

Child Play Therapy at Acorn Counselling

# Parent / Caregiver Handbook



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# Welcome Letter

Dear Parent or Caregiver,

I would like to extend a very warm welcome to you and your family. I'm committed to providing the best possible therapeutic experience for each and every client entrusted in my care.

To facilitate communication with you, I've created this handbook to assist you and your family in making the most of your time with me. I believe that no one knows a child more than their caregivers, and embrace the opportunity to work closely with you to best support your child.

Anna Raworth, MSW RSW  
*Child and Family Therapist*

# Contact

Open communication and collaboration with caregivers are vital to a child's success in therapy. As thoughts, questions or concerns arise during our time together, I encourage you to contact me to book an appointment by:

Phone: (289) 799-9622

Email: [anna@acorncounselling.org](mailto:anna@acorncounselling.org)

Please allow 24 hours for a response.

To book an appointment, visit: <http://oab.owlpractice.ca/acorncounseling/1/calendar>

## Hours & Location

Acorn Counselling  
71 Rymal rd W.  
Hamilton, Ontario, L9B 1B5

Tuesday	9:00 am - 5:00 pm
Wednesday	9:00 am - 8:00 pm
Saturday (on occasion)	9:00 am - 1:00 pm

### Parking:

Access to the property is only from the eastbound lanes on Rymal. You are welcome to park in one of the 4 parking spots in the front of the building. Otherwise, there is ample parking in the plaza across the street.

### Transit options:

- 35 bus up Upper James onto Rymal rd W
- 44 bus goes across Rymal rd.
- 20 & 27 buses on Upper James at Rymal rd will be a short walk

# About the Therapist



Hello! My name is Anna Raworth. I'm a Registered Social Worker (RSW) who has supported children and families for 10 years. As a social worker, and previously a Child and Youth Worker, I have worked in various settings and cared for children and youth with a diverse range of abilities and challenges.

From these experiences, I've had the privilege of witnessing the profound capacity and desire for growth, healing and connection inherent in all children. I am passionate about helping kids discover their inner strengths and empowering them to resolve their own life challenges.

I received my Master of Social Work from the University of Windsor, and Bachelor of Child and Youth Care from Ryerson University. I hold specialized training in play therapy through the Canadian Association for Play Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) through the Beck Institute, and trauma-responsive approaches. I am continuously learning and upgrading and love my work.

I am licensed through the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers, and am a professional member of the Ontario Association of Social Workers, Canadian Association for Play Therapy, and am a Certified Child and Youth Care Practitioner through the CYCCB.

# Consent

It is your right to know all there is to know about the therapy your child is receiving, including any expected outcomes, potential risks and benefits. It is also important that your child is included in the decision-making process as well.

To support your family in making an informed decision, the consent process actively involves both you and your child through a comprehensive intake assessment as well as ongoing discussions throughout the course of therapy.

Written consent is required for:

- Starting therapy
- Sharing personal information from another care provider
- Filming sessions for supervision purposes (if applicable)
- Appointing an alternate decision maker to make medical/personal decisions in the event that you are away

# Confidentiality

I am committed to protecting the privacy of your child's personal and health information. All aspects of care, treatment and activities are documented and secured in your child's electronic records, and will not be disclosed outside of my practice without your consent.

## **Public Encounters**

It's a small world! It is possible we might bump into each other in public. As your family's confidentiality and safety is my priority, I will never initiate contact or approach you outside of the clinic. You are absolutely welcome to ignore me and I will never take offence to it! Alternatively, if you are comfortable making contact in public, I would be happy to respond.

## **Social Media**

My social media accounts are for education and marketing purposes only. Confidential information including photos of client work and stories will never be shared. Please note, past and current clients risk breaching confidentiality if they choose to follow and comment on any of these accounts. To honour ethical boundaries and privacy, I will not "follow" or accept requests from any clients.

# Play Therapy

Play is the natural language of children and is essential to their optimal development. It is how they express themselves, connect with others and understand the world around them.

Play therapy is a form of psychotherapy that is developmentally-appropriate for children experiencing challenges in their lives. When facilitated in a therapeutic way, play can help your child express their worries, better manage distress, rehearse new skills and strengthen relationships with the important people in their lives.

Emotional, social and behavioural issues are often signs your child is struggling with something beyond their capacity to deal with. Play therapy can strengthen essential life skills, such as:

- Attention and focus
- Self-regulation
- Impulse control
- Flexible thinking
- Perspective-taking
- Empathy
- Problem-solving
- Self-esteem
- Relaxation techniques
- Positive self-talk

Play therapy can also enhance family relationships and further strengthen the foundation for healthy social-emotional development. You will be supported in meeting the unique emotional needs of your child and broadening your toolkit to best tackle day-to-day challenges.

## **How does play therapy work?**

Your child is most capable of growing and healing when they feel safe. Compared to traditional talk therapies, play therapy offers an environment

that is more natural, engaging, and less threatening to children. Play therapy is based on a safe and secure therapeutic relationship, where the child can feel seen, heard, respected, and completely accepted. This sense of safety allows the child to express themselves freely and ultimately focus on their own inner work.

The Play Therapist is a highly trained and skilled Master's level clinician who can form a therapeutic relationship with the child by allowing the child to lead while skillfully reflecting their feelings, words, and actions in a non-judgemental and accepting way. This reflection allows the child to see themselves in a new way, hear their own thoughts, recognize their own feelings, and ultimately solve their own problems.

Through sessions, I hold the space for the child while continually assessing their needs and their mental health. By staying attuned to the child's inner world, their temperament, pacing, and themes that emerge, I am able to gently guide the child in the direction of their treatment goals through the use of a wide range of techniques and tools. Some of these techniques include sandtray, art, imagination and pretend play, and play-based cognitive behavioural therapy.

I also work closely with parents and/or caregivers on how best to support their child during and after therapy. This can include sharing resources, offering and practicing strategies, and sometimes involving you in our sessions to further strengthen your relationship and support you with developing the skills to create this space within your relationship as well.

### **How is play therapy different from letting my child play at home?**

Free play is absolutely important for healthy growth and development. However, when your child experiences a stress or a particularly difficult challenge that is beyond their ability to manage, they can become stuck. A

professional specifically trained in play therapy can provide a safe, non-judgemental presence to help them move forward.

### **Does OHIP/health insurance cover play therapy?**

Play Therapy is not covered by government health insurance in Ontario. Oftentimes, extended health benefits do provide coverage for psychotherapy services. Check with your provider to ensure that they cover services provided by a Registered Social Worker (RSW). Services provided by Registered Social Workers are exempt from HST.

### **Is play therapy supported by research?**

Yes. Evidence shows that play therapy is an effective means for children to communicate and work through their challenges. For accurate, peer-reviewed research related to play therapy, visit: [www.evidencebasedchildtherapy.com](http://www.evidencebasedchildtherapy.com)

# What To Expect

## Step 1: Initial Phone Consultation

This is a chance for us to discuss whether play therapy might be a good fit for you and your family. If you prefer to chat in person, we can arrange to meet at the clinic where you will also receive a full tour of our space.

Free | 20 minutes | Children welcome.

Please call or email to book your initial phone consultation.

## Step 2: Intake Process

During this meeting, we will complete an in-depth history, review your goals and collaboratively develop a treatment plan. We will also have the opportunity to chat about the play therapy process in greater detail, including any potential risks, benefits and expected outcomes. My role is to support you in making decisions that are fully informed, feel right to you, and serve the best interests of your child.

\$150 | 75 minutes | Caregivers only.

Book an Initial Visit [here](#).

## Step 3: Rapport Building

After our Initial Visit, we can begin booking play therapy sessions. At the start of therapy, our focus is on building a safe and trusting therapeutic relationship. This lays the groundwork for successful outcomes, and usually takes about 4 to 6 sessions. Your child may require fewer or more sessions depending on their history, personality and reasons for seeking therapy.

\$125 | 50 minutes

Book a Subsequent Visit [here](#).

## Step 4: Treatment Process

Once your child feels safe and comfortable, they might begin working on the issues troubling them all on their own. My role is to facilitate this process if they become stuck and gently guide them towards their treatment goals through a variety of techniques.

The number of total sessions your child requires will vary depending on their unique needs, presenting concerns and overall progress. Together we can continue to reassess whether fewer or more sessions would most benefit your child.

## Step 5: Feedback Meetings

This is an opportunity for us to discuss how your child is doing in therapy and identify areas where I can further support you as a parent or caregiver. During these meetings, we will also reassess treatment goals, confirm ongoing consent and chat about any concerns, questions or feedback you may have.

\$125 | 50 minutes | Caregivers only.

Book a Caregiver Feedback Meeting [here](#).

## Step 6: Ending Therapy

Deciding when to end therapy can be determined by a number of factors. You and your child may feel there is no longer a need for therapy when:

- Your child displays less dependence and expresses their needs openly;
- There is less need to engage in play that is regressive, aggressive or destructive;
- Your child reports fewer and less intense worries or fears;

- There is evidence of positive change outside the playroom (home, school, peer relationships);
- You and your child feel there are adequate supports beyond play therapy;
- Your child notices changes within themselves and can compare current behaviour with their earlier, different reactions;
- Your child reports feeling like they don't need to come anymore; or
- Your child feels like they have achieved their goals

The process for actual termination typically requires about 3 to 4 sessions to provide children the time to work through any emerging feelings about no longer having this area of support. It is typical to see some regressive behaviours during this time.

# Tips for Success

Here are some ways to help you prepare your child for therapy and support them throughout the treatment process.

## **1. Introduce the topic during a calm and connected moment.**

When we are upset, we have less access to our thinking brains. We might be more likely to use words we didn't intend to use and frame therapy as a form of punishment. It's also harder for children to process new information when the emotional parts of their brain are activated.

A good opportunity might be while you're enjoying a snack together after school, during dinnertime or when you're snuggling together before bed. Start preparing your child at least 2 to 3 days in advance for younger children and at least one week for older ones.

## **2. Be open and transparent about what a play therapist does and what to expect.**

It's important to normalize therapy and show there are many ways to ask for help. Let your child know they will be seeing someone who helps kids with their worries and big feelings. Show them photos in this handbook.

Try not to tell your child that they need to be fixed, or that they are going to play therapy for bad behaviour. This can decrease self-esteem, create a negative association with therapy and potentially hinder progress before therapy begins.

### **3. Arrange a meet-and-greet before your child's first appointment.**

Meet me in-person and have a full tour of the playroom! This brief visit might give your child a better sense of what to expect and lessen any worries.

### **4. Understand that it might get worse, before it gets better.**

As your child develops new understandings of their feelings and experiences, it is typical to see changes in behaviour at home, school and in therapy. Celebrate your child's effort and small successes as they learn to navigate big feelings and adopt new coping strategies.

### **5. Keep me in the loop and share any relevant information.**

If there are significant events or updates on your child and family, please let me know so I can plan accordingly. In some cases, it might be best to chat when your child is not present so concerns can be discussed freely.

### **6. Respect your child's confidentiality.**

How did it go? What did you talk about? Did you tell your play therapist about \_\_\_\_? It is normal for caregivers to want to ask these questions after a session. If children feel pressured to share information, or that their confidentiality may be violated, they may be less inclined to open up and be themselves in therapy.

Keep in mind progress takes time. If at anytime you would like an update, have questions or need to raise a concern, you are welcome to contact me via phone, email or through our scheduled Caregiver Feedback Meetings.

# Example Explanations of Play Therapy

You know what? Sometimes we have really big feelings\*. And that's okay. I have them too. Sometimes, though, feelings can get so big we don't know what to do with them.

When things seem really hard or when our feelings get too big, though, something we can do is ask for help. There's a person we're going to meet who helps kids and families, just like us, with big feelings.

They actually have a playroom where you can play with different types of toys and games. This is what it looks like. *(Refer to photos in this handbook.)*

*\*Replace "big feelings" with "worries" if appropriate.*

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I know it's been tough after (major event/transition). I think you might enjoy some special time in a playroom. There's a place we can go to that has toys, games, sand, arts and crafts. But it's different than other play places! There won't be any other kids there, so it would be just for you.

It's a place where you can have fun and be yourself. Want to see what it looks like? *(Refer to photos in this handbook.)* There's also a person there to help you if you need it, or play with you if you want them to.

# Planning Your Visit

Navigating unfamiliar spaces and meeting new people can be overwhelming. To help make your visits as comfortable and stress-free as possible, here is a run-down of what to expect when you arrive and how my space was designed with families in mind.

If you require any additional information or accommodations, please don't hesitate to contact me at [anna@acorncounselling.org](mailto:anna@acorncounselling.org).

## Accessibility

My office is located on the second floor of a large converted house. There are steps leading to the front door, and no ramps or elevators available.

There is a shared waiting room on the main floor with comfortable couches, and also a washroom available for client use.

Here is what you can expect for the building, parking lot, and waiting area:



## What To Bring

Comfortable clothes for your child to play in! You can also pack an extra set of clothes in case our session gets messy. Your child is welcome to bring a security item if needed. Please note, I am not responsible for any personal items that go missing.

## Waiting Room

We share a waiting area/space with other professionals, including another psychotherapist, a massage therapist, and a photography business. The waiting area is equipped with comfy couches, and there are some magazines, crayons and colouring pages for your use.



## Play Therapy Room

The play therapy room at this time is not a strict or traditional play room, and is set up in a more versatile way as I see teens, adults and families as well. This means that there are many toys and tools that are available, but that are not always visible. I bring out some of the materials when expecting children for play therapy.

The space itself is specifically designed to foster safety, expression, and exploration. It is set up to feel safe and grounding. Every toy and play material in the space serves a therapeutic purpose, and has been carefully chosen for Play Therapy work.

Here is what you can expect in the counselling room:



## Siblings

Siblings are welcome to play in the waiting room while your child is in session. Please note, siblings are the responsibility of the parents or caregivers and must be supervised at all times. If, for any reason, you are experiencing difficulty in meeting this requirement, please let us know and we will do our best to access resources or assist with alternative arrangements.

## Medical Needs

If your child has complex medical needs, we can work together alongside your multidisciplinary team to form a treatment plan that is safe, inclusive and developmentally-appropriate.

# Important Guidelines

## Payment

Payment in full is expected at the end of each visit. Payment is accepted in the form of cash, credit card, or e-transfer.

Initial Phone Consultation (30 min)	Free
Initial Visit (75 min)	\$150.00
Subsequent Visit (50 min)	\$125.00
Caregiver Feedback Session (50 min)	\$125.00

## Cancellation

Your appointment time is reserved just for you. Please provide at least **24 hours** notice before cancelling a scheduled appointment. If you fail to give timely notice, you will be charged the full session fee. Exceptions can be made in the event of an emergency.

## Illness

If your child has a **fever of 38°C** (100.4°F) or more, has **diarrhea, vomiting** or is **coughing significantly**, please consider staying home and notify us of your cancellation as soon as you can. This is for the protection of both your sick child and other clients visiting the office.

We can reschedule your appointment after your child is **symptom-free for at least 24 hours**. Children with known communicable diseases (i.e., chicken pox, mumps, measles, tuberculosis, whooping cough, etc.) must be kept at home for the length of time recommended by Public Health.

## Limit Setting

The play therapy room is a safe space where your child is encouraged to be their true selves. It is common for aggressive behaviours and testing of limits to emerge during early sessions.

In the play therapy room, limits are set on an as-needed basis in a way that is clear, reasonable and compassionate. Role modelling, re-directing, cooperative problem solving and specific strategies using movement, music and play are also integrated to promote self-regulation.

## Conduct

Harassment and discrimination is solely prohibited from any party.

If, at any point, an individual feels uncomfortable, threatened, abused or belittled, they may immediately end the conversation or interaction and report the situation to myself ([anna@acorncounselling.org](mailto:anna@acorncounselling.org)) or through our anonymous feedback form linked at the end of this handbook.

## Accidents or Injuries

During your child's session, you are required to remain on the premises and will always be contacted immediately if, in any circumstance, your child is showing signs of distress or need for emergency response.

For minor scrapes and cuts, we have a first aid kit on-hand. You will be guided on the most appropriate action (i.e., visit emergency, walk-in clinic, etc.), or 9-1-1 will be called if the concern is urgent.

## Suspected Child Abuse

Everyone is required by law to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. If a parent or guardian expresses concerns that a child is being abused or neglected, they will be advised to contact the local Children's Aid Society (CAS) directly. We can do this together and support you in this process.

Any person who becomes aware of such concerns are also responsible for reporting this information to CAS as per the "Duty to Report" requirements under the *Child and Family Services Act*.

For more information, visit [www.children.gov.on.ca](http://www.children.gov.on.ca).

# Feedback

As part of my commitment to quality care, I value any feedback you may have as a client, parent, caregiver, family member or visitor.

If you would like to communicate about your play therapy experience, please fill out our Feedback Form at:

**<https://forms.gle/PQKxAnGgV4eemmUw9>**

This form can be completed anonymously.

# Mental Health Resources

Last updated: September 2019

## 24-Hour Crisis Lines

### Hamilton-Based

COAST: (905) 972-8338 or TTY 1-844-972-8338

Barrett Centre for Crisis Support: (905) 529-4343 or TTY 1-844-777-3571

Distress Centre of Hamilton: (905) 522-8611

Salvation Army Suicide Crisis Line: (905) 522-1477

Victim Services: (905) 546-4904

Sexual Assault Centre (SACHA): (905) 525-4162

Interval House: (905) 387-8881

### Ontario-Based

Ontario Mental Health Helpline: 1-866-531-2600

Ontario Drug & Alcohol Helpline: 1-800-565-8603

Ontario Problem Gambling Helpline: 1-888-230-3505

Good2Talk: 1-866-925-5454 or connect through 2-1-1 (For post-secondary students)

### Canada-Wide

LGBT Youthline: 1-800-268-9688

Trans Lifeline: 1-877-330-6366

Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868 / text CONNECT to 686868

911 or your nearest Hospital Emergency unit

## Walk-In Clinics

*Check websites or call ahead for hours of operation and wait times.*

Youth Wellness Centre  
(905) 522-1155 ext/ 31725  
38 James st. S., 2nd floor  
<https://reachouthamilton.ca/>  
*Serves: ages 17-25, must be registered with YWC*

Child and Adolescent Services  
(416) 395-0660  
100 Main st E., Suite 220  
<https://www.hamilton.ca/>  
*Serves: ages 17-25, must be registered with YWC*

Reach Out Centre for Kids (ROCK)  
(905) 634-2347  
471 Pearl St. Burlington  
<https://rockonline.ca/>  
*Serves: 0-18, families*

## Free Community Counseling Services

Contact Hamilton  
(905) 570-8888  
<https://contacthamilton.com/main/>

211 Toronto  
Call 2-1-1 and ask for specific services in your area  
[www.211toronto.ca](http://www.211toronto.ca)

Mental Health Helpline  
1-866-531-2600  
[www.mentalhealthhelpline.ca](http://www.mentalhealthhelpline.ca)

## Support Services: LGBTQ+

Rainbow Mentors (for children and youth)

(289) 389-2061

<https://rainbowmentors.org/>

P-Flag Hamilton

(888) 530-6777

<http://pflaghamiltonwentworth.ca/>

The SPACE Youth Centre (formerly NGen)

On FB @TheSPACEyouth

<http://www.ngenyouth.ca>

Rainbow Health Ontario

[www.rainbowhealthtoronto.ca](http://www.rainbowhealthtoronto.ca)

## Support Services: Sexual Assaults and Abuse

SACHA - Sexual Assault Centre

(905) 525-4573

<http://sacha.ca/>

Mission Services (L.E.A.F program)

(905) 528-5100 ext. 3132

<https://mission-services.com/about-our-work/youth/>

Women's Centre of Hamilton/ Interval House

(905) 387-9959

<https://intervalhousehamilton.org/>

McMaster Children's Hospital (counselling for sexual assault for under age 18)  
(905) 521-2100 ext. 73557  
<https://www.hamiltonhealthsciences.ca/areas-of-care/emergency-care/sexual-assault-domestic-violence/>

## **Support Services: Substance Abuse, Addictions, Gambling**

Alternatives for Youth (AY)  
(905) 527-4469  
<https://ay.on.ca/>

Alcohol Drugs and Gamblers Services of Hamilton (ADGS)  
(905) 546-3606  
[www.camh.ca/en/your-care/programs-and-services](http://www.camh.ca/en/your-care/programs-and-services)

Mission Services  
(905) 528-0389  
<https://mission-services.com/about-our-work/addiction/>

Drug and Alcohol Helpline  
1-800-565-8603  
[www.drugandalcoholhelpline.ca](http://www.drugandalcoholhelpline.ca)

## **Support Services: Eating Disorders, Disordered Eating Patterns**

Body Brave  
<https://livingbodybrave.com/>

NEDIC  
[www.nedic.ca](http://www.nedic.ca)

## Find a Primary Health Care Provider

Health Care Connect

[www.health.gov.on.ca/en/ms/healthcareconnect/pro](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/ms/healthcareconnect/pro)

## Find a Private Psychotherapist

Psychology Today

[www.therapists.psychologytoday.com/rms/prof\\_search.php](http://www.therapists.psychologytoday.com/rms/prof_search.php)

*Online directory to find a psychotherapist near your area*

## Find a Social Worker

[www.findasocialworker.ca](http://www.findasocialworker.ca)

*Online directory to find a private practice social worker*