



# IL-APT • On The Go



## Jack of All Trades AND Master of One: A Conversation with Dr. Rick Gaskill

Elizabeth A. Gassin, PhD, LPC

On Feb 27 & 28, 2014, IL-APT will have the honor of welcoming Dr. Rick Gaskill as the speaker of our annual conference (see p. 3 of this newsletter). Rick is well-known in the play therapy community for his work on neuroscience and play therapy, but for decades his clinical work has led him into all corners of the mental health world. He kindly took some time to talk with us in preparation for his visit.

Since 1975, Rick has worked at Sumner Mental Health Center, where he currently works as Clinical Director. Sumner is a community mental health agency that provides emergency services, therapy for children and adults, psychiatric services, education for other organizations, transitional services between hospital and community, and screening for state hospital admissions. In addition to this broad community mental health experience, our upcoming speaker also serves as adjunct professor at Wichita State University, where he teaches and supervises play therapy. He is also an Infant Mental Health Mentor in the state of Kansas. It's hard to imagine a corner of the mental health world that Rick hasn't seen.

That being said, in our little corner of this world, we know Rick for his work in play therapy. When he started his career in the mid-1970's, there was no play therapy training to be found in Kansas. Rick noted how odd this was:

*"...there have been some very famous play therapists and children's therapists study in Kansas. In the 1950's, it was a hotbed of play therapy. For example, Albert Bandura [developer of social-cognitive models of development] did his residency here, as did Bernard and Louise Guerney [founders of Filial Play Therapy], at the Wichita Child Guidance Center, which is one of the oldest child guidance centers in the United States. And Edgar Doll, the author of the Vineland Social Maturity Scale, worked here in Wichita and developed the Vineland because of his work with some of the state hospitals.... And then of course the Menninger Foundation started here in the 1930's."*

When Rick was getting started in his career, however, the geographic area was dominated by behavioral models of therapy. While he appreciates the usefulness of such models,

Rick noted that the humanism that underlies most approaches to play therapy wasn't really on the radar screen in institutions at that point:

*"I got out of school in '75 and started working, and I just felt like there were some major pieces missing. So I started going back to night school at Wichita State in the counseling department because at that point three of the faculty there...were psychologists but they were into very different things. They were clearly not behavioral... As I was working at the mental health center I was seeing children, and pretty much like most of the literature that we read about "why play therapy?", I just realized that...talking to kids just wasn't working."*

In the absence of training opportunities, Rick read what he could on play therapy, and on the recommendation of one of his counseling professors, he then went out to the University of Northern Colorado to get his doctorate. From here, Rick's "play therapy bio" reads like a Who's Who of the field. For example, during his time at UNC, he was mentored by Byron and Carol Norton, developers of Ex-

periential Play Therapy. Rick credits Garry Landreth with offering further training and much practical help in getting play rooms set up in the mental health center after he (Rick) returned to Kansas from his doctoral work. In 2000, Rick attended trainings by Dr. Bruce Perry, which began a fruitful cooperative relationship that was a main impetus for delving into the neurodevelopmental aspects of play therapy. At this point, Rick has written multiple scholarly articles and chapters on the topic and has spoken many times to practitioners at conferences. At the most recent APT national conference, he was not only the keynote speaker (presenting on "A Culture of Violence and the Developing Brain") but also led one other breakout sessions on the DSM-5 and play therapy and co-led a third on neurobiological foundations of Holistic Expressive Play Therapy.

In reflecting on the importance of neuroscience for our field, Rick noted:

*"I'm very pleased that increasingly play therapists ...are latching on to and having increasing interest in what neuroscience is telling us. I honestly believe that it will make*

**Cont'd on back page**

- Chessa et al. (2013) found that Italian children express more emotion during play than American kids, but the latter express more imagination (see *Journal of Cross Cultural Psych*, v44, 640-656).
- Wong (2013) gives experimental evidence that teacher-led play sessions can improve the social cognition of young children with autism (see *Autism*, v17, 340-357).
- Gagnon et al (2013) found that children who are highly reactive and have authoritarian parents tend to play in more disruptive and less interactive ways than other children (see *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, March; abstract available at [springer.com](http://springer.com) website).

# Meet a Few of Your IL-APT Leaders

**Erin Brumfield Grima  
President**

I am a LCPC and have worked for most of my counseling career in residential treatment, both group homes and in a residential treatment for boys with sexually problematic behavior. I have integrated play based and play therapy interventions in the therapeutic work I do and see the significant change that can occur. I believe in play therapy because I believe that children need to be able to express themselves. Because I believe in play therapy I believe in the Illinois Association for Play Therapy. When I was in graduate school I thought that play therapy would be interesting but wondered if it was taken seriously at all and whether I would ever get to learn about it. I then found our association and learned about play therapy and the efficacy of play therapy and therefore the growing respect play therapy has in the mental health field and in the general population. I am excited to have been elected as president of the Illinois Association for Play Therapy so that I can help continue the legacy of our past presidents and ensure that our membership has an association to come to for training, support and networking and so that the next master's student out there wondering about play therapy has a source of sound information and a group of professionals to learn from.

**Lisa Eaton  
Secretary**

Hi, my name is Lisa Eaton, and I am honored to be elected as Secretary for the Illinois Association For Play Therapy. I currently work as a psychotherapist and program coordinator with the Ben Gordon Center, a Community Mental Health Center in DeKalb County, Illinois, where I see clients ages 3-21, and their families. During my tenure at Ben Gordon Center, I helped develop an Early Intervention and Play Therapy Program that is currently meeting the needs of an otherwise underserved population. In my role as program coordinator, I continue to develop and market the Early Intervention/Play Therapy Program at Ben Gordon Center, as well as supervise staff working with clients in this program. I also provide outpatient substance abuse treatment to adolescents and their families in my role as a psychotherapist on the Youth Team at Ben Gordon Center. I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, as well as a Certified Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Counselor, and am currently working toward my certification as a Registered Play Therapist. I received my Master of Social Work from Aurora University. As I continue on my journey as a therapist using the powers of play, I have enjoyed learning about all of the ways that using play can benefit so many children - the very young and even adolescents.

**Mary Alice Wentling  
Past President**

As the past president and co-chair of the IL-APT Training Committee I remain dedicated to spreading the word that the best way to reach children is through the informed use of Play Therapy. I am proud to be a member of the Play Therapy community and look forward to a few more years of involvement on the board and working with members across the state. I continue to work as a Clinician and Clinical Supervisor at Lutheran Social Services of Illinois in the Rockford Foster Care Program. I love the summers and spend as much time as possible in my kayak on lakes and rivers.

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**Watch for more bios  
in the next issue of  
*On The Go!***

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Lisa Eaton, continued..

It has given me a new way to connect with and help my clients. I am excited to be part of the Illinois Association For Play Therapy, and excited for this new adventure!



## Don't Miss The Annual IL-APT Conference!

### February 27 & 28, 2014, Bolingbrook, IL

We invite mental health professionals working with children and families for a two-day training event featuring Dr. Richard Gaskill.

#### Day One: Play and Play Therapy Interventions: A neurobiological perspective

This presentation consists of general overview of neurobiological development and the functional roll of major brain structures. More specifically, this presentation focuses on how these structures mediate our behavior in normal and pathological circumstances. This information has enormous implications for our ability to understand a child's symptomatology, form therapeutic relationships, and design play therapy interventions.

*Information learned on Thursday is valuable to know, but is not a pre-requisite for Friday.*

#### Day Two: Neurobiologically Informed Play Therapy Interventions

The second day will be devoted to working on interventions that are specifically designed to impact particular brain regions. Play therapy interventions are more effective when they address the child's neurological developmental age and create a state of regulation, safety and positive reward in the process. Interventions presented will be a mixture of traditional play therapy activities ranging from child-centered, to experiential activities, and cognitive activities, as well as other specific activities believed helpful at specific developmental stages.

For more information, contact Erin Brumfield Grima at [ecbrumfield@yahoo.com](mailto:ecbrumfield@yahoo.com)

### Help mental health professionals across IL use the power of play!

IL-APT invites you to consider participating in the training committee. The goal of this committee is to insure that IL-APT members are provided with quality training, coordinate play therapy informational training opportunities across the state, and maintain records of our provider training opportunities. We'd like participation from all parts of Illinois. Amy Overmyer and Barb Mackey-Bruzetti have both stepped forward to be on the training committee and to offer their exper-

tise. The committee will be formulating a plan to reach members across the state and to help IL-APT be more inclusive. If you are interested, please contact Mary Alice Wentling at [mawentling@hotmail.com](mailto:mawentling@hotmail.com).



### THANK YOU!

IL-APT would like to thank Dr. Charlie Myers for his service as Treasurer of the chapter for the last four years. Charlie stepped down this year to take the editor's position of APT's *Play Therapy* magazine. We appreciate all you do for APT!

We also thank Mary Alice Wentling for her service as president, and Karen Robertie for her service as secretary. Both MA and Karen are still involved with IL-APT leadership, so we'll still have the honor of their presence for some time!

## Trainings

If you are in southern IL and/or have easy access to St. Louis, you can find the following upcoming training opportunities through the St. Louis Center for Play Therapy (see [stlplaytherapy.com](http://stlplaytherapy.com)):

Intro to Play Therapy, January 10, 2014

Intro to Sandtray Play Therapy, January 11, 2014

Using Play Therapy to Treat Attachment Disorders, February 7, 2014

History of Play Therapy, February 8, 2014

Play Therapy with Spectrum Disorders, February 8, 2014

Play Therapy with Families, March 14, 2014

Play Therapy with Sexually Abused Children, March 15, 2014

*Please note that IL-APT does not sponsor these trainings and bears no responsibility for their content. They are listed here only for informational purposes. Therapists themselves are responsible for choosing CE opportunities that meet requirements for licensure and ethical practice.*

## **Rick Gaskill, cont'd (from p. 1)**

*a lot of the things we do better. I'm shocked by how much neuroscience is in play therapy that we never really understood... I think as we involve ourselves in the neuroscience research more and more, we're in a position to hone what we do with children both in our assessments with children and our therapies with children...I really think that what neuroscience is probably doing is moving us to a more prescriptive form of play therapy. All of the play therapies work, but...they tend to work and have actions on different parts of the brain. As we get better at understanding pathology and the effects it has had on various parts of the brain, then we will get better about what...types of play therapy [we] might use with this child at this particular time, and we may see that over the course of treating a child [for a time] that the play therapy evolves...from very sensory and calming in its orientation to ultimately much more cognitive."*

As a result of discovering the brain-related underpinnings of play therapy, Rick noted we will be in a better position to explain how this approach works and advocate for its usage.

A favorite question we ask of our upcoming speakers is what wisdom they can share with new play therapists. In other words, what do they know now that they wish they fully understood early in their career. Rick had the following two insights to impart:

*"...[First,] I wish when I started that I had appreciated the incredible importance and power of the relationship between play therapist and child. And I don't mean that I didn't know that was there, but...coming from the 70's when things were so incredibly behavioral, a lot of that relational stuff was thrown on the back burner...I think that's part of what attracted me to play therapy. I always felt this very, very powerful relationship that guided me with the children, but I didn't have enough confidence in that because it wasn't in the textbooks...The second thing was that the techniques and strategies, while important, are secondary to the relationship...and I knew that, too, but no one in those early years of formative training were really talking about that. So I think one of things play therapy did for me is validate my own personal experience with children and give me the language to really understand what was really happening between the child and I, the family and I, and what I was encouraging between child and family.... I used to have all this angst that I wasn't picking the one and only right method to do things. I think there's a transition that occurs with professionals over the length of their career, and that is I think early in your career – and this is certainly true of me – I lacked enough confidence in the relationship with the child and where that would lead us that I clamored for many techniques because there was security in knowing what I should do...But what I realize now is that those activities will evolve out of...the relationship with the child pretty naturally. I just don't worry about it like I used to."*

We also asked Rick about his life outside of professional responsibilities. It turns out he is quite capable not only with head and heart, but also with hands! In his quest for balance in life, our upcoming speaker enjoys building structures and furniture, working with mechanical things, and hiking in the woods. He is also a season ticket holder to Kansas State football games and enjoys spending time with family and close friends.

Rick reflected on his productive career to this point:

*"I was really lucky. You know, sometimes I think there was somebody with their hand on my shoulder, guiding me, because I never really set out to go where I ended up. Looking back I seemed to make the right choice at every turn. The other thing that fits into that is that I never had and still don't [have] any great ambitions about anything other than delivering the very best service to my clients.... I've been honestly a little surprised and shocked that people started asking me to come speak and then write chapters because I still consider myself a student."*

Rick, we thank you for this interview and look forward to being your students at the IL-APT conference this coming February!

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**Have feedback, questions, and/or ideas about IL-APT's *On the Go* newsletter? Wish to contribute an article or other content to future additions? Contact the newsletter coordinator, Lisa Gassin, at [lgassin@olivet.edu](mailto:lgassin@olivet.edu).**