



Play Therapy with Sexually Abused Children: A Synergistic Clinical-Developmental Approach

Robert Ciottone, John Madonna

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Here is a disguised but tragically accurate account of a 7-year-old boy who was repeatedly victimized by two uncles who penetrated him, required him under threat of violence to act upon them, and forced him to have sexual contact with his sister for their entertainment. Before his ongoing abuse was discovered, the child made several serious suicide attempts. Verbatim accounts of the child's therapy are used to illustrate a new treatment approach for abused children, Synergistic Play Therapy, which follows the work of Haim Ginott and Heinz Werner. Much that is written about play therapy focuses on theoretical notions or intuitive, impressionistic judgment. Seldom does a work make clear the rationale by which play strategies and techniques are derived from underlying constructs. This book links theoretical reasoning with the specific dos and don'ts of clinical practice. The purpose, rationale, and impact for interventions are woven into session transcripts and related to the concepts upon which Synergistic Play Therapy is based. Topics covered include rapport building and the beginning of restoration of the child's trust in an adult male, therapeutic contact negotiation, the introduction of metaphor, indirect referencing of the trauma and the process building toward explicit emotional disclosure and metaphoric retribution, the restoration of self-esteem, 'emotional inoculation' against regression, and the emergence of a future-oriented perspective characterized by confidence and hopefulness. Therapists need a clearly defined and well-documented set of guidelines for the treatment of sexually abused children. Abused children become adult perpetrators in numbers disproportionate to the rest of the population, but this dire statistic holds true only for those victims who have not been effectively helped as children. This book offers a means to provide such treatment.

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