



CONGRATULATIONS NEW RPT'S & RPT-S's



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and look for "Social Media Request" for WAAPT to give consent.

Toy of the Month: Reviewed by Board Member Kade Hodges:

This locking house has 4 separate doors with different keys/locks and different sounding doorbells. It is so popular with most of the youth I serve. The symbolism with it is powerful and it fits most little figurines, small crafts, and treasures inside of it. They can hide or secure things to their heart's desire!

Find this awesome toy here



amazon



Daisy Vergara LMHC Issaquah WA



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Femeke Britschgi Cabernard, LMHC, Seattle WA



Mei Yu Cheung, LMHC Seattle, WA

The Power of the Pick-a-Toy Box

Heather Schilling MS, LMFT, RPT-S

Years ago, when I had my first job at an agency, I noticed a powerful tool one of my fellow colleague used when working with children. She had a toy box filled with random little things (pencils, stickers, fuzzy balls, bouncy balls) that a child could pick from. Several years later, when I worked with children at a local domestic violence agency, I called upon that “treasure box” to form my own “pick-a-toy” box. I filled this box with some of the same little things, even the occasional toy from a Happy Meal 😊. As a way to signal the closure of a session, each child was provided the opportunity to take a toy home with them from the “pick-a-toy box”. At first, I will admit, I thought it just a nice gesture; a way to give children, who had endured the hardest of circumstances, a gift. Oh, and it made *me* feel better too. Then, as I moved on in my career, I started to take notice and do my own informal research. The “Pick-a-toy box” was more than just feel good ending to sometimes hard sessions. This box could actually provide me with valuable information, perhaps be its own assessment tool.

I started to take notice of how each child approached the “pick-a-toy box”. More anxious children would spend a lot of time wondering what to pick out. They might go back and forth between two different toys. They may want me to make the decision for them. Each time, I was able to provide a learning and empathic response, based on play therapy; “You are worried about making the wrong choice.” “It is hard to choose sometimes.” “You want to make sure you pick out just the right toy”. Other times, I started to notice the children who felt helpless, hopeless or even depressed. This might be the kids who look in the box and say “eh, there is nothing that I want in here”. Again, my response is simple, “You didn’t find anything you liked”, “You are choosing not to pick a toy today”. I noticed my sensory kids, who would love to explore every toy; touch it, feel it, experience it, dislike it, want

to take it out of the wrapper, or even put it in their mouth. Again, responses consist of “You really want to touch that toy”, “You really like the way that toy feels” or sometimes, “You really don’t like the way that toy feels”. I watch as children “bury” toys to keep other kids from finding ones they want to save. I watch as children remember with clarity, what toy is missing and thus must have been chosen by another child. I notice as children ask me to save a toy for them for the following week. I notice if children ask if they can pick a toy for a sibling. I notice what the child does with the toy after session. Do they proudly present it to their parent? Do they hide it in their coat pocket? Do they forget about it and leave it in the waiting room? I have learned over the years what toys not to include as well. Bouncy balls are great, but not when the child slams it hard (as most children will do) thus sending it off careening around the waiting room.



Sticky things are fun, but often end up thrown on to the ceiling and a distressed child is unable to retrieve it. Any noise makers (i.e. kazoos) are a big no-no. 😊 Stamps can be fun, but not when the 4-year-old stamps their entire face on the way to school after session. I have learned to stick to simple toys. Small animals, erasers, pencil toppers and the current favorite, squishy animals called mochi’s!

I have a few rules about my “pick-a- toy” as well. First, the “pick-a-toy” *is a given no matter the child’s action in the play room. It is NEVER based on their behavior at home. It is not a reward system.* Second, *picking a toy is never required.* If a child does not want to, they do not have to. After 12 years of having a “pick-a-toy box” in my room, I have come to realize this is constant for my clients. It helps them to own the play therapy space as theirs. They know what to expect and it provides them with the option to take a piece of their special place home with them if they like. It is also for this reason that I believe I have never had a toy stolen from my room. I believe this “pick-a-toy” box allows children an option to “choose” in times when they may feel powerless. Most importantly, it is a one on one moment I share with a child that says, “you are important”. Even my children who choose not to pick, will still look, each week. Sometimes, eventually, they even find something.....I notice that as well.

I have had a few clients come back as teenagers. They often ask me, “do you still have the “pick-a-toy box”. Even still, some ask if they can pick one and talk about the toys they remember getting when younger. I know for many of my clients, my name, my face and even my office may fade from their memory when our time is done. I hope they can remember the “pick-a-toy box” and how it made them feel.

Questions or comments about this? Feel free to email me, I would be happy to discuss: akfamilycounseling@gmail.com

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