

The Benefits of Trauma Toys

1. When a traumatized child plays with a toy, it is easy for people such as police, paramedics, fire brigade officers, social workers, nurses, and doctors etc to see when the child is not coping by the way the child uses the toy to act out their fears.
2. One of the best ways to help children with behavioural and emotional problems is through an approach known as play therapy. Play therapy is a psychotherapeutic treatment approach specifically developed to help children between the ages of three to 12 years old.
3. Toys facilitate healing from stressful or traumatic experiences

“Sometimes children go through experiences that are stressful or traumatic for them. These difficult experiences that children go through may not enter their minds in a normal manner and can remain “stuck” or even out of awareness. The feelings associated with these experiences can also get stuck and are frequently what cause emotional and behavioural problems that adults observe in children.

In order for children to feel better and improve their behaviour, they need to make sense out of the stressful or traumatic experience and assimilate it into what they already know about the world. This is known as “processing” an experience and it usually involves expressing thoughts and feelings and coming to a new understanding about the experience, which then leads to behaviour changes.”

4. “By expressing themselves symbolically through toys in play therapy, children are allowed to distance themselves from difficult feelings and memories, which are frequently too hard for them to talk about directly with others. This gives children the opportunity to communicate their fears, worries, problems, wishes, and desires to others, even if it is done symbolically through toys. Other adults in children’s lives, such as play therapists and parents, can then get a better understanding of children’s inner worlds, which allows these adults to understand what children need in order to provide the appropriate type of help and support.”
5. Soft, sad-faced, huggable stuffed animals in the form of dogs have been distributed to over 14,000 young children in communities within reach of Hamas rockets from Gaza and Hizbullah missiles in the North to help the youngsters cope with trauma. The Hibuki dolls (called Huggy Puppy in English) were provided by the Ashalim-Joint Distribution Committee as part of a study by Prof. Avi Sadeh of Tel Aviv University on half of a group of 74 five-year-olds to see whether they helped the children overcome their fears. The results of the research have been published in the journal *Paediatrics* and - to the research team's surprise.

The children, who were living with their families in bomb shelters, were told the puppy was sad because he was far from home, had no friends and needed help from a friend. A study of parents' testimony reported that nearly 83 percent of the children had experienced one or more symptom of severe stress, such as separation fears; nervousness or aggression; strong reactions to noise; excessive

crying; or nightmares and trouble sleeping, the researchers wrote. Three weeks later, the children who had the most powerful connection to their dog showed reduced stress levels compared to children who did not receive Hibuki. A follow-up two months later showed that 71% had lost their severe stress reactions, twice as many as those children who served as controls. Researchers are now studying whether the huggable doll can help children who are suffering from other life crises, such as divorce or illness.

6. Paramedics can show a child exactly what they need to do to the child to help them after a car crash by using the toy as another victim. It helps the child understand exactly what has to be done and the child can then relate to the toy as having gone through the same trauma as well; especially when so young.
7. Trauma toys can be cuddled when a parent or guardian cannot be with the child to comfort them. In times of disasters and crashes, the parents are often taken to hospital in a second ambulance if they are suffering critical injuries.
8. Trauma toys can be hugged hard whilst the child is receiving treatment for a broken bone or needs a needle inserted into their arm or urgent stitches. It frees up the paramedic to apply treatment fast so that the child can be taken to hospital.
9. A trauma toy given to a child after a fire has destroyed their home; gives them a sense that 'all is not lost' and they have one thing at least that wasn't burned in the fire.
10. Trauma toys also keep the child quiet during a horrific event so rescue crews and paramedics can concentrate on freeing other people from the circumstances in which they were hurt. They also keep their mind occupied so that they are unable to see what is happening to loved ones on extrication of bodies from crashes.
11. Trauma toys keep children occupied whilst on long journeys to hospitals in rural and Outback areas.
12. Trauma toys can help paramedics in their work by asking a traumatized child where does it hurt (on the toy). Often traumatized children won't or cannot speak but can point. They are used in the same way for sexual assault cases when police and doctors ask where the person (offender) touched them.
13. Trauma toys can be used by children to re-create the traumatic event – to themselves. Doctors, police, crash investigators, child psychologists etc.
14. Trauma toys give reassurance to the child that everything will be all right. It acts as a security blanket.
15. Trauma toys calm down children to young adults who suffer from autism to mental diseases so that they focus on one thing and do not get stressed out with too much on their mind.
16. In cases of dog attacks, giving a child a toy dog can help stop fear of all dogs occurring in a child because paramedics and police can show that it is a friendly dog and would never hurt them.

References:

- #2, #3, #4 (Kathy Eugster – MA,RCC,RPT – Counselling Psychologist; Registered clinical counsellor, Registered play therapist, child and family counsellor)

