

# Game therapy

**Game therapy** is a psychotherapeutic method of a comprehensive approach in the treatment of hospitalized pediatric patients. Its main task is to minimize the stress of the child who is waiting for a hospital stay, a number of unpleasant interventions and detachment from his home environment. This therapy is performed by a game specialist in children's wards of hospitals, teachers of special elementary schools at the hospital and also medical clowns.

## Origin and development

### In the UK

The first mentions of the positive influence of the game on the psyche of a child patient come from the 50s of the last century from Great Britain. The changes were mainly due to the attitudes of psychotherapist **James Robertson**, who focused mainly on the effects of separation from the family on children. He also made **the film** (*A Two-year-old goes to hospital*), where he captured the uncertainty, anxiety and suffering of a little girl with a week's hospitalization. The reaction to this film was the so-called *Platt Report*, which was the impetus for the creation of the **Charter of the Rights of Hospitalized Children**. This was followed by the creation of experimental game programs for some British hospitals. In 1973, the first course for training game specialists was held, and 2 years later the organization NAHPS (*The National Association of Hospital Play Staff*) was formed with the current name **National Association of Health Play Specialists**. In the UK, there was a rapid introduction of the game into practice, and today almost every hospital has its own specialist.

### In the Czech Republic

In our country, this field began to develop in the 90s, especially thanks to Mrs. Peg Belson and Dr. Olga Stárková. Today, a special field of combined study Game Specialist – Dramatherapist has been created. This issue is dealt with by us eg. The Klíč Endowment Fund or the Society for Game Work. Mainly due to the **unresolved definition of the given field** in the Czech Republic, trained therapists work in approximately one third of hospitals with children's inpatient departments.

## Progress

The course of game therapy can never be precisely planned in advance. It is necessary to adapt **individually** to each child. The game therapist often takes the patient already at the outpatient clinic. He becomes his guide. First, she shows him the environment of the ward, first of all the playroom, and then leads him to the room and to his bed. She introduces him to fellow patients. Then he will go through the whole department and show other important places where the child will move during his stay. First, the therapist tries **to gain the patient's trust** and partially get to know him. Later, he starts talking to the child about what awaits him. The main principle is **not to lie to the child**, but to explain everything to him simply and encourage him. Puppets are often used for demonstration, on which, if possible, the procedure is shown and the child is also informed – now it will burn a little, it will be unpleasant, but you can handle it. At the same time, the therapist holds the child's hand and tries to support him as much as possible. **Cooperation also takes place with parents**, who cannot always be hospitalized with the child and are psychologically worse off than the child patient himself. That's why the game therapist talks to them about their child's illness. They try to explain everything to them. The poor psychological state of the parent is largely transmitted to the child.

To prepare for the procedure, the patient's bed is used, to which he is accustomed and already has a piece of "territory". He has his things here and feels relatively safe in private. A very proven method is to play experiences after an already performed performance. The child is no longer so agitated and can additionally clarify the treatment procedures with the help of play. The child is then calmer during repeated performance and manages the situation better.

## Effect of Game Therapy

A properly chosen program will make it easier for the child to stay in the hospital, **distract him** and help him overcome sadness, fear, pain and hopelessness. With the help of the game, the patient can be **prepared for a medical examination** and performance. Through it, he expresses and "lives" fear and apprehension. He also understands the need for hospital care. The child **better expresses his feelings**, replays some problems and solves them through play. Thanks to the game, even in an unusual situation, such as a hospital stay, the child can feel like any other day. Games help parents cope more easily with their child's situation and help medical staff care for their child.

## Widgets

### Written and pictorial materials

- Coloring book,

- brochures,
- Books,
- photo albums with photos of the procedures that await the patient (game specialists usually make them themselves).

## Demonstration Aids

- Children's own toys,
- specially prepared dolls (with introduced infusion, etc.),
- Puppets,
- original medical instruments.

## Leisure time aids

- Art supplies,,
- natural materials,
- Toys, balls.

## Links

### Related articles

- Exposure therapy

### References

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