

CLINICAL EDITOR COMMENT

This article explains why the use of stories and books in the playroom is consistent with play therapy and describes theoretical ideas about their use.

By Dale Elizabeth Pehrsson EdD, LCPC, RPT-S

Benefits of Utilizing Bibliotherapy within Play Therapy

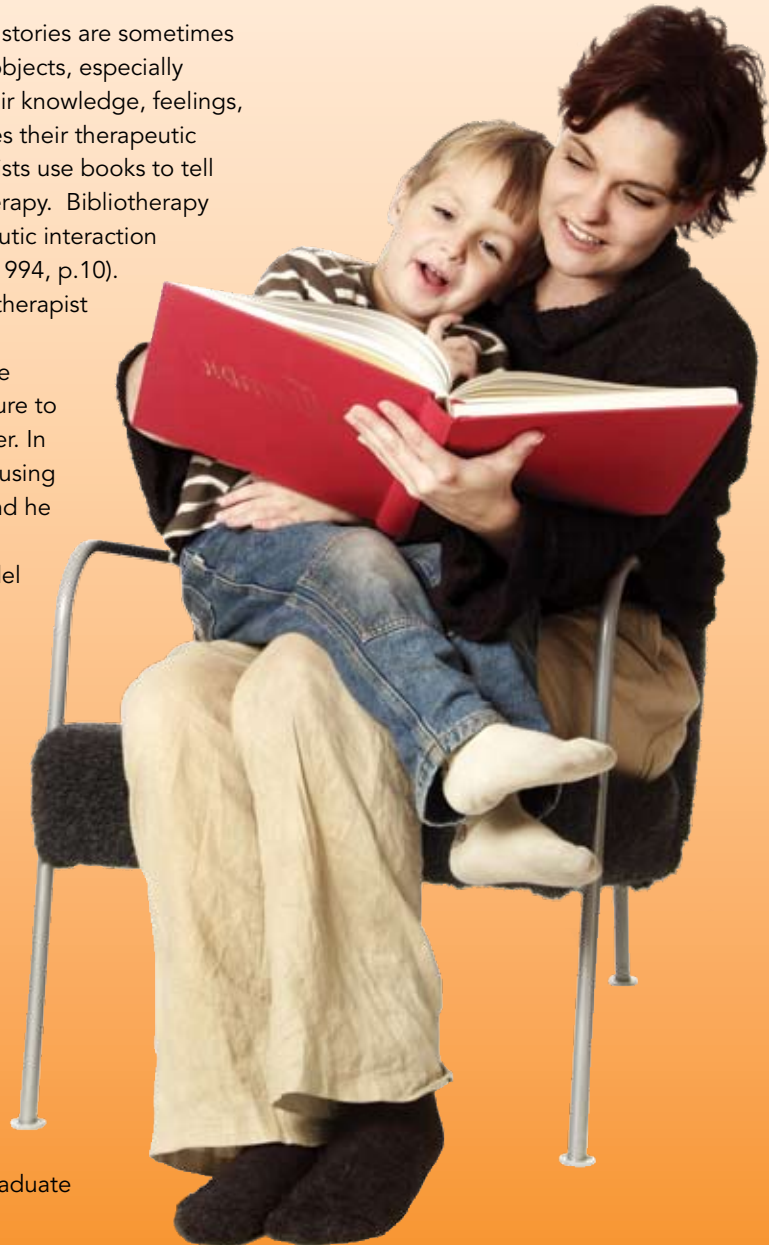
Children have always included storytelling in their play. Their stories are sometimes expressed verbally but more often through interactions with objects, especially toys. Children use their stories as metaphors to represent their knowledge, feelings, concerns, fears, etc. A well-prepared play therapist recognizes their therapeutic value and knows how to read such stories. When play therapists use books to tell and read stories to children, the process is known as bibliotherapy. Bibliotherapy is defined as the use of "...literature to bring about a therapeutic interaction between a participant and facilitator" (Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 1994, p.10). Bibliotherapy interventions tend to fall into three categories; therapist initiated, interactive and client initiated.

The use of books for therapeutic value may be traced to the ancient Greeks. Throughout the ages adults have used literature to guide their children's thinking and to strengthen their character. In a 1916 issue of *Atlantic Monthly*, Samuel Crothers suggested using books for patients to help them understand their problems and he called his technique "bibliotherapy" (Crothers, 1916, p. 291).

Carolyn Shrodes (1950) developed the first theoretical model from which current bibliotherapy expansions and applications have been derived. She suggested that bibliotherapy is effective because readers can identify with characters; and clients can work through a problem along with a character, ultimately achieving insight about their own situations (Shrodes, 1955, p. 24).

Bibliotherapy divides into two practice domains. Developmental bibliotherapy deals with transitions and normal life issues and is used primarily by educators. Therapeutic bibliotherapy involves the deliberate and planned intervention, using books in a psychiatric or mental health paradigm (Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 1994).

Some play therapists contend that using books is not congruent with principles and practices of play therapy, notably client-centered play therapy. In my earlier years as a professor, I agreed and actually discouraged students from utilizing bibliotherapy during play therapy. I even barred books from the university training playroom. Then Lillian, a graduate



student, approached me, waving a book and exclaiming, "I found this fabulous book, it's called 'No David!' (Shannon, 1998). It's perfect for my little guy (who coincidentally was also named David)." I suggested she try it while I observe. I watched David's smiles as Lillian read the book and I then watched as David retold the story with toys. I reconsidered my previous stance, a stance I now consider to have been rigid. Lillian and David demonstrated the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in play therapy.

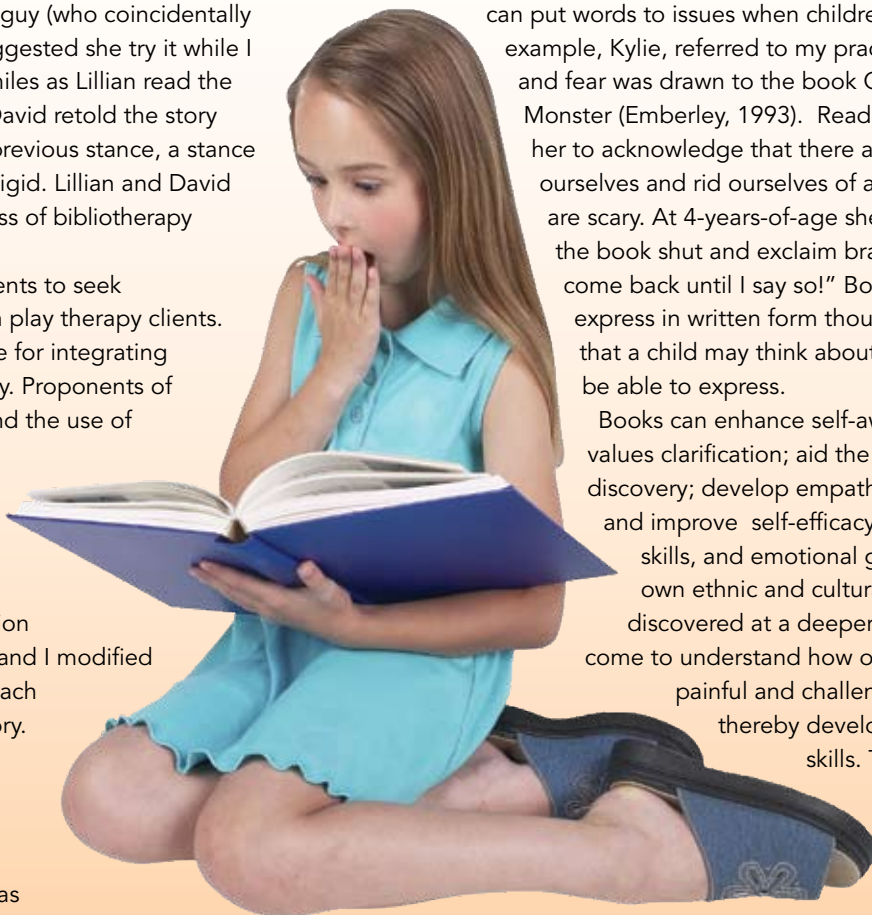
I began to encourage students to seek appropriate books to use with play therapy clients. I sought a theoretical rationale for integrating bibliotherapy and play therapy. Proponents of Alfred Adler's work recommend the use of bibliotherapy, applied within each of his four therapy stages: establishing relationship, exploring lifestyle, promoting insight, and reeducation or reorientation (Jackson, 2001). My students and I modified Axline's client-centered approach to include more Adlerian theory. Kottman (2002) recommends bibliotherapy as an added intervention during Adlerian play therapy.

Does bibliotherapy qualify as play therapy? Bibliotherapy definitions and advantages fall into alignment with the definition and benefits of play therapy put forth by the Association of Play Therapy (2006) in that "Play therapy refers to a larger number of treatment methods, applying the therapeutic benefits of play." Whether the therapist or the child chooses it, the book is used as a springboard to launch children into play representing their issues and concerns. Play therapy builds on the natural way that children learn about themselves and their relationship to the world around them. In our culture, school-age children listen to and read stories in printed form. Reading is woven into the context of who they are and how they learn. Books and stories provide the same safe psychological distance that is provided by a sandbox or puppets. Further, advantages and outcomes of play therapy, including problem solving, creativity, expression and mastery, align with benefits of bibliotherapy. Bibliotherapy is particularly effective in environments with shorter play therapy sessions, such as schools.

Since Lillian and David demonstrated the effectiveness of bibliotherapy and I opened my mind to its value, I have come to recognize additional benefits of bibliotherapy in play therapy.

Children can experience catharsis and emotional release - often expressed in their play after a story. A wisely selected book can put words to issues when children cannot. For example, Kylie, referred to my practice for anxiety and fear was drawn to the book *Go Away Big Green Monster* (Emberley, 1993). Reading this story allowed her to acknowledge that there are ways to calm ourselves and rid ourselves of anxiety when things are scary. At 4-years-of-age she was able to slam the book shut and exclaim bravely..."And don't come back until I say so!" Books and stories can express in written form thoughts and emotions that a child may think about and feel but not yet be able to express.

Books can enhance self-awareness, promote values clarification; aid the process of self-discovery; develop empathic understanding; and improve self-efficacy, communications skills, and emotional growth. One's own ethnic and cultural identity can be discovered at a deeper level. Children can come to understand how others cope with painful and challenging situations and thereby develop their own coping skills. Through the process of bibliotherapy, youngsters become motivated to



Bibliotherapy is defined as the use of "...literature to bring about a therapeutic interaction between a participant and facilitator" (Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 1994, p.10)

behave in new and healthier ways. The nature of reading to a child establishes a trustful and warm bond that helps even the most resistant child feel at ease. It also provides a temporary escape from pressing problems. Indirectly and cautiously literature offers advice and recommendations for decision-making and helps children communicate more openly. Books provide a distance, a kind of safety net for emotional intensity, a buffer that children often need (Pehrsson & McMillen, 2005).

Many resources are available for helping therapists select literature. The APT website has resource links that provide current information. Library children's sections have librarians who are well informed regarding themes, reading levels and interest. Online searches provide resources regarding multicultural and diversity websites. Many are linked to libraries and universities. Some books remain timeless and accessible and do not go out of print quickly.

There is no need for a large collection; a few carefully selected books should be sufficient. Choices will vary depending on populations being served. Sometimes the therapist finds the perfect book; in some cases the child know the best one. Book should be placed within a child's reach and displayed with covers showing so the child can select one.

David, a 4.5 year old European American male, was discussed



earlier. He had been referred because of impulsive classroom behaviors and anger management difficulties. His family was in the midst of changes and disruptions. Chemical abuse and an absentee father were just two of the issues that seemed to affect David. David's grandmother was trying to help, but she was at her wit's end. Several times David entered the playroom with tears and anger; he would grab toys and books and throw them on the floor. Such behaviors appeared to be David's primary coping strategies. His graduate student therapist, Lillian met little success in her attempts to set limits but. It was then, almost as a last resort, that I agreed to Lillian use of "No David."

When David entered the playroom Lillian explained, "We are going to do something different today. I found a book just for you. I think you'll like it." David was intrigued and settled into a reading and listening posture. Lillian and David read the book together, Lillian reading, David attending, turning pages, and talking

"Books can enhance self clarification; aid the process empathetic understanding; communications skills, and

IN A PERFECT WORLD

you wouldn't have to worry
about lawsuits...

Professional Liability Insurance for Counseling Professionals

But in the real world, you are wise to join over 1,000,000 healthcare and counseling professionals who depend on the professional liability insurance offered through Healthcare Providers Service Organization (HPSO) for their peace of mind.

So make the wise choice.
Apply today for **up to \$1,000,000 each claim, up to \$3,000,000 aggregate professional liability coverage!** Employed rates as low as \$120 a year. Students pay only \$29 a year!

Plus, you get these additional coverages, up to the applicable limits of liability—at no extra cost!

- ✓ License Protection
- ✓ Deposition Representation
- ✓ Personal Liability Protection
- ✓ Defendant Expense Benefit for Lost Wages
- ✓ Assault Coverage*
- ✓ Plus more!

APPLY NOW!

Go to www.hpso.com/apt6
For easy, quick and secure on-line application.

Healthcare Providers Service Organization*

Endorsed By:

Association for
 Play Therapy, Inc.

CON-APT606

This program is underwritten by American Casualty Company of Reading, PA, a CNA company and is offered through the Healthcare Providers Service Organization Risk Purchasing Group. CNA is in the process of seeking necessary regulatory approvals, which will enable them to offer the coverages reflected in this ad at this premium rate. If your state has approved the filing by the time your application is processed, your policy will be issued with these coverages and rates. If the filing has not been approved in your state by the time your application is processed then the current coverages and rates will be issued. Coverages, rates and limits may differ in some states. This material is for illustrative purposes only and is not a contract. It is intended to provide a general overview of the products and services offered. Only the policy can provide the actual terms, coverages, amounts, conditions and exclusions. CNA is a service mark and trade name registered with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

Healthcare Providers Service Organization is a division of Affinity Insurance Services, Inc.; in NY and NH, AIS Affinity Insurance Agency; in MN and OK, AIS Affinity Insurance Agency, Inc.; and in CA, AIS Affinity Insurance Agency, Inc. dba Aon Direct Insurance Administrators License #0795465. *Assault coverage not available in Texas.

© 2006 Affinity Insurance Services

Call 1-800-982-9491 for more information.



-awareness, promote values of self-discovery; develop and improve self efficacy, emotional growth.

about the pictures and the story. Lillian did not attempt to analyze or process the meanings. They just read together until Lillian closed the back cover. David took the book and turned it to the front cover and then gently placed it on table. Then David pretended to run water into a toy bathtub. He turned the faucets to "off" position and placed the tub back in the bathroom, placing a baby figure in it. Next David rearranged furniture, working hard to set the dollhouse in order. Fifteen minutes into this process, David looked up and said, "I don't listen too, just like David in the book". Lillian reflected, "Sometimes you act just like the other David". David responded, "I can be good too." Lillian countered, "You know just what to do to be good. You can choose." David pointed to the dollhouse and proclaimed, "Just like now!" Eight of us, seven students and I, standing behind the observation window, looked at one another, shook our heads and smiled. I was amazed by both the power of the intervention and David's insight. Clearly, he understood that he was making choices and choices were his to make.

Bibliotherapy, like play therapy, can be applied in a variety of ways depending on such factors as a child's interests, developmental levels, abilities, and issues. When a therapist reads to a child a trusting bond, a sharing of interests, and a relationship is established especially when they choose together

ArtHouse™

takes kids where their dreams are

Open-ended yet evocative: ArtHouse combines play and art therapy in one versatile toy building.

Engaging for both girls and boys, preschool-age through school-age.

"ArtHouse is the ultimate play therapy dollhouse!" — Gary Yorke, Ph.D. play therapist & owner of childtherapytoys.com

Display children's art inside tough transparent walls.

Wooden roof lifts away for easy play & discussion. Natural finish available.

Favorite places:



Fantasy places:



Playful places:



ACCESSORY DOLLS AND DÉCOR

Doll families: choose white, black, Latino, or Asian \$18

Career dolls: 12 for \$24

Action figures: five little firefighters (Storyboard Toys exclusive!) \$25

Ready-made decorations for ArtHouse: horse barn, viking house, or Japanese home \$18

Note: all ArtHouses come with ready-made cottage & firehouse décor included FREE!





For fastest service call 866-668-8697 or visit www.storyboardtoys.com

Sand Trays Anger & Management Tools

Books, 25 colors of sand, videos, doll house dolls & furniture, games, posters, lots of anger management tools, sound machines, puppets, sand tray carts & more books.

UNIQUITY
P.O. Box 10
Galt, CA 95632-0010
(800)521-7771 (209)745-2111
FAX (209)745-4430
www.uniquitypsych.com
uniquity@uniquitypsych.com

(Gardner, 1992). When used in play therapy that sharing and expression of the story may be more active than verbal and therefore very appropriate developmentally.

I now see bibliotherapy and play therapy as a perfect companion set. The emphasis in bibliotherapy is on reception while the emphasis in play therapy is on expression. Bibliotherapy provides an avenue for receptive learning about and empathizing with problems and feelings of others. Play therapy allows children to express similar feelings that apply to their own problems. I have now observed many children telling their own stories and also retelling a story read to them. How best do children tell their stories? Through play!

References

1. Association for Play Therapy. (2006). Play therapy makes a difference. Retrieved April 7, 2006, from www.a4pt.org/ps.playtherapy.cfm?ID=1158.
2. Brown, L. K., & Brown, M. (1988). *Dinosaurs divorce: A guide for changing families*. New York, NY: Little, Brown & Company.
3. Buscaglia, L. (1982). *The fall of Freddie the leaf*. Thorofare, NJ: Slack Inc.
4. Crothers, S. M. (1916). A Literary Clinic, *Atlantic Monthly*, 118, 291-301.
5. Emberley, E. (1993). *Go Away Big Green Monster*. New York, NY: LB Kids.
6. Hynes, A. M., & Hynes-Berry, M. (1994). *Biblio/Poetry therapy, the interactive process: A handbook*. St. Cloud, MN: North Star Press of St. Cloud Inc.
7. Gardner, R. A. (1992). *The psychotherapeutic techniques of Richard A. Gardner*. Cresskill, New Jersey: Creative Therapeutics.
8. Gray, L. M. (1995). *My mama had a dancing heart*. New York, NY: Orchard Books.
9. Jackson, S. A. (2001). Using bibliotherapy with clients. *The Journal of Individual Psychotherapy*, 57(4), 289-297.
10. Joose, B. M. (1991). *Mama, do you love me?* San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books.
11. Kaldhol, M. (1987). *Goodbye Rune*. La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller Publishers.
12. Kottman, T. (2002). *Partners in play: An Adlerian approach to play therapy*. (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
13. Pehrsson, D. E., & McMillen, P. (2005). Bibliotherapy evaluation tool: Grounding counseling students in the therapeutic use of literature. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 32, 1.
14. Shannon, D. (1998). *No David*. New York, NY: The Blue Sky Press.
15. Shrodes, C. (1950). *Bibliotherapy: A theoretical and clinical-experimental study* (Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1950). *Dissertation Abstracts Online*.
16. Shrodes, C. (1955). Bibliotherapy, *The Reading Teacher*, 9, 24-30.
17. Wyeth, S. D. (1995). *Always my dad*. New York, NY: Random House.

Oak Hill Specialties

SERVING APT SINCE 1995

See all of our products at www.sandtrays.com
(800) 615-4155

(Visa, MasterCard, purchase orders & personal checks accepted)