

# Provide Emotional Support to Play Therapy Clients Via Telehealth with Parents

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The following suggestions are a result of questions we have received from play therapists about how to support their child clients during the COVID-19 pandemic, when children cannot come to their playrooms. These ideas are designed to help you provide emotional support to your play therapy clients as well as support and empower parents during this challenging and distressing time. Our intent in suggestions 1 and 3 is for you to help parents provide the kind of accepting and healing relationship with their children that you provide to their children in your playroom. Although we mention three ways to support your clients that are dependent on your experience and the time you can devote to each client, we focus primarily on the third suggestion, **Parent Consultation + Special Play Time Support**. These suggestions assume that play therapists are using HIPAA compliant platforms to provide telehealth to their clients.

## 1. **Filial Therapy/Child-Parent Relationship Therapy:**

For play therapists with formal training and supervision in filial therapy (CPRT or Guerney Model), we encourage you to use the protocol and resources from the training you received to teach parents to become the therapeutic agent for their child under your supervision. Although not without challenges, filial therapy can be conducted with parents via telehealth, following HIPAA compliant procedures.

## 2. **Parent Consultation:** Provide parents with emotional support and parent education.

- **Emotional Support:** Parents are overwhelmed---struggling to work at home, provide home schooling and meet the demands of parenting, while feeling worried and being isolated from family and friends. Parents who feel supported are better equipped to meet the unique demands of parenting during this time of isolation.
- **Parent Education:** Teach skills taught in filial therapy, e.g. listening, reflecting child's thoughts and feelings, choice giving, and limit setting. *Note: We have provided you with several resources from the Child-Parent Relationship Therapy (CPRT) Treatment Manual, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition to assist you in your consultation with parents. Resources are provided with permission from Routledge Publishing.*

## 3. **Parent Consultation + Special Play Time Support:**

Support parents in the use of weekly Special Play Times to emphasize the importance of a secure parent-child relationship. Special parent-child play times provide children with an opportunity to gain a measure of control over their world during this confusing and, for some, distressing time. The materials provided and guidelines below are for professional play therapists who have not participated in formal filial therapy training and certification, but who would like to support their child clients with the help of parents.

While the guidelines and recommendations are based on filial therapy and taken from the Child-Parent Relationship Therapy (CPRT) Treatment Manual, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, the parent resources we provide are a simplified version of filial therapy intended for use by play therapists to: 1) help parents strengthen the relationship with their child and 2) support parents in providing their child with the opportunity to play out thoughts and feelings, including any worries or concerns. In this suggested approach, play therapists would not be conducting the CPRT/Filial Therapy treatment protocol with parents, rather you would be providing Special Play Time Support using a simplified version of CPRT.

Play therapists should be thoroughly familiar with the parent resource materials provided below and exercise their clinical judgement regarding parent and child readiness to participate in Special Play Time under the play therapist's supervision and guidance.

## Special Play Time Resources for Parents

[Special Play Time video](#): 7-minute video clip of a parent-child Special Play Time demonstrating basic principles of this special way for parents to play with their child.

[Special Parent-Child Play Time](#): handout designed to accompany and expand on the Special Play Time video.

### Additional Resources for Parents

[Life-Changing Play](#) by Garry Landreth ©LifeWay 2005. Used with Permission.

[Thirty-Minutes of Play](#) by Garry Landreth ©LifeWay 2005. Used with Permission

## Special Play Time Resources for Play Therapists

### Video:

Carefully review the 7-minute [Special Play Time](#) video prior to providing the video to parents.

### Handouts:

Carefully review the parent resource handouts listed in the above section prior to providing handouts to parents. The following handouts are provided with permission from the [Child-Parent Relationship Therapy \(CPRT\) Treatment Manual, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition](#) (© Routledge Publishing 2020) and are intended to provide additional information for play therapists to help teach and support parents in conducting Special Play Time with their child/ren.

1. [Child-Parent Relationship Therapy: What Is It and How Can It Help?](#) (p. 10)
2. [CPRT Toy Checklist](#) (p. 16)
3. [CPRT Basic Principles of Play Sessions](#) (p. 17)
4. [CPRT Play Session Procedures Checklist](#) (p. 24)  
*Contains information for play therapist to help parents select a place and time to conduct Special Play Time and additional guidelines to help parents be successful*
5. [CPRT Play Session Dos and Don'ts](#) (p. 25)
6. [CPRT Photo of Toy Setup](#) (p. 26)
7. [CPRT Cliff Notes for Parents](#) (p. 35)
8. [CPRT Choice Giving 101](#) (p. 50)
9. [CPRT Advanced Choice Giving](#) (p. 51-52)

## Guidelines and Tips for Facilitating Special Parent-Child Play Times

1. After determining that your client and your client's parent(s) are appropriate for Special Play Time, contact the parent to discuss your plan, and if the parent is willing, obtain appropriate consents and provide the parent with the parent resources included above (demonstration video and accompanying handout and 2 articles by Garry Landreth). **During all contacts with parents, ask the parent to go into a room away from the child/ren so little ears are not listening to the conversation.** Parents often share information that is not helpful for children to hear.
2. We suggest that the next contact is with your child client and the parent (who will conduct Special Play Time) both present. You likely have already had some contact with the child and explained why the child won't be coming to your playroom for now. Your previous contact will determine how you explain to your client in developmentally appropriate language that since the child cannot come to your office for now, that you are helping Mom/Dad (or other caregivers) have Special Play Times with the child "kind of like how you and I play in the playroom" (or similar wording).
3. Next telehealth session with parents: Getting ready to conduct Special Play Time.  
Review the *Special Parent-Child Play Time* handout with the parent (especially the Special Play Time Guidelines) and then watch the short video clip, *Special Play Time with a 4-year-old*, together and use the video to teach the parent what you want them to do. It can be helpful to role-play with the parent. Primary attitudes and skills to target: allow the child to lead the play and join in as a follower, describe what you see the child playing/doing, and reflect the child's feelings and words. **Most important is for parents to show keen interest in their child and enjoy being with their child during the Special Play Time.** If they do nothing else, that can be enough for now!

Provide information regarding helpful hints including the place and time to hold Special Play Time provided in CPRT handout #4 above. Emphasize choosing a consistent time when the parent is feeling calm and can be emotionally available to her/his child and a time when the child is not tired or hungry. You might share the CPRT saying, "*You can't give away that which you don't possess*" to help parents understand the importance of finding a time when the parent's 'emotional tank is full'. The place for conducting Special Play Time should be away from others in the home, free of distractions, and a place where the parent doesn't need to worry about messiness or prized possessions.

Discuss gathering toys for Special Play Time (similar to those on the video) that the parent can put in a box to set aside for the weekly play time (also see handout #2 above for additional ideas, but toys should be readily available in the child's home). Information provided in the CPRT handouts 1-7 provide additional information for you to help prepare parents for conducting Special Play Times. Note that handout #7 Cliff Notes for Parents provides an example of A-C-T Limit Setting. **Emphasize to parents that this special way of playing with their child can make a real difference in their child's life and in their relationship with their child, and that you will be there to provide support and guidance.**

4. Weekly telehealth parent consultation and Special Play Time feedback sessions:  
We recommend that you establish weekly telehealth sessions with parents to provide encouragement and supportive feedback on their weekly Special Play Times with the child that is your client as well as other children in the family. Again, remind the parent to go into a room away from the child/ren for your

telehealth session. Use your clinical judgment and experience regarding use of additional technology to support parents: 1) Ask parents to video-record their play sessions on their phone or other device for you to watch together during your weekly telehealth sessions. 2) In cases in which a parent is struggling to apply the attitudes and skills, consider the judicious use of headphones or earbuds (wireless are ideal) for the parent to receive gentle, paced coaching and encouragement while you observe the play session in real time on a video call. You will be able to prompt the parents with brief, specific phrases to say and guide them in how to convey love and acceptance with their tone of voice and body language. Therapist responses should be interspersed to avoid interrupting the parent's natural flow. Avoid overwhelming the parent with too many words. It is recommended that you turn off the camera on your phone or computer during the video call so that the child is not distracted by your mouth moving or confused by your facial expressions.

5. During this time when families are sheltering at home together, we recommend that parents have a weekly Special Play Time with each child in the family to focus on their relationship with each child. The time allotment might be longer (30 minutes) with the child who is your client and 20 minutes with each of the other children. For parents who, based on your judgment, have the time and motivation, you can suggest they have additional Special Play Times with each child throughout the week. For children 10 years and older, suggest arts and crafts or baking/decorating cookies together. For children younger than 3 years, we suggest *Special Bath Time*. Ask the parent to gather a few plastic animals, small plastic dolls, car/boat, a few containers of various sizes, and a few other small water-safe toys that are readily available in the home. A large strainer can be used to store toys to allow them to drain.
6. Using CPRT/Filial Therapy skills outside of Special Play Time:  
Use your clinical judgment to determine when a parent is ready to use play time skills in response to everyday life struggles, e.g. bedtime. Handouts 8 and 9 on Choice-Giving are particularly useful to parents to provide their children with a greater sense of control in their lives during a time when their choices are more limited. Consider teaching parents "30-second burst of attention" detailed in the article, *Thirty Minutes of Play*, as a strategy that parents who are working at home may find useful to give their child a burst of focused attention outside of Special Play Time.

*If you have access to the CPRT Treatment Manual or materials based on the Guernsey Model of Filial Therapy, you can find additional information and handouts that may be helpful.*

## Sources

- Landreth, G.L., & Bratton, S.C. (2020). Child-Parent Relationship Therapy (CPRT): An Evidence-Based 10-Session Filial Therapy Model, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bratton, S.C., & Landreth, G.L. (2020). Child-Parent Relationship Therapy (CPRT) Treatment Manual: An Evidence-Based 10-Session Filial Therapy Mode, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Guernsey, L., and Ryan, V. (2013). Group Filial Therapy. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley.