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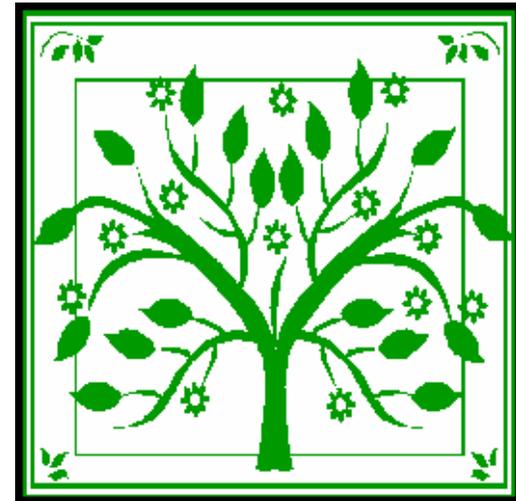
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The Windfall Centre
*Supporting the emotional health of
children and families*



Filial Therapy

Attachment-Focused

Family Therapy



What is Filial Therapy?

Filial therapy was developed in the 1960s by therapists Bernard and Louise Guerney. Their original premise was that family attachment difficulties could be healed effectively through the active involvement of parents and carers using play therapy skills. This was built on by various other child therapists in both the USA and the UK. Filial therapy puts the emphasis on play as the child's natural means of expression and integration and the parent/carer in the role of therapeutic play partner.

Filial therapy has been extensively researched in the last 40-50 years. It has been shown to help families of different compositions facing a wide range of difficulties. Research has also indicated that the progress in both family and child functioning achieved through Filial Therapy tends to last rather than to tail off after the therapist's involvement ends.

What is special about the play in Filial play sessions?

One of the most important factors is that the child leads the play and the adult follows, putting the child's actions and feelings into words, without questioning, teaching or judgment, for a significant amount of time. Most parents find this very strange at first. Parent/carers also learn simple methods to set and maintain limits on behavior so there is both an attitude of acceptance and containment. Parents practice these skills in mock play sessions during training with the therapist.

What happens in the Filial Therapy Programme?

Filial Therapy programmes have a basic structure but are flexible to meet the needs of individual children and families. Sometimes carers are involved right from the start; however, when a child may be facing great difficulties or has experienced trauma, individual sessions may begin the programme leading to the parental involvement later on. There are however essential elements within all programmes.

After an initial intake and family assessment, parents and carers receive full training from the therapist in the therapeutic play model. Training sessions are usually an hour. Parent/carers learn specific skills for the play sessions:

- How to set up a Special Time play session.
- To use empathetic responding and tracking to express attunement.
- Imaginative play skills (child-centred, non-directive).
- Limit setting skills.

Carers then begin observed weekly play sessions between themselves and their child or children using these newly acquired or refined skills, receiving support from the therapist throughout. Each play session is followed up by a discussion between the therapist and parent. When the families are ready, Filial play sessions move to the home without the therapist. Filial play sessions between parent and child are usually 20 minutes. Parents and carers continue to meet for several weeks with the therapist for feedback and training.