



# AUSTRALASIA PACIFIC PLAY THERAPY ASSOCIATION

## Clinical Competencies and Practice Standards for Play Therapy

The effective integration of knowledge and skills acquisition in Play Therapy practice is paramount to child clients, families, the community and the profession. Play Therapy practice requires commitment to the development of both personal qualities and professional abilities. The [personal qualities](#) support and guide practitioner self-reflection.

The following table differentiates Clinical Competencies and Practice Standards for Play Therapy. Clinical Competencies are measurable behaviours used to assess Play Therapy practice, education and to support curriculum development and accreditation. The Practice Standards guides and benchmarks service delivery of Play Therapy within the clinical environment. It is the responsibility of each member to adhere to the practice standard.

Clinical Competencies	Practice Standards
<b>Theoretical knowledge informing Play Therapy</b>	
<u>Child development theory</u>	
Examine the key theories of child development and apply to child	Applies child development theory to clinical Play Therapy practice.

observation.	
<u>Child play development</u>	
<p>Analyse child play development in the context of the conceptual understandings of play and child development.</p> <p>Identify theories of typical and atypical play development.</p> <p>Examine a number of assessments tools that may be used to evaluate the child's play.</p> <p>Able to administer assessments reliably and validly.</p>	<p>Assesses the child's play development to inform Play Therapy practice.</p> <p>Selects the most appropriate assessment tools for a range of client groups.</p>
<u>The therapeutic powers of play</u>	
<p>Appraise the therapeutic powers of play and its ability to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate communication</li> <li>• Foster emotional wellness</li> <li>• Enhance social relationships</li> <li>• Increase personal strengths</li> </ul>	<p>Communicates the theoretical underpinnings of the therapeutic power of play to parents, paraprofessionals, professionals and other service providers.</p> <p>Integrates therapeutic play principles into clinical practice.</p> <p>Incorporates play as a therapeutic metaphor within Play Therapy interventions.</p>
<u>Developmental psychopathology</u>	
<p>Describe developmental psychopathology.</p> <p>Identify the clinical needs of specific groups of children affected by disrupted development.</p> <p>Recognise the emergence of psychopathology within human development.</p>	<p>Remains current with developmental psychopathology literature and practice.</p> <p>Assesses clients according to developmental psychopathology.</p> <p>Provides appropriate Play Therapy intervention based on developmental psychopathology needs.</p>

	Makes recommendations to appropriate service providers based on assessment.
<u>Broad theoretical knowledge</u>	
Review a broad range of theories relevant to Play Therapy including but not limited to attachment, mental health, social and emotional wellbeing, disability and trauma.	<p>Selects and integrates appropriate theoretical knowledge and therapeutic frameworks to inform Play Therapy practice.</p> <p>Monitors therapeutic changes within each intervention.</p> <p>Reflects on the Play Therapy interventions based on the chosen theoretical framework.</p>
<u>Play Therapy theory</u>	
<p>Critique a range of theories informing Play Therapy practice; for example, humanistic, psychodynamic, systems theories, attachment theory, cognitive theories, behavioural theories, and developmental psychology.</p> <p>Examine various models that review the therapeutic change process in a Play Therapy intervention.</p>	Based on assessment the play therapist combines and integrates appropriate Play Therapy theories and techniques within an individualised clinical Play Therapy intervention.
<u>Bio-ecological systems theory and social constructionist theories of society</u>	
<p>Distinguish how the wider systems of family, community, culture, and government policy impact on children, young people and families.</p> <p>Integrate systems thinking and analysis into therapeutic practice.</p>	<p>Applies multiple systems theories to Play Therapy practice where appropriate.</p> <p>Integrates systems theory into Play Therapy practice, including assessment, therapeutic intervention, recommendations and multi-directional feedback.</p> <p>Incorporates systems theory to engage the child's family in Play Therapy practice, particularly when working with avoidant or resistant families.</p> <p>Informs organisational policy to incorporate systemic Play Therapy practice.</p>

<u>Integrative models of Play Therapy practice</u>	
Identify and integrate appropriate models of Play Therapy within a cohesive theoretical framework; including directive, non-directive and developmental approaches.	Combines and integrates Play Therapy models of practice, within a theoretical framework, for individualised clinical Play Therapy interventions.
<b>Clinical Play Therapy Practice and Therapeutic skills</b>	
<u>Play Therapy assessment</u>	
Assess the physical, behavioural, emotional, psychological and social needs of clients and formulate appropriate therapeutic objectives.	<p>Undertakes thorough assessment of the child, from multiple perspectives, within the family and community contexts.</p> <p>Utilises a range of play assessments to inform practice.</p> <p>Refers on to other professionals for further assessment when required.</p>
<u>Play Therapy treatment plan and contract</u>	
Formulate clear, meaningful and appropriate therapeutic contracts, including therapeutic goals, structure and boundaries.	<p>Contracts for a Play Therapy intervention, including appointment scheduling and approximate number of sessions required.</p> <p>Identifies goals for Play Therapy in conjunction with child and their family / carer.</p> <p>Explains Play Therapy structure and boundaries in age appropriate language for child and their family / carer.</p> <p>Informs family, paraprofessionals and professionals of ways to assist the therapeutic process.</p>

<u>Therapeutic endings</u>	
Provide planned and coherent opportunities to enable work with clients to end in a therapeutic manner.	Prepares the child and their family for therapeutic ending of the Play Therapy intervention.
<u>Therapeutic relationship</u>	
Demonstrate effective engagement and facilitation of the therapeutic relationship with clients.	Engages the client in a safe and secure, playful and therapeutic relationship  Maintains clear professional, personal and therapeutic boundaries.
<u>Communication skills</u>	
<p>Communicate effectively, through non-verbal and verbal expression, with clients and significant others.</p> <p>Use a range of therapeutic person-centred skills, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• active listening</li> <li>• empathic responding</li> <li>• questioning</li> <li>• paraphrasing</li> <li>• tracking</li> <li>• reflection</li> <li>• and summarising</li> </ul>	<p>Communicates effectively and integrates person-centred skills.</p> <p>Identifies emotional affect of client and reflects accordingly.</p> <p>Maintains a non-judgemental, playful and curious attitude towards the client.</p>
<u>Inter-personal communication</u>	
Demonstrate and facilitate a range of verbal, non-verbal and symbolic communication using a variety of play and therapeutic resources with children, young people and families.	<p>Provides therapeutic skills to support and foster the therapeutic relationship.</p> <p>Closely observes and attends to verbal, non-verbal and symbolic communication.</p> <p>Understands and engages in play in the context of the therapeutic process.</p>
<u>Inter-professional relationships</u>	

<p>Collaborate and communicate with other professionals.</p> <p>Work effectively as part of a systemic team around the child, young person and family.</p>	<p>Maintains professional systemic practice.</p> <p>Acknowledges limitations of service delivery and seeks external support and guidance to maintain healthy working relationships.</p>
<p><u>Therapeutic alliance</u></p>	
<p>Describe the benefit of forming a therapeutic alliance.</p> <p>Articulate and translate Play Therapy practice and process with the child's parent / carer or significant other, when appropriate.</p>	<p>Forms therapeutic alliances and uses appropriate therapeutic boundaries for safe clinical practice.</p>
<p><u>Reflective Practice</u></p>	
<p>Demonstrate ability to be self-reflective on practice.</p> <p>Completes required hours of supervision to reflect on professional practice.</p> <p>Promote Play Therapy practice through reflecting upon the <a href="#">Personal Qualities</a> of a Play Therapy practitioner</p> <p>Integrate personal therapy to enhance reflective practice.</p>	<p>Uses self-reflection within clinical practice and supervision.</p> <p>Initiates to undertake training in areas identified as a result of reflecting on practice.</p> <p>Identifies with and reflects on the APPTA Personal Qualities of a Play Therapist.</p> <p>Accesses personal therapy when required.</p>
<p><u>Clinical Supervision</u></p>	
<p>Use clinical supervision to promote and ensure ethical Play Therapy practice.</p> <p>Differentiate clinical and managerial supervision.</p> <p>Review and consider own strengths and limitations of play therapy practice within a supervision relationship.</p> <p>Comply with APPTA's recommended</p>	<p>Accesses clinical supervision by an approved supervisor.</p> <p>Critically appraises strengths and weaknesses in Play Therapy practice.</p> <p>Continuously maintains a log of supervision</p>

guidelines for clinical supervision.  Supervisors to refer to additional documentation (under review).	undertaken (hours and type).  Refers to policy and supervision requirements (under review).
<u>Continuing Professional Development</u>	
Maintain Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in accordance with APPTA requirements.	Continuously maintains a log of professional development undertaken.  Records Play Therapy specific or associated categories of professional development.
<u>Autonomous practice</u>	
Demonstrate ability to work independently, set priorities, plan and manage own workload and organisational tasks efficiently.	Works independently and manages and prioritises clinical workload.
<b>Professional Practice and Conduct</b>	
<u>Rights of the child</u>	
Demonstrate knowledge about children's rights as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, 1989)	Actively advocates for the Rights of the Child when breaches are observed  <a href="http://www.unicef.org.au/Discover/What-we-do/Convention-on-the-Rights-of-the-Child/Child-Rights.aspx">http://www.unicef.org.au/Discover/What-we-do/Convention-on-the-Rights-of-the-Child/Child-Rights.aspx</a>
<u>Legislation and policy in context</u>	
Ability to locate and translate current legislation and policy relating to the practice of Play Therapy in the context of government informed departments of health and education (as well as state and territory policies specific your locality within Australia).	Practices Play Therapy within the legal parameters within the state, territory or country where clinical practice takes place.  Reports suspected child abuse or neglect to relevant authority and adheres to mandatory

Define when and how to proceed in mandatory reporting based on current legislation.	reporting legislation related to your state or territory or country.
<u>Anti-discriminatory practice theory</u>	
Understand principles of anti-discriminatory practice in relation to children, young people and their families within the context of a diverse society.	Integrates anti-discrimination principles within clinical practice.
<u>Culturally appropriate practice</u>	
<p>Work in a culturally sensitive and inclusive way with a diverse range of children, young people and families, considering the individual's identity and cultural needs.</p> <p>Apply principles of cultural competence and inclusive practice to location of service.</p>	<p>Integrates and promotes cultural competence within own practice and as appropriate to community where the practice takes place.</p> <p>Seeks and undertakes additional training in relation to cultural populations within community where practice takes place.</p> <p>Seeks supervision or forward referral for cross cultural practice when knowledge deficit identified.</p>
<u>Record-keeping and writing skills</u>	
<p>Accurately records Play Therapy interventions and work within the requirements of Data Protection legislation.</p> <p>Communicate effectively in writing through clinical records, written assessments and reports of therapeutic progress.</p>	<p>Maintains a professional standard of record keeping.</p> <p>All records and written communications are documented in a respectful and considered manner.</p>
<u>Ethics and values in practice</u>	
Integrate ethical principles into Play Therapy practice to ensure protection of children, young people, families and the public (under review).	Practices within an ethical framework and scope of Play Therapy practice.

<u>Confidentiality and privacy</u>	
<p>Maintain the confidentiality and privacy required by clients and significant others.</p> <p>Meet both legal and ethical standards, including Data Protection requirements - Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988.</p> <p>Recognise the limitations of confidentiality in relation to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.</p>	<p>Continuously maintains confidentiality and privacy.</p> <p>Maintains up to date knowledge of Australian Child Protection Legislation for the State or Territory relevant to your work.</p>
<u>Play Therapy Research</u>	
<p>Identify and critically evaluate current research and integrate into Play Therapy practice.</p> <p>Demonstrate that Play Therapy practice is informed by contemporary evidence based research.</p> <p>Demonstrate an understanding of research methods and the application of research methods within clinical contexts.</p>	<p>Accesses current literature and research in the field of Play Therapy and applies to practice.</p> <p>Maintains regular updates on evidence assessments and techniques in Play Therapy.</p> <p>Attends relevant training and conferences for the updating of knowledge to inform practice.</p> <p>Practitioner undertaking research in practice seek information NH&amp;MRC ethical guidelines.</p>
<u>Play Therapy environment</u>	
<p>Demonstrates knowledge for developing and maintaining a safe Play Therapy environment, in line with Health and Safety Legislation (Workplace Health and Safety Act 2011).</p>	<p>Applies knowledge for developing and maintaining a safe Play Therapy room or space.</p>

<p>Selects and maintains play materials, performs risk assessment of the environment and takes appropriate steps to ensure safety.</p> <p>Ensures privacy during sessions, and preserves confidentiality in use and storage of therapeutic materials produced in sessions.</p>	<p>Chooses toys and expressive materials based upon child development theories and Play Therapy theories.</p> <p>Stores the child client's artefacts, (e.g. all art and craft work and photographic images), that are produced within the Play Therapy sessions in a confidential and safe manner.</p>
<p><u>Diverse settings</u></p>	
<p>Considers the complexity of integrating Play Therapy practice within diverse contexts.</p> <p>Demonstrates understanding of functions and priorities in diverse settings.</p>	<p>Provides an appropriate Play Therapy service when working in environments which at times have complex or competing agendas.</p> <p>Provides an appropriate Play Therapy service based on the work setting and / or across multiple locations.</p>

# Personal Qualities

The following personal qualities enhance professional personal reflection and facilitation of providing therapeutic presence (adapted from BAPT).

**Empathy:** To empathise with the emotional and psychological expressions, experiences and needs of clients and significant others.

**Sincerity:** Commitment to being sincere and genuine to self and others.

**Honesty:** To act truthfully and with integrity towards self and others.

**Respect:** To acknowledge and show acceptance towards other people's understanding, experiences and abilities.

**Ethical:** To be committed to ethical practice and able to comply with the ethical code and values defined by the Australasia Pacific Play Therapy Association.

**Knowledgeable:** To be able to apply knowledge, evidence and experience critically.

**Self-awareness:** To assess, review and consider own competencies, strengths and weaknesses as a Play Therapist.

**Self-responsibility:** To operate and practise efficiently within own level of competencies.

**Congruence:** To be authentic and genuine in conduct with clients and significant others.

**Compassion:** To be emotionally warm, caring and concerned towards others.

**Critical Reflection:** To critically reflect upon the emotional, social and psychological world of clients, significant others and the Self and to integrate reflection into practice.

**Commitment to professional development:** To continue professional development as a play therapist in a responsible and effective manner.

**Commitment to personal development:** To be reflexive, to integrate personal insights into future practice, to continue personal development in a responsible and effective manner.