

Play Therapist

A play therapist usually works with children between the ages of 3 and 11, exploring their feelings through play, so that they can cope with past, present and future problems. These could have been caused by difficult experiences such as abuse, bereavement, illness or disability.

The Work

You would:

- start off by meeting the people involved with the child – parents or carers, brothers and sisters, doctors, social workers, teachers
- work with individual children for about an hour at a time once a week
- work mostly with children aged 3 to 11 but occasionally with adolescents
- in 'directive' therapy, ask the child to play in a particular way, for example: to use puppets, dolls and cars to act out events in the child's family
- in 'non-directive' therapy, observe and listen while the child plays freely, picking up on the child's worries and guiding them towards a solution
- use other toys such as musical instruments, paints, crayons, sand and water
- write records and progress reports
- give evidence to the Children's Panel or in court
- perhaps occasionally work with groups of children.

Pay

Since play therapists work in social services, education and healthcare settings, salaries are varied.

In general, salaries can start at between £26,000 and £32,000 a year, rising with experience to around £37,000 or more.

Play therapists with the NHS are paid on the Agenda for Change scale Band 6, £41,608 to £50,702 a year. The current pay scales are from April 2025.

Those in private practice earn between £35 and £90 an hour.

Conditions

- You work in the child's home, in the school, clinic or family centre.
- Part time work is common.
- The work can be emotionally stressful.

Getting In

- Most play therapists have a degree (SCQF Level 9-10) and some experience as a social worker, teacher, or healthcare worker such as occupational therapist and then go on to complete a postgraduate qualification

(SCQF Level 11). Most do not practise play therapy full time, but practise it part time alongside their other work.

- The two main bodies that accredit play therapy training courses in the UK are the British Association of Play Therapists ([BAPT](#)) and [PTUK](#) (the UK Society for Play and Creative Arts Therapy).
- The only accredited postgraduate degree in Scotland is the MSc in [Play Therapy](#) offered by Queen Margaret University College. This can be studied part time over 3 years.
- PTUK offers a Certificate in Therapeutic Play Skills, followed by a Diploma in Play Therapy.
- To get on these courses you need an Honours degree in psychology, teaching, social work, occupational therapy, nursing or a related field plus at least two years' experience working with children or teenagers in therapeutic play or creative art.
- PTUK recommend you attend their one-day introductory course at their venues in Edinburgh or Glasgow before deciding to study the Diploma.
- The Scottish charity With Kids offers a BAPT accredited Play Therapy training course in Scotland, in conjunction with Queen Margaret University. On successful completion of this three-year part time course, you will gain an MSc in Play Therapy. For entry to this course you need a UK honours degree in a related discipline together with 2 years' post qualifying experience. For those without a degree, 5 years' relevant experience may be considered.
- A driving licence is useful and may be necessary.
- You will require a satisfactory criminal record check from Disclosure Scotland to show that you are suitable for this type of work. Contact Disclosure Scotland for details on the type you would need.

You can find jobs with the NHS, social services, family centres and schools. There are also opportunities with the voluntary sectors and charities such as Children 1st.

Some play therapists work freelance for several organisations and run a private practice alongside.

What Does It Take

You need to be:

- mature and responsible
- calm in stressful situations
- sensitive, empathetic and tolerant
- sincere, honest and genuine
- observant
- confident and caring to help children in emotional distress
- able to gain the trust of children
- able to communicate with people of all ages and backgrounds
- resourceful.

Training

- Training for the Diploma in Play Therapy involves a minimum of 100 hours clinically supervised work with children.
- Once you have completed the diploma you could progress to the MA in Practice Based Play Therapy. This course can now be studied through blended learning, which allows you to study at home at your own

pace. Check the PTUK website for details.

- Qualified play therapists are required to maintain continuous professional development (CPD) by regularly attending courses and conferences.

Getting On

- At present play therapy is a small profession with few opportunities for promotion, but it is expanding.
- Some play therapists move into the training institutions as lecturers and clinical tutors.

Contacts

Academy of Play and Child Psychotherapy

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British Association of Play Therapists

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Facebook: www.facebook.com/BAPT1992

With Kids

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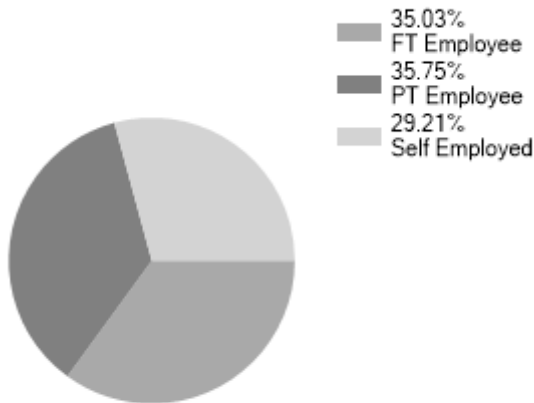
Website: www.withkids.org.uk

X: @withkidsscot

Facebook: www.facebook.com/withkids

Statistics

Employment Status UK %

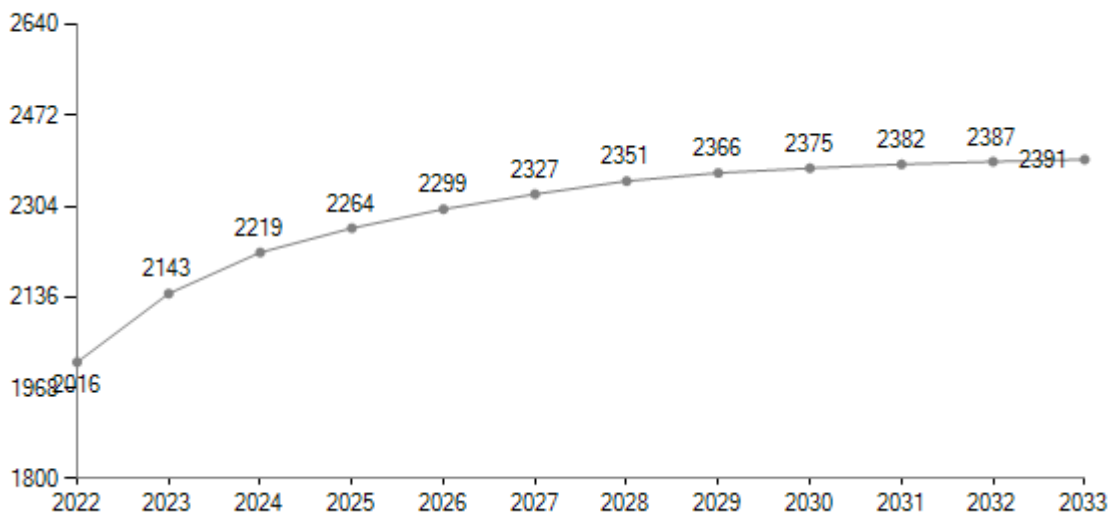


Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

LMI data powered by [LMI for All](#)

Predicted Employment in Scotland



LMI data powered by [Lightcast](#)