

About Deborah Hage:

Drawing on 50 years of experience, both as a parent of 14 foster and adopted children and as a reactive attachment disorder therapist, working with emotionally and behaviorally impacted children (resulting from early childhood abuse and neglect), Deborah specializes in coaching parents help their children adjust and heal from past traumas, overcome their fears, and effectively integrate into their new families and environments. As a lecturer, author, therapist and coach, Deborah has helped thousands of families overcome the impacts of past neglect, abuse and other traumas; providing the support and tools they need to create for themselves a happier and more connected life.

The ideas and interventions presented here have not been developed solely by Deborah. She has worked with numerous other therapists and parents over the years, notably Nancy Thomas, whose continued partnership and collaboration she appreciates.

To learn more about Deborah, her practice and her family, please visit deborahhage.com

Therapeutic Play with Children

Deborah Hage, MSW

Dr, Ann Jernberg developed Theraplay techniques in the 1960's. The Theraplay Institute in Chicago continues to train therapists and parents in creative and effective ways to incorporate play into the parent-child relationships in such a way that attachment is enhanced. The typical age range of children is from birth to 12 years, however, adaptations of the techniques can be used with older children.

Guidelines:

- The parent is in charge and chooses the activities to meet the child's needs
- Theraplay involves emotionally attuned, interactive, physical play
- Nurturing touch is part of each interaction
- Activities geared to child's emotional age, not chronological age
- Fast, quick

According to the Theraplay Institute, "Psychopathology results when early and ongoing experiences lead to a negative or inadequate sense of self. In the absence of positive and responsive interactions, the child learns to view herself as unlovable and incompetent, to view others as uncaring and untrustworthy, and the world as unsafe and full of threat. Within an insecure attachment, the process of learning about one's self and the world becomes negative and hopeless. Many behavior problems of older children can be traced back to their beginnings in insecure attachment and in their negative

views of themselves and the world. The Theraplay approach assumes both that change is possible and the essential ingredients for change lie in the creation of a more positive relationship between children and their parents. Because the roots of development of the self, of self esteem and trust lie in the early years, it is essential to return to the stage at which the child's emotional development was derailed and provide experiences which can restart the healthy cycle of interaction."

The activities are based on the playful interactions of parents with their young children, redoing the interactions that come naturally to parents. In fun ways the child learns to:

- follow the parent's lead
- accept direction with joyful outcomes
- engaging with the parent is enjoyable
- trust the parent will not ask them to do something unsafe
- relinquish control

Initially, when playing with an over reactive child, activities are best conducted within very narrow time limits, beginning with less than 30 seconds and building up to longer interactions as the child's defenses come down. It is better to surprise a child with little bits of joy throughout the day than to overwhelm him with an unwelcome thrust of heavy relationship building. The goal is to get in and out of a child's space before he flinches away.

<30 seconds

Stack of hands – hold out hand and child puts hand on top. Put 2nd hand on top of child's hand, child puts their 2nd hand on top of parents. Parent pulls hand out from bottom and puts on top, child repeats, going faster and faster

Crawl race

Hand feeding – quickly put small treat in child's mouth (Do not let child take treat and feed himself!)

Wake child up with a special treat or greeting

Quick hug

Blow kisses

30 seconds - 1 minute

Putting lotion on "owies", caring for hurts, quick kiss on hurt spot, look all over child's body for little scratches or hurts to put lotion on

Hand feeding with eye contact – get child's attention and as soon as he

looks at you put small treat in his mouth

Put love note and treat in lunch box

Straight faced tickle – parent tells child she is going to tickle him and he has to keep a straight face

Shoe & sock race – race child to get shoes and socks on

1 – 3 minutes

Cotton Ball Blow – Lay on stomach, facing each other, blow cotton ball between you

Patty Cake, Patty Cake

Mirroring – Face each other and take turns moving arms, legs, slowly while other person copies the movement. Take turns leading.

Pay attention to small hurts and soothe child with lotion or treat

Blow bubbles – Have child strong sit and then blow bubbles, telling them to jump up and pop them, repeat as long as child strong sits between

Pushing over – Sit on floor with legs spread apart, with child's legs inside parent's legs, grab hands and pull child on top of parent and then child pulls parent on top of him, go back and forth a few times, parent comments on how strong child is

Blowing over – Child “blows” over parent and parent makes a big commotion over it and then “blows” over child

Pick up with toes – drop something on the floor and take turns trying to pick it up with toes

Tell a “When you were a baby” or “When I first saw you” story

Touch noises – Have child touch nose and parent makes a funny sound (beep, honk, snort, etc). Parent touches child on ear and child makes a sound.

Repeat

This little Piggy song

Call to meal time – Tell everyone to come to dinner waddling like a duck, or hopping like a bunny, or prancing like a dear or marching like a drummer, etc

Horse back ride

Jump – How far can you jump? This is how far I can jump.

Water gun fight

Draw letters on child's back with finger and have child guess what letter it is

Stand on chair with small objects, see how many each can drop into a container

4 – 5 minutes

3 legged walk – Stand next to each other and tie inside legs together, grab around the waist and walk, faster and faster

Have child look at your while you feed him a bowl of ice cream or other treat

> 5 minutes

Toilet Paper Bust Out – Wrap child in toilet paper, asking them to stand very still under you are done, then counting down from 10, yelling “Bust out”

Lay child in lap and feed juice or chocolate milk from a bottle while he looks at your and you look at him

Make me a Pizza – Child lays on back on floor. Parent pretends to knead the child’s body as if it were dough, then rolls hands across body as if rolling out the pizza dough. Parent rubs pretend pizza sauce all over body and then pokes around on the child’s body as if she were putting on pepperoni and cheese. Parent scoops “pizza” up in arms and puts it in the oven (another spot on the floor). Pulls the “pizza” out and “gobbles” it up, kissing the child all over. Must be done with high energy and lots of laughing and giggling!

Face Painting

Do Chores/tasks together, sing while you work

Bake cookies – make sure child gets to lick the bowl to get the sugar

Read a bed time story while child snuggles or sits on lap

Stand in front of mirror – touch child’s hair and talk about how beautiful it is, he must have had a beautiful mother to have given him such wonderful hair, repeat with eyes, ears, nose, arms (how strong they are), etc

Give manicure and/or pedicure

Group Activities

Mother May I

Two adults –

Blanket swing – Have the child lay down in a blanket and the adults swing him

Child toss – gently toss child back and forth between parents

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