

BOOK REVIEWS

Solution-Focused Play Therapy: A Strengths-Based Clinical Approach to Play Therapy by Elizabeth Kjellstrand Hartwig

Stephan Natynczuk^a

Keywords: play, play therapy, adventure, outdoors

<https://doi.org/10.59874/001c.126168>

Journal of Solution Focused Practices

Vol. 8, Issue 2, 2024

The book takes us from the first phone call with a caregiver to ending the work with a child, with many helpful insights and observations along the way. The section on the history of SF and its application to play therapy would be useful to anyone working with SF and children, as it would be for anyone wanting to read more widely about using SF.

Solution-Focused Play Therapy: A Strengths-Based Clinical Approach to Play Therapy by Elizabeth Kjellstrand Hartwig

Routledge, 2021, 266 pages, ISBN 9780429354984, £31.99 paperback (Kindle edition available)

I was intrigued by the request to review this book, and surprised that it has been in print since 2021. How did I not know of its existence? (*We couldn't get hold of a review copy! Ed.*) I have not dipped into play therapy much, although I am keen on combining activity with solution focused (SF) conversations, especially when the activity is outside the therapy room and full of adventure (exploring caves, rivers, mountains — that sort of adventure). I enjoyed the book greatly, finding many common elements between Hartwig's Solution-Focused Play Therapy (SFPT) and how I practice Solution-Focused Adventure Therapy. I use play in an adventure situation — exploring, testing self, co-operation, shared responsibility for safety, etc — along with SF conversations, and witnessing clients at their best for hours. I found much to reflect on when comparing techniques of working with SF with children and young people in both types of play indoors and outdoors, as there is much common ground; I found this refreshing and affirming, and I am grateful for that. There are, it seems, few SF adventure therapists to compare notes with, so I found this book very interesting and useful. Reading it has helped deepen my practice, and I recommend it.

I was pleased to read about ways to engage children of all ages with games, play, and playfulness, especially as I have long been sceptical of the use of games to help practitioners guess what the problem is. I have seen

^a Stephan Natynczuk is co-author of *Solution-Focused Practice in Outdoor Therapy: Co-Adventuring for Change*, and a keen advocate for SF with adventure. Email sparekrab@icloud.com

a fair amount of that at conferences and workshops over the past three decades, and this text offered an antidote to that guessing game. So, to read about SF practice in its nonverbal and verbal forms with what at first appeared to be prescribed activities was refreshing. I make much use of nonverbal SF in my adventure work, so I was extra pleased to see a different angle to this approach. I particularly liked the discussion of getting children to create self-value by doing things for themselves, as I also use this technique within adventure experiences, gradually facilitating self-reliance and self-efficacy, ideally to the point I can trust clients to look after their own and others' safety.

The book takes us from the first phone call with a caregiver to ending the work with a child, with many helpful insights and observations along the way. The section on the history of SF and its application to play therapy would be useful to anyone working with SF and children, as it would be for anyone wanting to read more widely about using SF. I would have liked to have read more about supervision of play therapists, a little more about SF as a social therapy in the context of family work — setting a climate of competence, working with trauma and dissociation, and outdoor adventurous play; probably because those topics are special interests of mine. Perhaps they will appear in the second edition? The author recommends additional training in play therapy, suggesting to me that the book is part of guiding practitioners into SF play therapy. I found lots of information on how to work with children, so this book is a good place to start if you are thinking about how your own SF skills transfer to activity-based SF practice, especially play, whether indoors or outdoors. I found it very useful CPD.

The inclusion of discussions on the restorative power of play, neurobiology, modernism and postmodernism, and constructivist theory were written to be read without the reader struggling with an overload of technical jargon; this helped ground SFPT in counselling theory, and justify it as a thing to be taken seriously. I found this useful, and suggest many practitioners would also do so. There is still work to be done, though: Chapter 10 concentrates on family work, and starts with an appeal to integrate play and family therapy, something that has been slow to happen. It is to be hoped that this book will make a difference to speeding up this union.

Even though I consider myself a seasoned practitioner of SF with adventures, I found numerous insights that either informed me or I recognised as something I do intuitively. I found the text an exercise in reflection in many places, and I'm grateful to the author for that. The appendices are a thoughtful compilation of resources to help both new and seasoned practitioners stay efficient.

The two days I spent reading the book were time well spent, and I am happy to recommend it as a helpful introduction SFPT, to working with young children in particular, and as a good book on SF for practitioners working in schools with children and younger teenagers.

Submitted: October 30, 2024 GMT, Accepted: November 10, 2024 GMT



This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CCBY-4.0). View this license's legal deed at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0> and legal code at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode> for more information.