

# ***FILIAL THERAPY- A FAMILY BASED THERAPY – BUILDING STRONGER BONDS***



***This booklet is designed to help parents, primary carers and other allied health professionals get a better understanding of Filial Therapy.***

**What is Filial Therapy?**



**As parents or primary carers you are the most important adults in your children's lives, and Filial Therapy can help strengthen the bonds that exist within your family. Filial**

**Therapy is an evidenced based therapeutic intervention that places play, the child and the parent at its very centre. This unique intervention involves parents as being a primary change agent, helping children resolve difficulties they are currently and have previously experienced (Guerney, 1964 ; Vanfleet, 2014). It helps promote healthy child development across emotional, social and cognitive domains. It strengthens the whole family unit (Vanfleet, 2014).**

**A therapist trained in Filial Therapy will train and supervise parents and carers in conducting non-directive play sessions, a child-led approach to play. Non-directive means that the child is allowed to play freely without direction. This model holds a deep belief that children hold within themselves the direction towards positive growth and healing. Through the creation of special playtimes - that are a place for children to be accepted and met with empathy, a child can begin to communicate some of the difficulties they have been experiencing in life. This will help them unravel tangled feelings that might be causing them to struggle in certain areas of life (Axline, 1969, Landreth, 2012). Through the power of play the parent/carer-child relationship can be strengthened allowing for this optimal growth.**

**Parents will learn for core therapeutic skills that they can use in special play times with their children**

- **Structuring**
- **Limit setting**
- **Empathetic listening**
- **Imaginative play skills**



**Why is play useful?**



**Play is an essential and vital part of a child's development journey. Social, emotional, cognitive, physical, creativity and language development are all supported through play (Elkind, 2007).**

**Through play children can begin to create clearer understandings of their own thoughts and feelings. They will play out life events, re-enacting more difficult life experiences. In special play times with a children can begin to make more sense of these past experiences and develop coping strategies for the future (Axline, 1969, Landreth, 2012).**

**Current research suggests that Filial Therapy can lead to a number of potential positive outcomes, it can raise self-esteem, reduce fears and anxiety, help children strengthen relationships within the family and while also helping with a child's general development (reference). A defining aspect of these positive outcomes is the therapeutic power of play. These refer to specific healing agents of change in play that are initiated, facilitated and strengthened within play (Schaefer & Drewes, 2011). These powerful forces exist within the parent/carer-child relationship and are helpful in overcoming the struggles in a child's life.**

**Why is it important for the parent/carer to play?**



**Parents/carers are the without doubt the most important people in a child's life, they have a better knowledge of their child than any other person. Parents/carers when given the extra therapeutic skills to play with their children in special play sessions can have a profoundly powerful impact upon their children and their current struggles in life. By being able to increase their acceptance, empathy and understanding of their child's play their can be significant increases in positive outcomes for the child and the whole family (Guerney, 1964; Vanfleet, 2014).**



# ***Family and Child Goals of Filial Therapy***

## ***Child Goals***

- *Help children to express their feelings in more appropriate ways*
- *Help increase children's understanding of their feelings and emotions*
- *Help children increase self-esteem and confidence*
- *Reduce a child's difficult behaviours*
- *Help further develop children problem-solving skills*
- *Increase children's ability to self-regulate difficult emotions*
- *Strengthen children's trust in their parents/carers*

## ***Parent Goals***

- *Improve understanding of their children's feelings, thoughts and behaviours*
- *Improve understanding of child development*
- *Increase understanding their children's play and it's importance*
- *Increase their confidence in parenting through learning more parenting skills*
- *Develop more attuned, secure and close relationships with their children*

## ***Family Goals***

- *To help families create stronger bonds, more satisfying relationships built on love, trust, security, compassion, understanding and acceptance*
- *Build stronger family communications*
- *Reduce the problems that exist in the family relationships*
- *Increase the fun families have together*
- *Increase the toolkit that families can draw upon*
- *Build positive future outcomes*

*(VanFleet, 2014)*





**Is this right for my child and family?**



**Filial Therapy can help children between the ages of 3-12 years with a range of presenting issues, such as;**

**chronic illness / injury, bereavement, emotional and behavioural difficulties, including aggression, bullying, self-esteem / confidence issues, anxiety & depression, family breakdown (separation & divorce), Attachment and trauma related difficulties, eating and sleep difficulties, children in care, trauma & abuse/neglect, social difficulties, family reunification (Vanfleet, 2014)**

**If the family is struggling with such issues and is wishing to find more positive ways to come together as a family, Filial Therapy can be a suitable intervention.**

**What happens in the sessions?**



**The therapy is broken into 5 stages (VanFleet, 2014):**

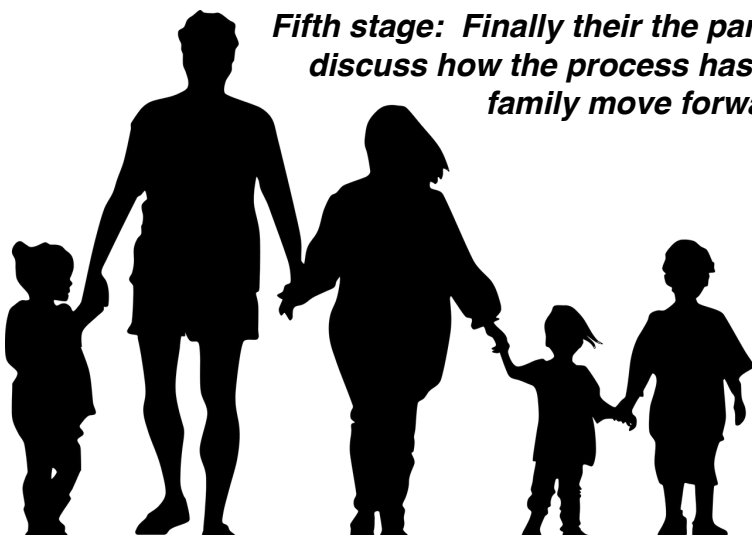
**First stage: Filial therapy will start with the therapist sitting down with the parents/carers to gain a fuller picture of the family and their strengths and difficulties. This will allow the therapist to start to understand the family more fully. The therapist will then spend sometime observing the family playing together to further add to this understanding of the family.**

**Second Stage: Then their will be some play sessions where the parents get to observe the therapist playing with their children, modelling core therapeutic play skills.**

**Third stage: The next stage will be some parent/therapist training sessions, where the therapist will help parent/carer gain some of these unique play skills and ways of being with the child in special play sessions.**

**Fourth Stage: Their will be some play sessions where the parent/carers will be able to practice these newly acquired play skills and reflect on them with the therapist.**

**Fifth stage: Finally their the parent/carer and therapist will meet to discuss how the process has been and how to best help the family move forward.**



**How long will the therapy run for?**

**Normally the whole therapy intervention will last for between 10-15 weeks, but this can be adapted to meet the needs of the individual family.**



***This booklet was designed to help parents, primary carers and other health professionals gain a greater understanding of the process of humanistic play therapy. For further information please see the reference list below or contact your***



## **References**

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