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Therapeutic Play and Anxiety in Hospitalized Children



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Question

In hospitalized school-aged children (ages 6-12 years old), how does therapeutic play compared to no therapeutic play influence the child's anxiety?

Background

- COVID-19 pediatric hospitalization have risen significantly over the past few months with over 600 hospitalizations each day in the United States for children aged 0-17 (CDC, 2022).
- Hospitalizations can present a multitude of emotions: 1 in 10 hospitalized children experience anxiety and depression (Doupnik et. al., 2019).
- Therapeutic play utilizes various toys, drawings, tools, or videos to demonstrate a medical procedure to a child (Coşkuntürk, et. al., 2018).
- Therapeutic play allows a child to outwardly communicate with themselves, family, and healthcare staff to process emotions, which should decrease overall anxiety levels (Koukourikos et. al., 2015).

The Effects of a Therapeutic Play/Play Therapy Program on the Fear and Anxiety Levels of Hospitalized Children After Liver Transplantation (Zengin, et. al., 2021)

Description: Level III; quasi-experimental study with a pretest and posttest design.

65 children aged 6-12 were undergoing liver transplantation in Turkey.

The researchers used individualized play to relate to each child's specific fear and anxiety levels.

The children played with various toys and after 45 minutes, the researchers utilized play medical equipment to demonstrate what will happen to the child during the liver transplantation.

The State Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children (STAIC) was utilized before and after play interventions.

Results: This study found a statistically significant decrease in mean trait anxiety scores.

Examining each child's specific fear and allowing the children to play with a toy while teaching the child about liver transplantation helped decrease their anxiety levels.

The Effects of Pre-Intervention Training Provided Through Therapeutic Play on the Anxiety of Pediatric Oncology Patients During Peripheral Catherization (Orhan, et. al, 2017)

Description: Level II; randomized control trial.

40 children aged 8-12 were receiving treatment in the pediatric hematology/oncology unit in Turkey who required peripheral vascular access for cancer.

The control group had peripheral catherization.

The experimental group had nurses that educated the child and family on what peripheral vascular access is, why it is used, benefits, and how it is applied. They also utilized the Chemo Duck toy to demonstrate peripheral catherization.

The State Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children (STAIC) was utilized before and after peripheral catherization was established.

Results: This study found a statistically significant differences between the control and experimental group. The Chemo Duck therapeutic play session before peripheral catherization decreased anxiety levels of the children.

The Effect of Interactive Therapeutic Play Education Program on Anxiety Levels of Children Undergoing Cardiac Surgery and Their Mothers (Coşkuntürk, et. al., 2018)

Description: Level II; randomized control trial.

40 children aged 6-12 were undergoing surgery for congenital heart disease in Istanbul, Turkey.

The control group had nurses who educated the patients and family 24 hours prior to surgery about preoperative instructions and what will happen during surgery.

The experimental group used a therapeutic stuffed bear to educate the child and parents about the surgery for 30 minutes.

The State Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children (STAIC) was used to measure anxiety a day before surgery, the day of surgery, and after surgery.

Results: This study found statistically significant differences between the control and experimental group. The therapeutic play education interventions were effective in reducing anxiety levels of the children before and after surgery.

Conclusion

Therapeutic play interventions can help decrease anxiety levels in hospitalized school-aged children.



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Application

- Therapeutic play should be implemented in all hospital settings to help decrease anxiety levels in school-aged children.
- Using a therapeutic toy to demonstrate medical interventions is important for children to explore, act, and process about what is going to happen.
- Therefore, therapeutic play is essential in providing holistic, child-centered nursing care as it addresses the psychosocial aspects of children dealing with healthcare.