Brave Play:

Using Play-Based & Experiential Directives
in Counseling and Supervision



www.braveplayconsulting.com

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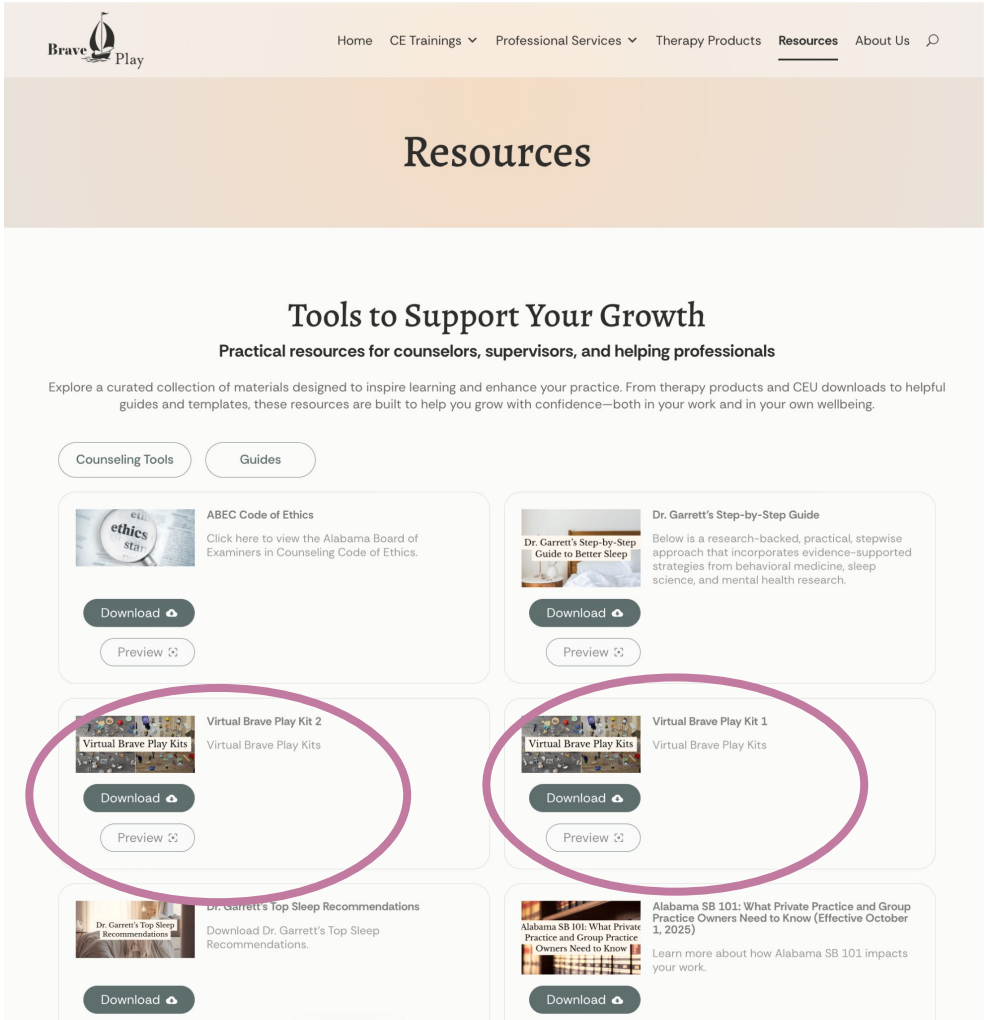
Ashley Garrett is the creator and owner of Brave Play and has a financial interest in the Brave Play Kit demonstrated during this training.

Purchase or use of a Brave Play Kit is not required to apply the clinical concepts or directives taught in this program.

Comparable, developmentally appropriate materials may be substituted.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Learning Objectives

Brave Play 2026

Learning Objectives:

1. IDENTIFY at least three clinical purposes for incorporating play-based or experiential directives into counseling.

2. DESCRIBE the five components of a framework for selecting, introducing, facilitating and processing an experiential directive.

3. APPLY at least two methods for adapting a directive based on developmental level, presenting concern, treatment goal, setting, or available materials.

Chauhan et al., 2024; Gilmore, 2025; Han et al., 2024; Robinson et al., 2024

Sometimes Words Aren’t Enough.

Play & Creative Expression Creates New Paths Forward

They can create opportunities to:

- Express
- Externalize
- Explore
- Connect
- Practice
- Problem-Solve
- Make Meaning

Frawley & Dillman Taylor, 2024; Gilmore, 2025

The Relationship Still Matters
The Material Is A Tool

The therapeutic work still depends on:

Relationship
Attunement
Curiosity
Clinical Judgement
Developmental Responsiveness

Fang et al., 2024; Hunnicutt Hollenbaugh & Joyal, 2025

What Makes It A Directive?

A directive gives the client a place to start.

The counselor intentionally provides:

- A Clinical Purpose
- An Invitation or Structure
- Freedom to Respond

Structure without requiring a “right” response

Hunnicutt Hollenbaugh & Joyal, 2025; Nilsson et al., 2024; Tipton et al., 2025

Start With the Client / Person

Don’t start with the activity.

Ask: What does this person need help doing?

Expressing?
Connect?
Making Meaning?
Gain perspective?
Understand / See patterns?
Externalize?
Regulate?
Explore?
Practice?
Problem-solve?

Fang et al., 2024; Hunnicutt Hollenbaugh & Joyal, 2025; Nilsson et al., 2024; Tipton et al., 2025.

The 5 Part Framework

Need - Purpose - Invitation - Experience - Process - Need

- Need: What is happening?
- Purpose: Why am I choosing this directive?
- Invitation: How will I introduce it?
- Experience: What happens when I give the client space?
- Process: How do we explore what comes up / emerges?

The Material is Not the Intervention

Ask what the material allows the client to do. Does it allow them to:

Represent?
Build?
Sort?
Externalize?
Tell a story?

Han et al., 2024

Playful Doesn’t Have to Mean Childish: Language Matters

Instead of asking adults (or even teens) to “play”, you might invite them to….

- Represent
- Map
- Build
- Create
- Externalize
- Use Metaphor
- Visualize a Relationship
- Show Rather than Explain

Respect autonomy, preference, culture, and comfort with experiential activities.

Han et al., 2024; Kemer, 2025; Tipton et al., 2025

Same Material but Different Language

Child vs Adult vs Supervisee

Child: “Build what worry feels like.”

Adult: “Use these materials to represent what happens when anxiety takes over.”

Supervisee: “Represent what happens between you and this client when the session gets stuck due to your anxiety or your clients anxiety.”

Han et al., 2024

Adults: From Talking to Seeing it

An adult feels pulled between work, caregiving, relationships, and personal needs.

“Choose something to represent each part of your life that’s asking something from you right now. Arrange them in whatever way makes sense / or feels “right” to you.”

Processing Questions:

- What do you notice?
- Where are you?
- What has the most space? What has the least?
- What would you want to move?

Kemer, 2025; Tipton et al., 2025

Using Creative Methods in Supervision

Sometimes saying “Tell me about the case” isn’t enough. Experiential supervision can support exploration of:

- Case conceptualization
- Therapeutic relationships
- Counselor responses
- Perspective taking
- Professional identity
- Areas where therapy feels “stuck”

Kemer, 2025; Tipton et al., 2025

Supervision is Not Therapy

Though supervision is not therapy our job is to gatekeeper and to know when a referral is needed.

In Counseling: The directive serves the client's treatment goals

In Supervision: The directive serves counselor development, case conceptualization, clinical competence, and ultimately client care. *counselor development vs therapy

Kemer, 2025; Tipton et al., 2025

Supervision Example: “Show me the case”

Instead of asking a supervisee to “tell you” ask them to “show you”

"Use these materials to represent the client, yourself, and anything else that feels important in this case."

- What do you notice?
- Where are you in relation to the client?
- What's missing?
- What feels stuck?
- What would happen if something moved?
- What are you noticing about yourself?

As You Watch Directives: Look for these…

1. Purpose: What is / could be being facilitated?
2. Process: How can I make this therapeutic rather than simply an activity?
3. Material: What function does the material/tools serve?
4. How could I adopt this for someone I currently provide service to?

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Stop, Start, Continue for Teens & Young Adults

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Frawley & Dillman Taylor, 2024; Gilmore, 2025

Don’t Rush to Interpret: Let the client/supervisee give you the meaning

Instead of “this means”

Try “Tell me about this”; “I wonder”; “I noticed”; “What’s happening here?”

Frawley & Dillman Taylor, 2024; Nilsson et al., 2024

Be Present with Your Person

Completing the directive is not the treatment goal. It is a tool.

Pause, modify, or abandon it when:

- The person becomes overwhelmed.
- It doesn't fit developmentally.
- They clearly don't want to engage.
- Something more important emerges.
- The directive begins interfering with connection.

Take It Back to Your Therapy Room

Just start with one. Choose an appropriate client or supervisory situation.

- Identify the need.
- Choose a directive with a purpose.
- Adapt the materials and language.
- Stay curious about what emerges.
- Reflect on what you would change next time.



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