

GUIDELINES ON THE BACKGROUND AND THE THERAPEUTIC SETTING INCLUDING PLAYROOM RULES

by Therese Woodcock on Dr Margaret Lowenfeld's work

Before I give you the guidelines for an actual session, I would like to begin by giving you a sense of the kind of structure which underpins the setting in which a therapeutic session with a child takes place. So that you can evolve a style of your own and one which answers the occasion.

Here I am likely to mention things which you already do or know about, but for the sake of completion, I hope you will overlook the fact that I may be talking about things you are already familiar with.

Preparation before the session

Background Information

Before one begins a session, especially a first session, you need to bear certain facts in mind. You will have had certain information about this child; you may have asked for certain other information.

Whatever the information you have about the child you are going to see in a moment, gather it and have it in mind before collecting the child from the waiting room. This will

become easier when you next meet the child. Depending on the complexity of the case, this gathering of your mind's attention need not occupy more than a few minutes but you will find this an invaluable aid to your therapeutic work.

Always update this information on an ongoing, easily available front sheet of your notes.

Guidelines on the room setting

Playroom furniture & materials

I would first like to say something about the room in which the Mosaic and World equipment are located.

It is important to remember the reason for any equipment (see also Appendix 3 in Handbook) you provide for the child to use. For children, play or action is the natural expressive medium so that, beside the Mosaic and World material you will need to have many modes of expression available for the child to use. If it is at all possible to have a sink at the height for a child to use. water worlds become a possibility. In the matter of provision of materials. good housekeeping practice (like not running out of paints or paper) applies!

Lowenfeld laid great stress on the therapist being positioned so that the adult has to look up to the child. This not only changes, if only temporarily. the normal positions between child and adult, but reminds the adult a tiny bit of what it feels like to be little and always littler. In this way you will be communicating something of the therapeutic attitude by the very objects you provide within the room.

[1] Essentially. you are providing not only a child friendly environment. you are providing an obvious and decidedly child-centred environment.

[2] You are saying to the child: "I understand that play is a form of self-expression and a serious matter for you."; "I hope we have most of the things you will need so you can tell me properly": and, "I am serious about listening to what you have to say".

Playroom Rules and Boundary Setting

Now to turn to boundaries within the therapeutic setting: - Should there be rules within a therapeutic session?

- Should they be articulated or should the child discover them gradually as the occasion arises?
- If you have playroom rules, are you clear why you have them: Consider the message you want to get across & which rules matter and why? & Should these rules apply to you as well as the child?
- Should the same rules apply to all the children you see?
- Apart from safety, should you also take into account your own needs? eg Mess (make rules that you are comfortable with, rather than only on principle).
- What about confidentiality?
- How would you reconcile confidentiality with statutory obligations?
- What and when would you say to the child about child protection issues?