



The Impact of COVID-19 on the Psychological Well-Being of Children, and the Therapeutic Benefits of Play in Addressing Related Challenges

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the impacts of the global Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on children, particularly in the area of mental health (MH)/psychological well-being.
2. What are the roles of play and play therapy in alleviating the MH challenges experienced by children during the COVID-19 pandemic?

IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON CHILDREN

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted every aspect of children’s lives. School closures took away children’s boundary between school and home, changed daily routines, and caused decreased socialization, physical activity, and motivation, and increased restlessness and misbehavior (Fitzpatrick et al., 2020). Children with preexisting diagnoses, like ADHD or Autism are at a higher risk of adopting behavioral symptoms (Panda et al., 2021).

Remote learning was not an easy transition for many families (Fitzpatrick et al., 2020) since it put great pressure on them to guide and supervise their child, while maintaining their other responsibilities. Issues such as abuse, neglect, and homelessness became highlighted.

Mandated use of medical masks sparked controversy among parents, due to perceived impacted learning, play, focus, socio-emotional development.

PSYCHOLOGICAL REPERCUSSIONS

STRESS & ANXIETY:

Since the start of the pandemic, anxiety in children has reached clinical levels (Fitzpatrick et al., 2020). This may be due to a variety of reasons, including the shake-up to way of life, greater potential for at-home tension, perception of stress in family members, and lessened physical activity.

DEPRESSION:

Depression has also increased. This may be due to increased loneliness, a COVID infection or death in the family, and exposure to news or other media outlets (Wang et al., 2021).

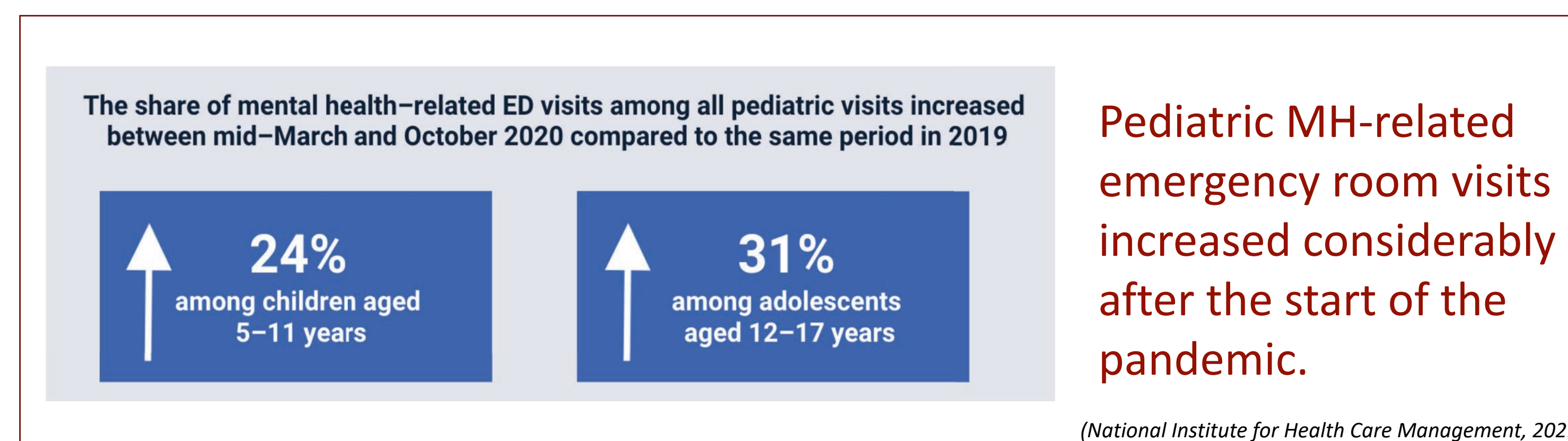
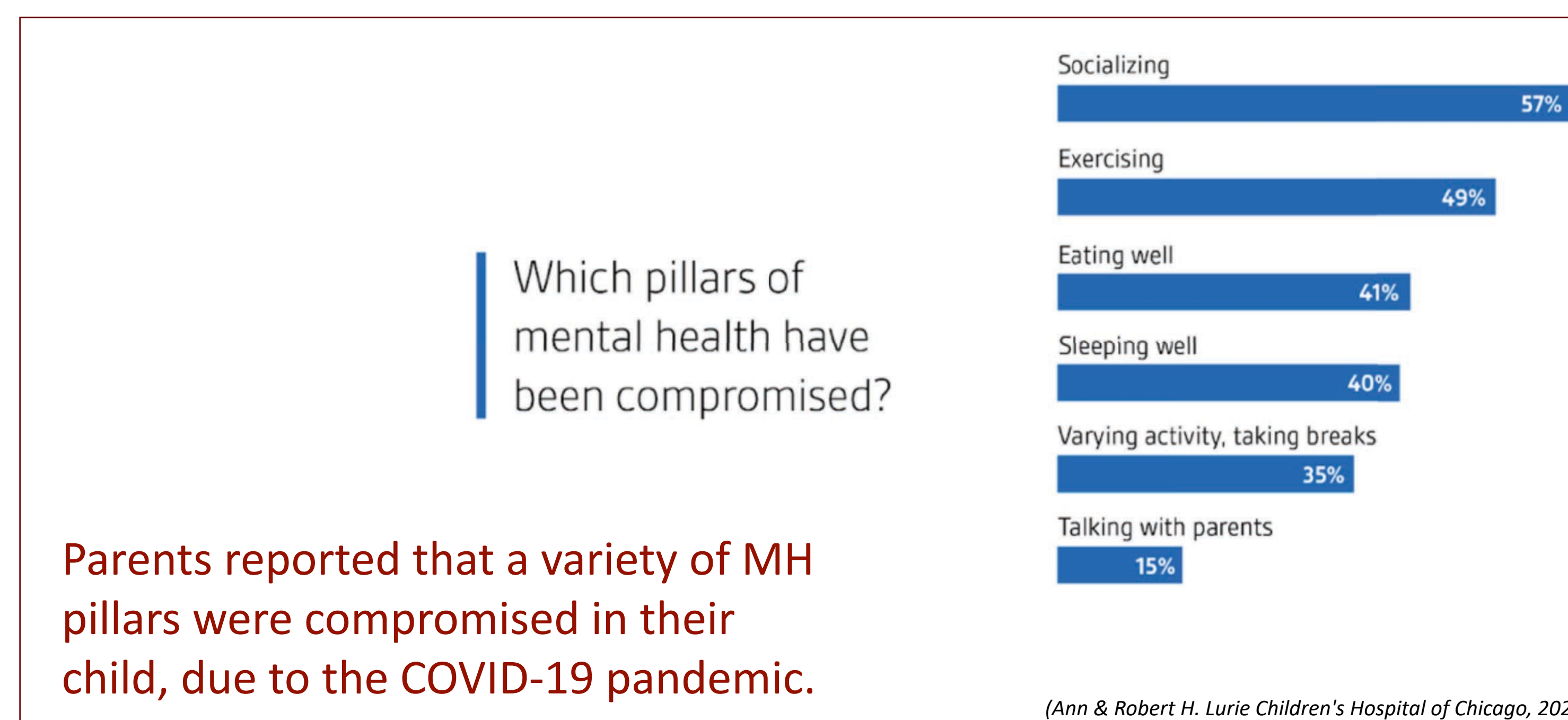
SOCIO-EMOTIONAL WELLBEING:

Lack of independence and withdrawal have become common (Fitzpatrick et al., 2020). Parental MH problems can make children more vulnerable to having socio-emotional challenges.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Factors that can help aid these MH challenges include close family relationships, calm home life, use of effective coping mechanisms, and managed or little parental/caregiver stress (Wang et al., 2021).

Additionally, play can serve as a protective factor in limiting the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the MH of children by encouraging healthy physical, social, emotional development, and self-awareness/self-regulation skills (Graber et al., 2020).



PLAY – THE LANGUAGE OF CHILDREN

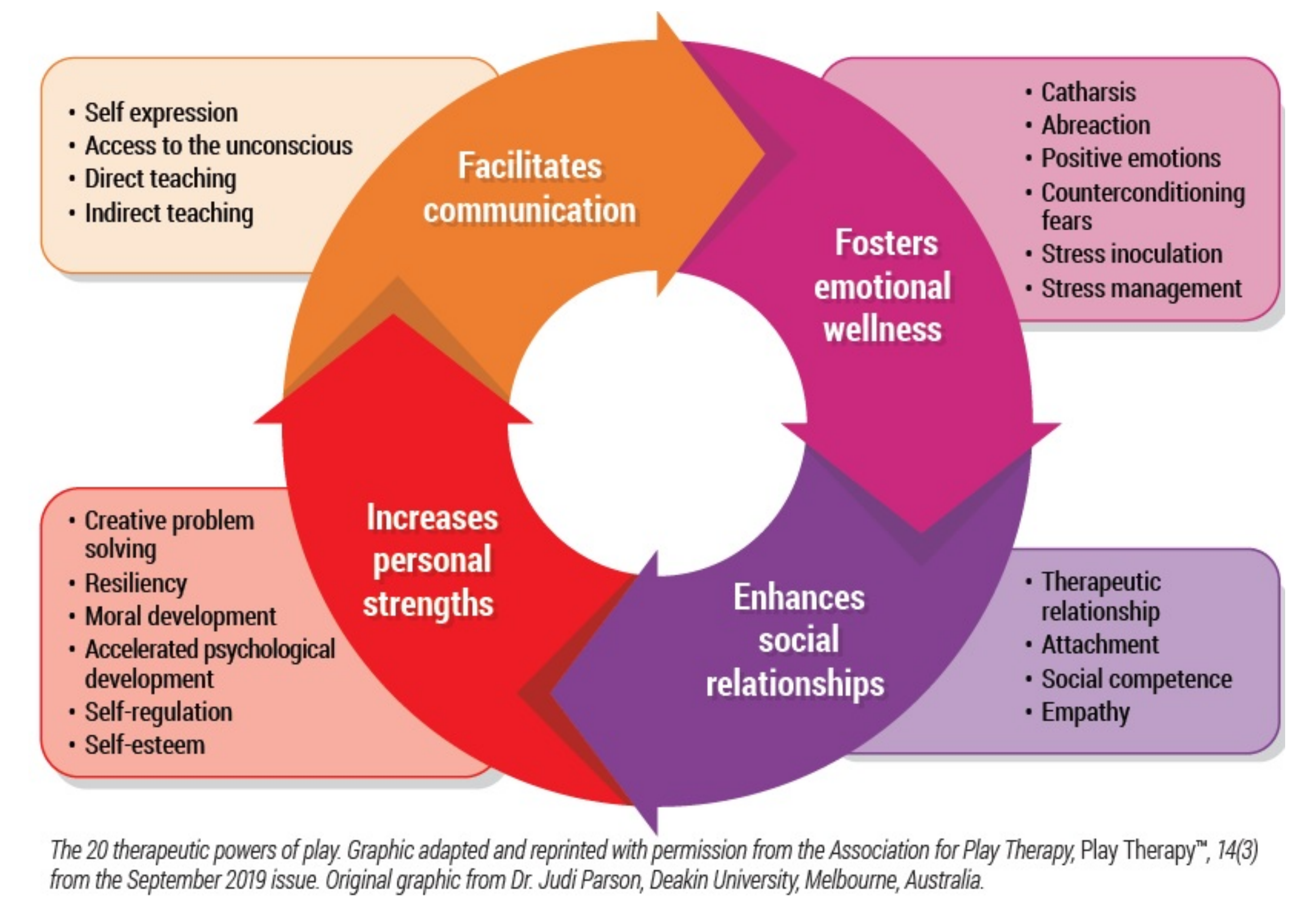
Play is not just a fun and enjoyable part of childhood, it is crucial for healthy child development, and is children’s primary form and language of communication (Zosh et al., 2017).

Play encourages learning through fostering social development, emergent literacy skills, and self-regulation. Play promotes creativity, confidence, and collaboration, and supplies children with the tools that they need to cope with the challenges of everyday life, by providing them with a safe and nurturing space to try out a variety of creative solutions to problems they encounter (Yogman et al., 2018).

For these reasons, play and play-related activities are particularly beneficial in mitigating the consequences of COVID-19 on children’s mental and socio-emotional well-being (Graber et al., 2021).

PLAY THERAPY

Play therapy (PT) uses the therapeutic powers of play to help individuals with a variety of MH needs. Numerous types of PT are evidence-based.



CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impacts on the well-being of children, particularly in the realm of MH and psychological well-being. Play and play therapy are well-documented strategies that may be helpful to children impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

SELECTED REFERENCES

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