The Use of Touch in Theraplay

What is Theraplay?

Theraplay is a child and family treatment for enhancing attachment, self-esteem, trust in others, and joyful engagement. It is based on the natural patterns of healthy interaction between parent / carer and child, and is personal, physical and fun. Theraplay interactions focus on four essential qualities found in parent-child relationships:

• **Structure**
• **Engagement**
• **Nurture and**
• **Challenge.**

Theraplay sessions create an active and emotional connection between the child and parents/ carers, supporting a changed view of the child as worthy and loveable and of relationships as positive and rewarding.

The use of touch

Touch is a normal, healthy part of all parent-child interaction and is very important for the healthy development of all children. Various kinds of touch are essential to Theraplay treatment.

Theraplay touch:

• Is **playful** and **engaging** as seen in many of the surprising and delightful activities;
• Is **nurturing** in the care giving activities;
• Is **organising** and
• Is **regulating** through the structuring activities;
• is used to **help guide the child** in the challenging activities.

At all times our goal is to maintain the safety and meet the developmental needs of the child.

Why is this important?
A child who has been inappropriately or hurtfully touched in the past needs to re-learn what gentle, fun and appropriate touch feels like and therefore learn that he is worthy of this kind of treatment. Also, children who may be extremely sensitive to touch need physical closeness and playfulness, therefore, Theraplay treatment seeks ways to provide these experiences in ways that are tolerable for the child and eventually to expand his/ her tolerance for new sensory experiences.

If a child is angry, dysregulated or out of control in a session and has not responded to other efforts to calm her, the Theraplay therapist and parent / carer will stay with and contain the child in some way. This may involve cradling the child on the lap of the adult, an arm around the child, or close, soothing physical contact. If you are able, you the parent / carer will contain the child with support from the therapist. As soon as the child settles, the containment stops and the adult continue interacting with the child.

Containment in Theraplay is done in reaction to the child's dysregulated behaviours; the therapist never provokes the child in order to contain the child. The model for this type of containment is that of a parent / carer who holds an over tired, overstimulated, or frightened toddler in order to calm him/her.

The reasons for containing a child are:
- To keep the child and therapist or parent/carer safe
- To communicate to the child that the therapist and his parent/ carer can protect him from aggressive or self-injurious impulses
- To let the child know that the therapist / parent / carer can accept and assist him with strong emotions.
- To control the situation until the child is able to regain self-control.

The essential role of the parent or primary carer

You, the parent/ carer, will play a major role in Theraplay. However, at the beginning of treatment, the Theraplay therapist will be the more active member of the team and initiate the interactions. This is for the following reasons:

- To provide a model for a new way of interacting for you and your child
- To get past the child's initial resistance so that your first experience with the new kind of interaction is positive
- To help you feel more sure of yourself and comfortable with touch

If you feel uncomfortable with physical contact, we will move slowly until we develop a relationship with you and better understand your interaction with your child.

Your engagement and participation in the Theraplay process is essential.   Please share any concerns you have surrounding the use of touch in this way —be it in terms of yourself or regarding your child's history and tolerance to touch.

I have read the above statement and give permission for my child to participate in Theraplay therapy as described.

Signature _____ Date   _____