

## Living in a Shelter: The Loss Situations Told by Children Through Therapeutic Play

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**Abstract.** The childhood is a determining factor for a healthy adult life, and family presence is fundamental, especially within the first years of life. (Nogueira, 2016; Scopel, Souza & Lemos, 2011) Not all children have a structured family system and, for different reasons, they need to live in shelters facility or foster care homes. (Freitas & Oliveira, 2016) In this context, children who was abandoned by their parents live with people who are not members of their family, they normally are not treated based on their individuality and need to live together with others at all times. (National Council of Public Prosecutions, 2011; Silva, Cabral & Christoffel, 2008) To understand loss situations experienced by children, researchers used therapeutic play strategies to allow children to reflect about their experiences, and become close to adults. (Ribeiro, Almeida & Borba, 2008) **Objective:** To understand loss situations experienced by institutionalized children who expressed themselves through toys in play therapy. **Method:** This was an exploratory and qualitative descriptive study that included 5 children aged 4 to 11 years old, who lived in a shelter facility located in the municipality of Santos – Brazil. Children participation in the study was approved by their legal representative. In 2017, after approval of the project by Ethics Committee of the Hospital Israelita Albert Einstein (CAAE: 63248216.3.0000.0071), data were collected. Children assented their participation in the study using the Minor's Assent Form as required in Resolution 466/2012. (Ministry of Health, 2013) To guarantee the confidentiality of children's identity, we requested them to choose character's name to themselves. Data were collected during a therapeutic toy session, which allowed the children to freely express their feeling and thoughts, deal with and understand their loss experience in less stressful environment. (Ribeiro, Almeida & Borba, 2008) We adopted the Bardin content technique to perform the analyses. (Bardin, 2011) **Results:** Children living in a shelter experience many situations of real and symbolic loss. Among these losses, the most significant that emerged in therapeutic play session was the loss of contact with family. Other loss situations were highlighted, such as: the change of their daily routine in the shelter that generates insecurity after have lost their home, the constant fear of being separated from their siblings, loss of contact with their pet. **Final considerations:** Dramatizing moments of children's daily life in the play session allowed us to understand the context of these children's life in the shelter facility. We could also identify their feelings and loss situations that they felt most affect, such homesickness after being separated from their families and be far from their homes. The therapeutic play session seems to be an effective strategy to communicate with children, and an excellent approaching proposal to be used in contexts similar to this study.

**Keywords:** Orphanages; Play and Playthings; Child; Pediatric Nursing.



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