

Improving Concentration, Creativity, and Motor Skills through SAVARI (Save All Memories) Play Therapy for Children with Special Needs

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ABSTRACT

Children with special needs face various barriers to learning and development. Play therapy is one way to help them develop optimally and perform their social functions effectively. Play therapy is a therapeutic activity that utilizes toys and games to facilitate children's expression of various emotions, including happiness, sadness, anger, resentment, depression, and others. The goal of this activity is to help children with special needs increase their concentration and develop creativity and motor skills. The method of implementing play therapy in children with special needs involves several approaches and strategies tailored to individual needs, including group play therapy, structured play therapy, visual techniques, and motor training through penguin gymnastics. Activities are divided into several sessions. During the first session, we divided the children into three groups using a division system that involved coloring paper pictures of three different types of animals. Once the coloring session concluded, the children transitioned to the next activity, which involved arranging pyramids using plastic cups to enhance their concentration, despite their frequent distractions in practice. The last activity is for children to do motor exercises with penguin gymnastics. Children with special needs follow each session according to the therapist's direction. We hope that the child's parents will participate regularly and schedule the activities to ensure the program's sustainability.

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INTRODUCTION

Children with special needs face various barriers to learning and development that can affect their ability to reach their full potential. These barriers include cognitive and academic difficulties, such as problems in reading, writing and counting, which are often experienced by children with developmental disorders of intelligence and cognition (Rahmawati et al., 2021). In addition, physical barriers such as visual, hearing or motor impairments can also hinder their access to learning materials. Children with communication disorders, such as speech impairment or autism, often struggle to express themselves and understand instructions, while emotional and behavioral disorders can hinder their ability to interact socially and manage emotions (Una et al., 2023).

Children with special needs are children who require specific services with tailored educational approaches and comprehensive support to help them develop optimally and perform their social functions well (Molina Roldán et al., 2021). Therefore, they need educational services that are tailored to their individual learning needs. In this case, the therapy that is usually given to children with special needs, such as autism, is play therapy (Sukiatni & Sakina, 2020).

Two basic words, namely therapy and play, combine to form play therapy. Therapy is an effort to restore sick people's health. Play, on the other hand, derives from the term "play," signifying a heart-pleasing activity that involves the use of enjoyable tools like picture books, balls, puzzles, and more. Playing entails using a variety of tools for enjoyment (Kristian Siahaan, 2022).

Biological, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and socio-cultural factors closely relate to the function of play therapy and its application in therapeutic games. The biological factor indicates a close connection between play therapy and biological functions, such as the ability to learn fundamental skills, channel energy for relaxation, and serve as a kinesthetic stimulus. The intrapersonal factor in play involves three functions: fulfilling one's passion, gaining the ability to master certain situations, and overcoming conflicts. Interpersonal play functions as a vehicle for a child to learn more social skills. The last function of play is sociocultural, which is a medium for children to learn the role of culture for their own and others' benefit (Kristian Siahaan, 2022).

Play is an activity that can enhance children's thinking to utilize their emotional, social, and physical aspects, as well as improve their physical abilities, experience, knowledge, and mental balance (Gupta et al., 2023). Therapeutic guidance programs are necessary for children with special needs (ABK), particularly tunagrahita children and autistic children, who have low intellectual abilities and face obstacles in adaptive behavior. Play therapy can improve adaptive behavior, which focuses on daily behavior, meeting community expectations, and the ability to cope effectively with circumstances in the community environment. The benefits of play therapy for children with special needs include: 1) improving problem-solving skills; 2) improving social interaction; 3) being able to express feelings; and 4) improving concentration (Venti, 2017).

Play therapy has many important benefits for children with special needs, including the development of social, emotional, cognitive, and motor skills (Molina Roldán et al., 2021). Applications in games, such as building pyramids using plastic cups, can increase concentration in children with special needs. Play therapy employs visual coloring techniques on drawing paper to foster creativity in children with special needs, while penguin gymnastics play treatment enhances their motor skills. The goal of community service activities is to help children with special needs increase their concentration and develop creativity and motor skills. We give this community service activity a theme, namely SAVARI (Save All Memories) Play Therapy for Children with Special Needs.

METHODS

The method of implementing SAVARI Play Therapy for children with special needs can involve several approaches and strategies tailored to individual needs. Here are some of the methods used to implement play therapy:

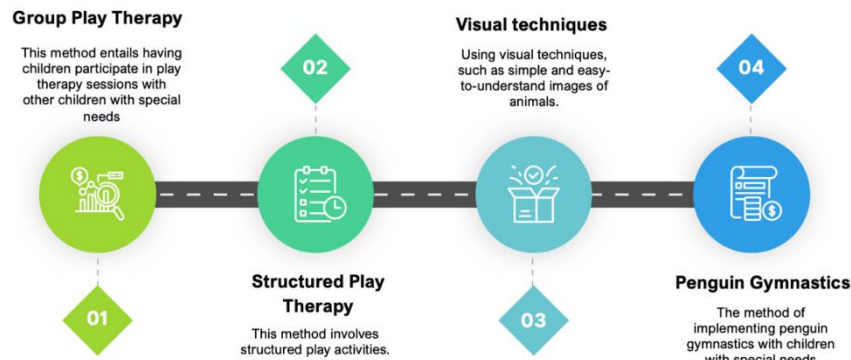


FIGURE 1. Flowchart of method.

1. **Group Play Therapy**
This method entails having children participate in play therapy sessions with other children with special needs. Through social interaction in the context of play, children can learn and practice social skills such as cooperation, communication, and tolerance of differences.
2. **Structured Play Therapy**
This method involves structured play activities. We design activities by integrating therapeutic elements into a playful situation. Building a pyramid using simple plastic cups can develop social, motor, cognitive, or language skills in children with special needs.
3. **Visual techniques**
Using visual techniques, such as simple and easy-to-understand images of animals, can help children with special needs express themselves and improve social skills through this creative process. Paper with pictures of animals and colored pencils are the mediums used.
4. **Penguin Gymnastics**
The method of implementing penguin gymnastics with children with special needs can help improve motor coordination, flexibility, muscle strength, and social engagement.

The implementation of the activities took place at SLB-C Plus Asih Manunggal Bandung West Java Indonesia, a special school for children with a moderate level of tunagrahita and autism. Play therapy activities include coloring, dancing through penguin gymnastics, singing, and playing with paper cups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the first session SAVARI Play Therapy, the children were divided into three groups with a division system of coloring paper pictures of three different types of animals (cats, lions, and cows). In the implementation of this coloring session, children can develop creativity by doing visual technique play therapy, namely coloring on drawing paper. Children's enthusiasm when coloring is shown by asking for more drawing paper to color again. Drawing and coloring are effective ways to develop children's fine motor skills and creativity (Khairani & Rahmahtrisilvia, 2024). It also allows children to express their emotions through visual art. This approach not only improves children's cognitive and motor skills but also gives them a safe and supportive way to express themselves.



FIGURE 2. Activity of coloring paper pictures of three different types of animals.

After the coloring session is over, we move on to the next session, which is playing pyramid building using plastic cups that can improve concentration. Although we are often distracted to do other things, we always redirect back to focus on what is being done. Building pyramids with plastic cups is an activity that can improve concentration and fine motor skills in children with special needs (Milander et al., 2014). This activity requires a high level of focus to balance and arrange the glasses in the correct order, so it can help children with special needs improve their concentration skills. Arranging the glasses requires good hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills to place the glasses precisely without dropping them. Children learn to be patient and try again if their pyramid collapses, which helps develop perseverance and the ability to deal with failure (Maranatha & Briliany, 2023). This activity also helps children understand the concepts of size, order, and balance, which are important for their cognitive development (Khairani & Rahmahtrisilvia, 2024).



FIGURE 3. Pyramid building activity using plastic cups.

At the end of the activity, which is the penguin gymnastics activity, the children always follow the gymnastics until the end. Two children led the continuation of the penguin exercise. Penguin gymnastics can be a fun and beneficial activity for children with special needs, if done appropriately and adapted to the child's individual abilities (Mohd Nordin et al., 2021). It is important to always pay attention to the safety and comfort of the child during this activity (Luwes, 2020).



FIGURE 4. Children always follow the movements of the penguin gymnastics.

Overall, SAVARI Play Therapy for children with special needs can improve concentration, develop creativity, and develop motor skills in children. For the program's sustainability plan, one of them is the implementation of routine exercises every Friday. Activities such as coloring pictures and arranging glasses into pyramids can be scheduled as play therapy for children as a means of increasing concentration and also developing children's motor skills. Contributions from parents also need to be directly linked so that this play therapy can be properly realized.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Community service activities in the form of play therapy for SLB-C Plus Asih Manunggal students aim to improve their adaptive behavior by focusing on daily behaviors such as increasing problem-solving skills, increasing social interaction, being able to express feelings, and increasing concentration. Sixteen SLB-C Asih Manunggal students participated in the activity over the course of one day. The school can lead the next activity, which requires more preparation and regular weekly play therapy sessions.

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