



ROCKY MOUNTAIN
PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

Child & Family Focus

Newsletter

A Unique Service Provider

What sets us apart from other services?

We are not generalists. Each practitioner has developed areas of expertise in child and/or family counseling. All therapists have specialized training in child and play therapy. Services are matched to individual needs. We offer comprehensive, results oriented services in 4 key areas:

- Play Therapy
- Assessment
- Mediation
- Family Counseling

Does one size fit all?

We believe services should be individually tailored, from beginning to end.

All services emphasize:

- Research based practice
- Professionalism that includes expertise, responsiveness and innovation
- Outcome focused activities
- A practical, future-oriented approach to growth and change

Should cutting edge leadership and management philosophies drive service?

We believe clients should have the expectation that all practices are monitored and professionally supervised. We pride ourselves in ongoing professional development activities and supervision by Directors who bring years of clinical and professional training experience.

Our unique facility is designed to provide a number of comfortable and flexible meeting spaces including: 4 fully equipped play therapy rooms; 2 board rooms; art-making and family meeting rooms.

RMPS is an affiliate to the **Rocky Mountain Play Therapy Institute**, which is an internationally recognized child psychotherapy and play therapy training provider and publisher.

www.rmpsychservices.com

Children's Spirituality Emerges in Play Therapy



Children express their inner thoughts, feelings and concerns in symbolic ways during play therapy. Play is the natural language of the child and it is through the use of objects and actions that they tell about their realities. Play therapists are witness to the profound nature of children's spirituality through the symbols and accompanying verbal explanations that emerge during their play.

The play therapy environment is often referred to as the child's "kingdom" by play therapists. It is a safe and protected child-focused space for children to resolve difficult life experiences. Issues of grief and loss, anxiety, re-location, peer and school problems, divorce or relational problems are examples of children's life stressors. During play therapy children have the opportunity to bring forward a representation of their realities. Upon closer examination, their internal resources also emerge in many spiritual ways. Whether exposed to a formal religion or not, children often put forth symbols of god, angels, heaven, hell and magical and/or mystical items for which they provide profound explanations. What

some children cannot say in language, they are able to show in discrete play and art-making activities. Children gain strength, hope and direction from their spiritual selves and are ultimately able to reprocess and recover from matters that have interrupted their day to day lives.

In a study by Wintersgill (2008), 385 students were asked to fill out questionnaires and also completed face to face interviews related to their thoughts on the concepts of spirit and spirituality. The young people involved in the study described spirit and spirituality differently. They generally viewed the spirit as an entity that existed on its own, internally, and they explained spirituality as an attribute. Spirituality was described as something activating and facilitating the awareness of the spirit and how it works. They thought that the spirit controls your mind, guides and keeps you going. Spirit was described as the "real me inside". Spirit, they thought, also constituted "who you are" and determined your humanity and uniqueness. Respondents noted that some people are "more aware of their spirituality than others" and some

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respondent's friends tried to hide their spirituality, potentially to hide the "real" self. Some of the boys in the study argued that it was not cool to look like you were spiritual. This speaks to the spirit being viewed as the "real me". Opposite to this conceptualization, students described the "unreal me" and described it as the physical self, superficial self, the part of self you mostly show the world and that sometimes follows what society says you should do and at times can be corrupt. Surprisingly, the study found students believed that spirituality was not a matter of fact; rather it was something you had to work at.

Sarah was four years old when she was referred to play therapy. She had been witness to family violence and her biological mother was also physically and emotionally abused her. She had been removed from her family of origin and was, at the time I met her, living with her paternal grandparents. Sarah was confused and angry. She struggled to make meaning about her life and told her story through play therapy. During her first session, protectors and an angel emerged. Sarah initially picked up a play figure and began to pretend it was punching her in the chest. She told it to "stop" and threw it over her head. She next picked up a crocodile and had it repetitively bite her hand while she murmured sounds of pain. She put this figure down and proceeded to build a house out of blocks. She then chose a number of protective figures (big dogs, and dinosaurs) and placed them all around the house "to protect the baby" she said to herself. She placed a very small infant figure in the centre of the house. She then looked very carefully for what she needed from the shelves and found an angel figure. She picked it up, held it over her head, looked up and said, "This is God". She then said "it is an angel" and found the highest point in the room and placed the God/angel on top. "I will put it here, so it can see everything and everyone", she said.

Sarah began her time with me with helpers and an overseer for the holistic safety of the little girl inside the house. For much of her young life, Sarah had suffered in silence. She was now in a safe enough place to work through her experiences with the externalized spiritual helper to keep a close eye on her. Together we found a healing pathway.

I am now in the third decade of working with children. I have observed hundreds of powerful examples of the emergence of what the children in Wintersgill's study have so poignantly identified about the human spirit and the facilitative nature of spirituality. Although Taylor (1989) points out that modernity has given way to 'the half-collapsed lungs of the spirit', Sagberg notes that although today's child may be at times deprived of sources of spiritual and moral growth, children may express it in their own ways and perhaps re-awaken a spiritual awareness in adults and inspire a new spiritual journey.

Lorri A. Yasenik MSW, RSW, RFM, Certified Supervisor of Child Psychotherapy and Play Therapy (CPT-S)



Sagberg, S. (2008). Children's spirituality with particular reference to a Norwegian context: Some hermeneutical reflections. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 13: 4, 355-370.

Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the self: The making of modern identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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ROCKY MOUNTAIN PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

SERVING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES FOR OVER 20 YEARS

- Play Therapy 2-12 years
- Expressive Therapy 5-18 years
- Parent Consultation
- Assessment
- Family Therapy
- Mediation



ROCKY MOUNTAIN
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Common referrals include anxiety, depression, behavior issues, loss, divorce, peer and school issues, assessments and developmental issues.

To Make an Appointment Contact 403-245-5981 or visit rmpservices.com

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