral problems in students. Kafaki, Akerdi, and Rezaei conducted experiments with students who experienced behavioral problems. Behavioral problems suffered by students decreased after 14 therapy sessions (Kafaki, Akerdi, & Rezaei, 2014).

Conclusion

Based on previous studies on group play therapy for students who have behavioral problems, it was found that there are several approaches to group play therapy. The group play therapy approaches are child-centered group play therapy, Adlerian group play therapy, cognitive-behavioral group play therapy, and gestalt group play therapy.

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