

# Play Therapy in Diverse Urban Schools

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# What is Relational Culturally Competent Play Therapy (*RCCPT*)

- Is a strengths-based approach to **understanding & responding** to diverse children and families that
  - Facilitates **growth and change**
  - Builds **resilience through identifying strengths and furthering initiative**
  - Promotes **coping** strategies
  - Responds to the **particular** histories, lived experience and circumstances of **specific** children and family members
  - Promotes healthy school communities

# Relational CCPT is an approach to working with children and families that is

- Relationship based and humanistic
  - Empathically grounded
    - Empathic understanding as a tool to help children grow
  - Strength-based
    - Identify and develop personal strengths
  - Attachment based
    - Promote multiple attachment relationships in family, school & community settings
- Culturally competent
  - Seeks to empathically understand the social, cultural & historical contexts of children's lives
  - Sensitive to the linguistic and transnational experiences of children and families
- Developmentally appropriate
  - Aligned with educationally sound principles that connect expectations with children's developmental abilities and needs

# Relational Culturally Competent Play Therapists

- Aim to understand – and stand for - the inner, emotional lives of children
- Create therapeutic relationships and school environments that facilitate development and learning
- Work with children to express and transform their emotions and experiences through expressive and creative arts
- Facilitate child and family repertoires of positive coping abilities and personal strengths
- Committed to their own personal and professional learning and growth.

## **Relational Culturally Competent Play Therapists Work Flexibly, Dynamically & Creatively**

**With children - and their families - who  
present with:**

- Histories of trauma**
- Histories of separation and loss**
- Identified vulnerabilities**
- Disabilities**
- Behavioral concerns**
- Learning difficulties**
- Language and communication disorders**

How does

Relational Culturally Competent  
Play Therapy (RCCPT) **work?**

# RCCPT: The Process

- Therapeutic process is built on consistent, caring relationships that take genuine interest in children's inner lives.
- Empathic relationships help children
  - overcome fears
  - trust themselves & others
  - develop and learn
  - gain courage

## Relational Culturally Competent Play Therapists Aim to

- Empathically understand potential sources of child anxiety, mistrust and hurt
- Consider how adults may be perceived by children in light of their lived experience
  - How the dynamics of children's primary attachment relationships recur in other significant relationships, such as with therapists and teachers (child transference)
- Be self aware of their own emotional reactions to children and families (countertransference)
- Support their practice through learning, reflection, supervision (formal & peer), self-care and therapy



## RCCPT practitioners are also

- Interested and curious about children's lived experience
- Interested in, and empathically understanding of children's inner lives
- Advocates for children's emotional and developmental needs
- Dynamic, interactive, creative and playful
- Trustworthy and safe
- Clear, firm and non-confrontational
- Authentic
- Accepting and non-judgmental
- Calm, stable, consistent
- Patient

**How do RCCPT practitioners  
embody empathic understanding  
and facilitate growth?**

- **5 Core Concepts**

# CONCEPT 1

## **Authentically invested in children's growth and development**

- Interested in and curious about children's lived experience
- Interested in and empathically attuned to children's inner lives
- Advocates for children's emotional and developmental needs
- Dynamic, interactive, creative and playful
- Trustworthy and safe
- Clear, firm and non-confrontational
- Accepting and non-judgmental
- Calm, stable, consistent
- Patient
- Authentic

## CONCEPT 2

**Create safe, creative environments that promote attachment, exploration, expression and growth.**

- Self expression promotes emotional growth by helping children explore their inner lives.
- Emotional growth is facilitated by a safe, welcoming and friendly environments that promote child initiatives
  - Room and materials organization to promote child autonomy and initiative
  - Developmental considerations
  - Limits
  - Expectations

## CONCEPT 3

**Help children learn to express themselves through careful selection and presentation of materials.**

- Demonstrate understanding of children's need for expression through making **expressive, creative opportunities** possible.
  - Creative art materials – paints, crayons (wax & oil) , clay, pencils, markers, finger paints, paper, tape (masking tape, cellophane)
  - Collage and sculpture materials (paper, cardboard, fabric, nature, found objects)
  - Toys and play materials
    - Structured
    - Unstructured
  - Natural materials
    - Sand
    - Water

# CONCEPT 4

## Being with children

- Observing
- Witnessing
- Participating
  - Unobtrusive, tactful and kind – avoid interpretation; never retaliate
  - Follow child's lead
  - Encourage verbal exploration and conversation
  - Scaffold and encourage turn-taking
    - Language as cognitive scaffolding
    - Emotional scaffolding
    - Developmental considerations
    - Children with disabilities – ASD, language delays

# CONCEPT 5

## Encouraging child initiative

- Create structure and set limits to promote safety
- Encourage child initiative to further mastery and competence
- Unobtrusively join play to scaffold child initiative and to develop narrative ability in accordance with children's developmental needs
- Encourage communication - non-verbally and in language

## In Summary, Relationally Culturally Competent Play Therapy is...

- Relationship-based
- Sensitive to cultural, linguistic, family and community contexts
- Creative
- Expressive
  - Develops capacity for thinking and imagination
  - Furthers development and learning





# Relational Culturally Competent Play Therapy

Made in Brooklyn

## **Brooklyn College Play Therapy Project**

- **Professional Development through graduate level Advanced Certificate in Play Therapy**
- **Career-ladder professional development workshops and seminars tailored for agencies and community-based organizations**

## Brooklyn College Advanced Certificate in Play Therapy

- Education; special education
- Social work
- Psychology
- Mental health counseling
- School psychology
- School counseling
- Creative arts therapy
- Speech-language pathology
- Occupational therapy
- Physical therapy
- Nursing
- Other relevant profession

## **Course of Study: Advanced Certificate in Play Therapy**

- **A coherent set of four courses (16 credits)**
- **Structured sequentially to develop professional**
- **Expertise in culturally competent play therapy with diverse populations**
- **Proficiency in the supervision of culturally competent dynamic play therapy with diverse populations**
- **Case-based, experiential seminar meetings**
- **Mentoring and consultation**

## Course Sequence

- SPCL 7946 Historical, Theoretical and Social Foundations of Play Therapy
- SPCL 7947 Play Therapy Methods and Approaches
- SPCL 7948 Play Therapy Applications for Special Populations
- SPCL 7949: Advanced Seminar in Play Therapy Practice and Supervision

## SPCL 7946 Historical, Theoretical and Social Foundations of Play Therapy

- **Critically analyze** the history and development of play therapy
- Engage in **case-based study**
- Explore the **social and cultural contexts** of play therapy
- Develop a **culturally competent** approach to play therapy
- Learn the **role of the play therapist**
- Study the **therapeutic relationship**
- Develop **applied approaches** to working with diverse children and families.

# SPCL 7947 Play Therapy Methods & Approaches

- Learn multiple, culturally competent **play therapy interventions** with common presenting problems
  - anxiety
  - aggression
  - oppositional behavior
- Learn to **evaluate** play therapy interventions with
  - Children with typical development
  - children with autism spectrum disorders
- Develop **proficiency** in working with **diverse families**

## SPCL 7948 Play Therapy Applications for Special Populations

Play therapy interventions with children & families who have experienced

- *Separation and Loss*
- *Trauma*
- *Abuse*
- *Neglect*
- *Divorce*
- *Migration*



## **SPCL 7948 Play Therapy Applications for Special Populations *Continued***

- Develop applied skills for conducting and evaluating play therapy interventions with special populations in community and school settings
- Develop clinical sensitivity to working with diverse children who present with a wide variety of psychological needs, and their families

## **SPCL 7949: Advanced Seminar in Play Therapy Practice and Supervision**

- **Take part in an advanced seminar in play therapy practice with diverse populations**
- **Study advanced play therapy skills**
- **Draw on play-based experience in the field**
- **Participate in group supervision of play therapy practice**

## ***SPCL 7949: Advanced Seminar in Play Therapy Practice and Supervision Continued***

- **Learn principles of diagnostic play assessment**
- **Learn about child forensic interviewing**
- **Learn principles of clinical supervision of play therapy**
  - **role of the play therapy supervisor**
  - **impact of vicarious trauma on play therapist and supervisor**

## **Brooklyn College designated National Approved Center of Play Therapy Education**

***Press Release: Association for Play Therapy  
(Clovis, CA)***

***“The *Play Therapy Project at Brooklyn College* of the City University of New York has earned designation by the Association for Play Therapy (APT) as an Approved Center of Play Therapy Education and Approved Provider of Play Therapy Continuing Education.***

***The Project offers a graduate *Advanced Certificate Program in Play Therapy*, approved by the New York State Department of Education.”***

## Contact

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