

# The Heart of a Play Therapist

By Cherie L. Spehar

While observing my wonderful play therapy colleagues, I have noticed that there is something quite extraordinary about their hearts; the kind of dedication to children that is unrivaled and awe-inspiring. It led me to put together a collection of characteristics typical of those amazing people with whom I have the privilege of being connected. Because they are naturally a playful bunch, I take the approach of a well-known list format, as these attributes range from the inspiring, to the humorous, to the moving.

You might be a play therapist if:

- 1) You see the entire world as a playground.
- 2) You hold each child you see in the arms of reverence, delight, and connectedness.
- 3) You willingly lose nights of sleep preparing to bravely and courageously stride into a courtroom to testify and advocate for the safety and well-being of the little one you cradle in your care.
- 4) Your heart can hold the elements of trauma and hope simultaneously, a ready container for the former, and an abundant source of the latter.
- 5) You don't focus on the hours you work, but on the hearts you heal.
- 6) You get that play therapists are not just people who play with puzzles on the floor...but you also recognize the inherent value in playing with that same puzzle on the floor.
- 7) You spend countless hours of your personal time reading, studying and staying current with the most effective and helpful play therapy treatment approaches – and you love it.
- 8) You think nothing of blowing your entire work budget (is there such a thing?) on a hundred sandtray miniatures in one short shopping spree. And come back again for “just one more” tomorrow.
- 9) Your eyes light up at the mere glance at the puppet section in your local department store.
- 10) You begin to salivate and your eyes glaze over when you walk into the arts and crafts stores.
- 11) You visit any toy website and get lost in a time warp where hours have passed since you ate, drank, or slept.
- 12) Though you love tools and props, you never underestimate the therapeutic uses of a rock, some dirt, a stick, water or a simple box.
- 13) You have an uncanny ability to speak a child's language – in a way that they actually *hear* it.
- 14) You have creative hearts and minds that rival anyone else's on earth.
- 15) Your own children ask you if you are ever going to become a grown up.
- 16) You found yourself smiling, nodding, laughing, or tearing up in recognition at any part during this list reading.

So, this is in tribute to all of my fellow play therapists out there, those whom I know well and those of you I've never met. I have seen this in you and have been inspired, amazed, and blessed to witness it. I have been honored to share time with you in places where your Play Therapist Heart shines! I can only hope to exemplify the same in my own playful practice. Thank you for blessing me, but most importantly, for blessing the young ones who desperately need you!

In the Light of a playful heart,

Cherie L. Spehar

### **About the Author**

Cherie L. Spehar, LCSW, CTS, CTC, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Certified Trauma-Consultant-Supervisor, and Registered Play Therapist - Supervisor. She is founder and director of Smiling Spirit Pathways - The Apex Center for Trauma Healing in Apex, NC, where she offers training, education, and treatment for children and families. A national presenter, local teacher, mother and avid learner, she has dedicated her life to the emotional wellness of children, adults, and families. For further information please visit: [www.facebook.com/smilingspiritpathways](http://www.facebook.com/smilingspiritpathways)