

# Family Enhancement & Play Therapy Center, Inc.



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## Filial Therapy

Filial Therapy was conceived in the early 1960s by Drs. Bernard and Louise Guerney, and it has been extensively developed and researched for over 40 years. Filial Therapy is a psycho educational family intervention in which the therapist trains and supervises parents as they hold special child-centered play sessions with their own children, thereby engaging parents as partners in the therapeutic process and empowering them to be the primary change agents for their own children. Filial Therapy represents a theoretical integration of a number of orientations into a comprehensive approach to eliminate presenting problems, improve parent-child relationships, and strengthen the family system as a whole. It has wide applicability with very consistent research results indicating significant improvements in (a) child problems, (b) parents' skills, (c) parents' acceptance of their children, (d) parent satisfaction, and (e) gains maintained up to 5 years, as well as significant decreases in (a) parents' stress levels, (b) therapy drop-out rates, and (c) excessive utilization of services.

Filial Therapy has been used successfully as a preventive program to strengthen families as well as a therapeutic intervention for many child/family problems: anxiety, depression, abuse/neglect, single parenting, adoption/foster-care/kinship-care, attachment disruptions, high conflict divorce, family substance abuse, traumatic events, oppositionality, anger/aggression problems, chronic medical illness, step-parenting, relationship problems, multi-problem families, and so on. It also has very high multicultural applicability and has been rapidly growing in use throughout the world. Other adaptations include its use with Head Start families, elementary teachers, high school students, and paraprofessionals.

Filial Therapy is a relatively short-term intervention with demonstrated long-term results. It can be used with groups of parents or with individual families. The basic phases of the therapy are listed below.

- Thorough assessment, including a family play observation
- Play session demonstration (therapist holds nondirective play sessions with each child while parents observe)
- Training (therapist uses mock play sessions with prompting, modeling, reinforcement, and shaping; usually three 1-hour sessions)
- Supervised parent-child play sessions, followed by therapist feedback and discussion with parents
- Discussion of play themes, parent reactions, family dynamics, and problem-solving with parents
- Home play sessions, with parents reporting the results regularly to the therapist
- Generalization of skills
- Phased-out discharge process

Some key references on Filial Therapy are listed below.

- *Filial Therapy: Strengthening Parent-Child Relationships Through Play*, VanFleet, 2005 (2nd ed.); 1994; Sarasota, FL: Professional Resource Press. (also translated into Japanese)
- *Introduction to Filial Play Therapy*--video workshop, VanFleet, 1999; Boiling Springs, PA: Play Therapy Press.
- *A Parent's Handbook of Filial Play Therapy*, VanFleet, 2000; Boiling Springs, PA: Play Therapy Press. (several translations are in process)
- *Casebook of Filial Therapy*, Van Fleet & Guerney, Eds., 2003, Boiling Springs, PA: Play Therapy Press.
- *Filial Therapy: A Critical Review*, VanFleet, Ryan, & Smith. (2005), in Reddy, Files-Hall, & Schaefer (Eds.). *Empirically-Based Play Interventions for Children (241-264)*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- *Play Therapy for Traumatic Events*, Van Fleet & Kaduson, in press, Boiling Springs, PA: Play Therapy Press (includes section on Filial Therapy).
- Hundreds of other chapters, articles, and research studies on the efficacy of Filial Therapy are also available.

For more information about resources and professional workshops, contact the Family Enhancement & Play Therapy Center at the address, phone, or website below.

[www.play-therapy.com](http://www.play-therapy.com)

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