

PLAY THERAPIST

WHAT DOES A PLAY THERAPIST DO?

Play Therapists help children to make sense of difficult life experiences or complex psychological issues through the activity of play. Play is a child's natural way of communicating and with a Play Therapist they can explore various issues they might find difficult to express in other ways.

A play therapist's duties will include assessing children's needs; running therapy sessions; making use of toys (such as puppets, cars and dolls) and creative arts (including drawing, clay, sand, movement, music and therapeutic story telling); developing symbolic communication with children, which involves making a connection between the signs, symbols and actions the child creates through play and how these relate to their experiences; creating an in-depth therapeutic relationship, which promotes positive change in the child by helping them to help themselves; occasionally attending court e.g. to give evidence in a child protection or custody case.

SKILLS REQUIRED

Applicants for Play Therapy courses and jobs will need to demonstrate that they have:

- an ability to communicate well with children
- empathy and an open and friendly manner
- the ability to gain the trust of children
- resilience and insight for working with children in emotional distress
- good spoken and written communication skills
- a broad knowledge of child development
- a good understanding of the different ways in which children communicate their feelings
- an honest and sincere respect for children
- a flexible and motivated approach to work
- the ability to work with difficult behaviour or facts, without making judgements
- a good understanding of issues surrounding confidentiality

A driving licence would also be useful for this work

QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED

- Generally, an approved postgraduate qualification. Check the British Association of Play Therapists (BAPT) website (<http://www.bapt.info/>) and the Play Therapy UK (PTUK) website (<http://www.playtherapy.org.uk/>) for a list of universities offering approved postgraduate courses.
- Registration with the British Association of Play Therapists (BAPT) or with Play Therapy UK (PTUK).
- The Play Therapy UK (PTUK) website (<http://www.playtherapy.org.uk/>) also contains details of other PTUK-accredited postgraduate part-time programmes.
- Applicants will need to pass a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.
- Check entry requirements and course content with individual course providers.

POSTGRADUATE COURSES

Three universities in England offer BAPT-approved postgraduate courses: the University of Roehampton, Leeds Beckett University and the University of South Wales. One of the courses is outlined below.

MA Play Therapy: University of Roehampton (<http://www.roehampton.ac.uk/>)

Length of study: 2 years full-time

Entry requirements - qualifications: Applicants are normally required to have an undergraduate degree at Honours level, preferably in a modality-specific discipline or a clinically-related discipline such as Psychology, Education, Early Childhood Studies, Mental Health (Psychiatric) Nursing, Social Work etc. Graduate level professional qualifications in appropriate disciplines such as Teaching, Nursing, Social Work, Visual Art, Drama, Performing Arts, Occupational Therapy, or Probation Officers etc. are also accepted. Applicants hold a relevant professional qualification relating to working with children such as: Social Work (DipSW, BA in Social Studies with DipSW, Masters in Social Work MSW; Nursing (Nursing BN, Nursing BA/BSc); Teaching (PGCE, BEd, MA/MSc in Education); Occupational Therapy (BSc, MSc); Speech and Language Therapy (BSc, MSc); Counselling/Psychotherapy Postgraduate Diploma, MA, MSc); Clinical Psychology/Educational Psychology (PhD, MSc) OR hold a good second-class honours degree (or above) in Psychology or a related subject.

Entry requirements - work experience: Applicants must have considerable experience of working directly with children and families. This must include a minimum of two years post-qualifying experience (from their professional qualification or degree).

The Play Therapy UK (PTUK) website (<http://www.playtherapy.org.uk/>) contains details of other PTUK-accredited programmes.

NB Please check with individual course providers as entry requirements can change.

EMPLOYMENT SECTORS

Play Therapists work within the statutory sector e.g. in social services departments, child mental health services, family centres, education, and within the voluntary sector such as the NSPCC, Barnardo's and NCH.

WORKING CONDITIONS

Many jobs within Play Therapy are offered on a part-time basis, and some play therapists are self-employed. Play Therapists usually work in a variety of settings e.g. in specially equipped playrooms, in a school or in a child's home. Play therapy sessions are usually held once a week, Monday to Friday.

SALARY

Full-time play therapists earn £25,000 to £40,000 per year.

NB These figures are only a guideline: see job advertisements for up-to-date information

LABOUR MARKET DATA

The majority of Play Therapists work in the statutory sector. Many are employed by more than one organisation and maintain a private practice alongside their statutory employment. A small percentage work in a training institution as a lecturer and clinical tutor.

The Play Therapy profession is said, by the BAPT, to be rapidly developing across Britain.

INFORMATION SOURCES

- British Association of Play Therapists (BAPT): <http://www.bapt.info/>
- National Careers Service: <https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/>
- NHS Careers: <http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/>
- Play Therapy UK: <http://www.playtherapy.org.uk/>
- Prospects: <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/>
- UCAS: <https://www.ucas.com/>

VIDEO CLIP

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6RkdZDfIjLY>

ASSOCIATED ROLE: HOSPITAL PLAY THERAPIST/ ASSISTANT

Role: Hospital Play Therapists lead playful activities and use play as a therapeutic tool. They are neither play therapists nor play leaders. Their role includes organising daily play and art activities in the playroom or at the bedside; using play to prepare children for hospital procedures; supporting families and siblings; encouraging friendships to develop; organising parties and events. Some Hospital Play Therapists work in hospices and community-based settings.

The Foundation Degree in Healthcare Play Specialism is offered by 4 institutions: Bolton College, Cardiff and the Vale College, North Warwickshire & Hinckley College and Nescot. One of the courses is outlined below.

Foundation Degree: Healthcare Play Specialism: North Warwickshire & Hinckley College (<http://www.nwhc.ac.uk>)

Length of study: 2 years part-time

Entry requirements - qualifications: all candidates must have a minimum of a Level 3 qualification in Early Years or a related field and be able to demonstrate and evidence their literacy and numeracy skills at Level 2.

Entry requirements - work experience: Two years of work experience in a related field. The course is open to staff employed in the sector and volunteers. Volunteers are expected to have arranged their work placement prior to enrolment.

NB Please check with individual course providers as entry requirements can change.

In addition to the general organisations mentioned above, in the Play Therapist profile, specialist advice is available from:

- Hospital Play Staff Education Trust (HPSET): <http://www.hpset.org.uk>
- National Association of Hospital Play Staff (NAHPS): <http://www.nahps.org.uk/>