

Sally's Story

Sally is 4 years old. She arrives with her Dad for her Theraplay session with them both and the Theraplay practitioner, Milly. Milly is waiting at the door to welcome them in. Milly checks whether Sally has brought her sparkly bright eyes and her strong legs and invites them both into the room to do giant steps over to the cushions. Milly has arranged a blanket in the corner of the room with soft cushions to make it look cosy and inviting. She shows Sally and her Dad exactly where to sit to help them feel comfortable. Once everyone feels cosy Milly starts a check-in, noticing things about Sally that helps her get to know her better. She comments on her brown eyes and wavy hair and that she has two hands. Sally looks down at her hands and they all notice them together. She counts all of Sally's fingers and gently holds Sally's hands to see if they are warm or cold. Milly watches carefully to see how Sally is responding and makes sure she feels comfortable. Whilst holding Sally's hands Milly stops to notice a freckle and takes care of a hurt she finds. She passes Dad a dab of lotion and invites him to give the hurt a gentle stroke communicating to Sally that Theraplay is a time for taking care of her. Then Milly moves through a series of activities that she has planned beforehand, based on a careful assessment of Sally's needs that takes place before the Theraplay sessions start. The games are a mixture of lively and calm activity. Milly gets Sally to pop bubbles with different parts of her body, punch through newspaper and chop through toilet roll, blow feathers, sing nursery rhymes and clapping games together and balance teddy bears on each other heads to playfully drop into her hands. These are just a few of the activities used in a session. In the beginning sessions, or when Sally is resistant to playing this way, Milly plays with her directly whilst Dad sits close by but gradually Milly supports Dad to be more and more involved in the play. When Sally struggles with an activity Milly works hard to re-engage her and focuses on keeping the connection positive. After a calm activity Milly offers a snack, this could be a fruit string for measuring, a crunchy cracker or pieces of fruit and a drink of milk through a straw. The crunching and sucking are calming for Sally and the feeding is a direct way of offering nurture. In this session, or subsequent ones, Milly may get Dad to feed Sally too. Milly finishes the session by offering Sally a swing in the blanket or cuddling up with Dad whilst she sings a song that helps Sally feel special, valued and nurtured. This tender ending activity helps Sally and her Dad feel physically close and emotionally connected. Milly then helps Sally and her Dad leave the Theraplay session using the same activity in which they entered the room.