

Children’s Perceptions of Therapy

Introduction

This study elicits the experiences of children in occupational therapy. By determining their perceptions of therapeutic processes, occupations, capacities, and outcomes, we can better understand how to therapeutically meet their needs.

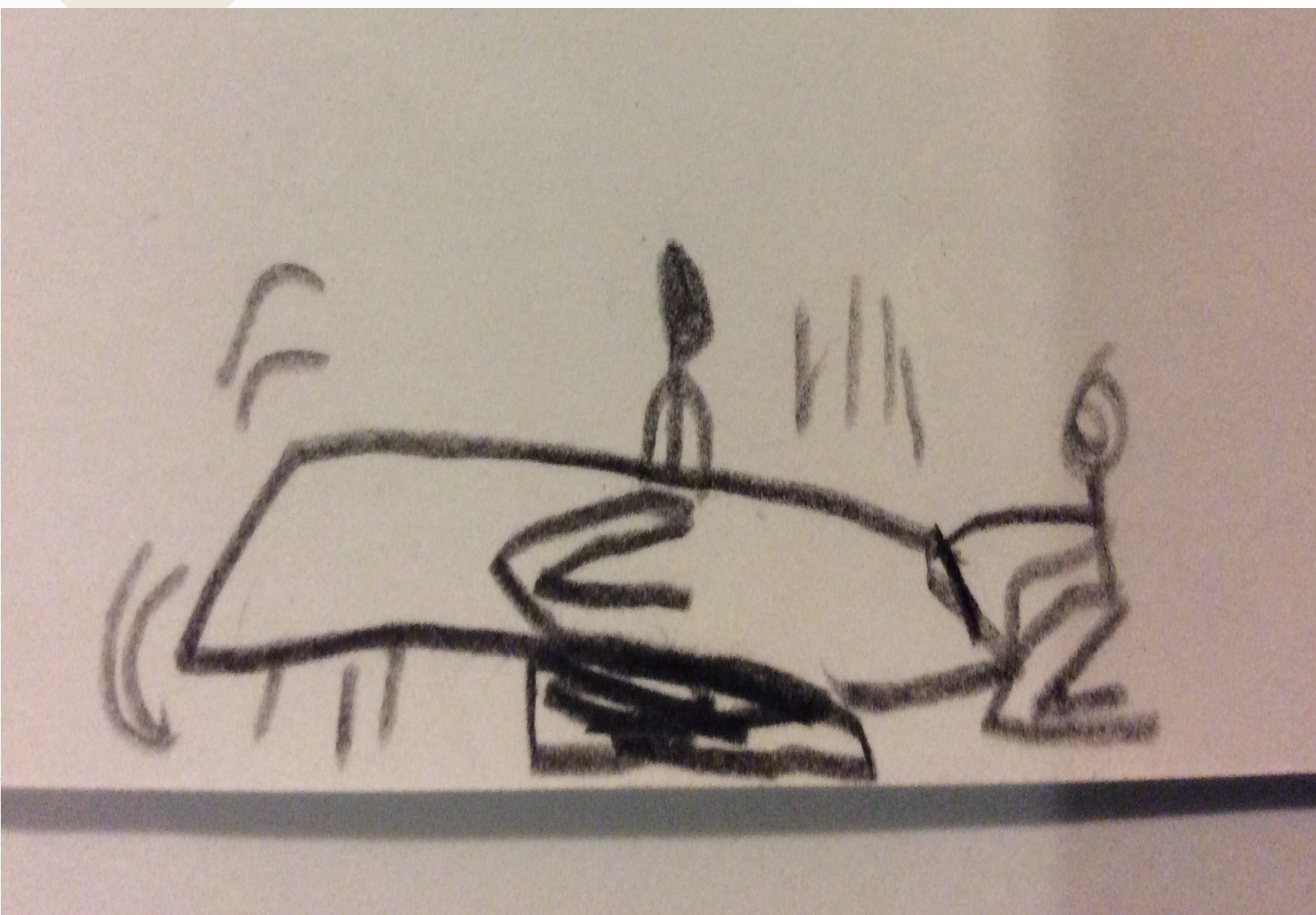
Review of literature identifies key characteristics of good therapy: relevance, acceptance, competence, and fun within sessions (1); in a clean, flexible, familiar, accessible location and with a therapist who communicates, supports, listens, and understands (2).

Research indicates that children’s opinions often differ from those of their parents (3) and that the do process experiences, have valid opinions, and can express them successfully (4).

Methods

Children were included in the study based on age and participation in regular OT sessions within the last year. All three children participated in semi-structured interviews asking about their experiences in and perceptions of therapy.

During interviews, each participant also created several drawn artifacts to expand on verbal explanations. These pictures showed “what therapy looked like,” “what was your favorite thing,” and “what do you think will happen because of therapy”



Results

Likes: Fun

- Movement activities: swinging, obstacle courses
- Sensory activities: putty, climbing in hammocks
- The gym “had things to do”

Dislikes: Writing

- “It was boring”
- “I just don’t like it”
- “It takes too long”
- Liked writing better when it happened with other, more interesting things

About My Therapist

- “She was really, really nice”
- “It just felt like she was nice”
- “She was pretty fun”
- “She let me do things”

Reasons for Therapy

- Guessing at reasons
- Helps manage energy
- The swings are “basically for fun afterwards”
- It doesn’t really make a difference

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Discussion and Conclusion

Children focused especially on the items and actions of therapy that made it ‘fun,’ rather than specific things their therapist did. This suggests that therapists’ specific interpersonal skills are less important to children than general friendliness and enjoyable activities

They enjoyed activities that provided opportunities for movement and sensory input, and disliked activities like writing that offered little of either. This seems partially related to the idea of relevance and competence in therapy.

All participants felt they had positive experiences but beyond enjoying therapy didn’t see many benefits; perhaps this would be different if they knew what the therapists’ goals were.

This study was limited by a small, homogeneous participation pool and no follow-up interviews.

These results can help occupational therapists better understand how children experience therapy, which in turn will help them determine how they can best connect with and meet their needs.

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