

The Utilization of a Multiple Functional Playroom in a Facility for Disabled Children

- Place for Providing Sensory Stimuli, Relaxation and Den -

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I . Introduction

For a child with disabilities who stays in hospital, it is easy to imagine that the changes in environment and the absence of his/her understanding family create significant stresses to that child. To understand the meaning of subtle signs that a child in hospital sends out, making a trust relationship with him/her is the first step. The environment in hospital is hard for a child to feel at peace since it is filled with constant strange noises that are different from home and with many people who come and go incessantly.

In our ward for children with disabilities, there are 40 children with impaired motor functions are living together. Because a playroom in the ward had no divider (Pic. 1 & 2), children in a wheelchair, with a walking aid or with other devices were freely able to enter the room and anyone could play there during their spare times. It was, however difficult that children with particular conditions including visual / hearing problems, autistic spectrum and hypersensitivity to noise were able to enjoy the playroom as other children do. In this article, a re-construction work of the playroom is described in detail. It was done in order for every single child in the ward and their families to be able to relax and enjoy the space.



Picture 1. A playroom with no divider



Picture 2. A relaxation room before renovation (blackout curtains and mattresses were used)

II. Objective

To create a play space where children and their families can relax and where they can enjoy their creative work together.

III. Procedures

- 1 . To make a relaxation room by renovating a part of the playroom. (Pic. 3)



Picture 3. The renovation had begun by taking away the blackout curtains

- 2 . To create a Black-Room where all lights are blocked.

- 1) Apply black cut-out stickers on walls (Pic. 4). Place a curtain rail in four directions. The room can be used for other purposes by replacing the curtain rails.
- 2) The curtain is double. An inside curtain is black one for blocking lights and an outside one is colorful one with sound proofing. To make the Black-Room look natural even it is in the playroom, the colorful curtain was used on the side of the playroom (Pic 5 & 6).



Picture 4. Apply cut-out stickers on the walls



Picture 5. Inside of the Black-Room



Picture 6. Colorful curtain

3. To design the room especially for individuals with the following conditions:
 - 1) Having communication difficulty and difficult to understand what he/she tries to speak
 - 2) Having severe muscle tensions and difficult to retain one's posture
 - 3) Having visual/auditory impairment
 - 4) Having difficulty to control one's behaviors and easy to feel panicked
 - 5) Having difficulty to enjoy the ordinal playroom or not showing he/she enjoys the room
4. To bring out children's desire of self-expression and provide opportunities to practice one's imaginations.
 - 1) To place tools and toys effective for sensory stimulation depending on the level of child's development
 - 2) To use relaxation music (ex. sounds of music box/ nature, nursery rhymes, ethnic music, etc.). To select soothing and quiet music that a child likes to listen.
 - 3) To talk calmly to a child by observing his/her facial expressions, the tone of voice, physical tension, etc.
 - 4) To encourage his/her voluntary behaviors and observe their play with least restrictions
 - 5) To have gentle physical contact to make his/her relaxed and use toys and tools that a child can have sensory experiences, such as fluffy animal toys and aluminum foils.
 - 6) To refresh one's mind, provide some visual images and music by using devices such as iPad



Picture 7. Glowing bubble patterns on ceiling



Picture 8. A child who enjoys the color variation



Picture 9. Glowing curtains



Picture 10. iPod, speaker and glowing toys

IV. Result

The renovated room was offered to children depending on their conditions. The following changes were observed among children while using the room.

1. A child who had severe muscle tension was able to release his/her own nervousness by him/herself.
2. A child who often showed restless behaviors and was making loud voice became calm in the room and was able to focus on his/her play (Pic. 11).
3. A child who was crying when her mother left hospital was able to switch her attention to a movie and music while warming her body in the room.
4. A child who was frustrated with his/her long-term hospital stay was using the room as a den and playing actively in it.
5. A child in a cast acquired a different point of view and played differently. Eventually his/her facial expressions became brightened.
6. The room was used for families for relaxation.
7. No matter the conditions of a child, everyone including healthcare staffs was able to enjoy the room as a private space.
8. A child who showed little his/her own feelings became more expressive and vocalized than before (Pic. 12)



Picture 11



Picture 12

V. Discussion

In hospital, a situation around a child can be changed every second. No matter how linguistically able a child is, he/she becomes more expressive naturally when one is given a place where he/she can relax. As the severity of one's disabilities contributes how well the child can communicate with others, the feelings of nervousness and tension seem also a significant factor. When a child becomes lonely, frustrated or restless, a place where he/she can relax seems very important. Consequently it provides positive effects on families and staffs all together.

VI. Conclusion

The result of this study broadens our image of a "playroom", and it indicates that the importance and the necessity of play space designed for an individual's needs and conditions through thorough understanding of each child. The idea of the hand-made relaxation room was greatly inspired by facilities in England and Sweden, including hospitals, a sensory room in schools and Snoezelen facilities.

Snoezelen is a therapy used for producing one's sense of balance through controlled multisensory stimulation¹⁾. According to Krista Mertens PhD., the leading scientist for research on Snoezelen, "Snoezelen has a relaxation effect that makes people calm down. At the same time it has the effect of

activating one's mind. It brings out one's sense of interest and methodizes received stimuli by controlling them. It evokes one's memories. It reduces one's anxieties and provides the sense of safety. It gives one a sense of leadership, encourages to acting out and provides better communication skills. Above all, it is great fun¹⁾.

We applied the idea of Snoozen as one of relaxation tools for children in hospital but not as a therapy. It was a great discovery that the idea of "relaxation room" was rather well accepted even within the ward where available space was extremely limited. We also learnt that relaxing one's body would make him/her open up psychologically as well. Though the Black Room had a very limited space, we learnt how to make efficient use of such space. Since children created their own unique ways to enjoy the room more than we expected, the relax room was used for broader purposes. Anxieties and distresses during hospital stay will not vanish unless we work on every single aspect of hospital environment so that children would feel safe and relaxed while staying hospital. The result of this study brings up some of our future assignments regarding the improvement of medical environment for children and its effectiveness.

Cited reference

Krista Mertens. Snoezelen – in action (Berichte Aus Der Padagogik): The world of multisensory environment that provides therapeutic effects, 2nd edit. UNIVERSITY EDUCATION PRESS

References

- Hiroshi Anezaki (2012). A Study for the Signification of "Snoezelen Education" on Jilitsu-Katsudo for Children with Severe Motor and Intellectual Disabilities. Bulletin of Mie University, **63**, pp.297-314.
- Hiroshi Anezaki (2005). A Welfare Practice of Snoezelen for Children or People with Disabilities in England II. Bulletin of Integrated Center for Educational Research and Practice Faculty of Education, Mie University, **25**, pp.53-58

This study was prepared also with reference to the following foreign facilities

- 1 . Worcester Snoozlen/UK
- 2 . Pool Hospital/Child Development Centre/UK
- 3 . Edinburgh Royal Sick Children's Hospital/UK
- 4 . Leicester Royal Infirmary Children's Hospital/UK
- 5 . Southampton General Hospital/UK
- 6 . Kingston Hospital NHS Trust/UK
- 7 . Sachsska Barns sjukhuset/Sweden
- 8 . Soders sjukhuset/Sweden
- 9 . Vinstagårdsskolan /Sweden

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