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Volume 11, Number 1S, Supplement, 2024

Congress 2023

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1110241ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.26443/ijwpc.v11i1.400

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Publisher(s)
McGill University Library

ISSN
2291-918X (digital)

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Cite this document
MINDFULNESS AND THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIPS: INSIGHTS FROM A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS' PRACTICES

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Keywords: Therapeutic relationship, Mindfulness, Occupational therapy

BACKGROUND

A well-established body of literature highlights the importance of the therapeutic relationship when working with children and youth. A growing body of literature points to the potential of mindfulness to enhance the quality of relationships, including the therapeutic relationship. To date, little attention has been paid to this topic within the profession of occupational therapy.
AIM
The aim of this study was to inquire into paediatric occupational therapists’ experiences of mindfulness in the therapeutic relationship with children and youth.

METHODS
Heideggerian-informed hermeneutic phenomenology was employed as the methodological approach. Two key Heideggerian concepts of being-with and care served as theoretical underpinnings of the study. Semi-structured interviews were completed with eight North American occupational therapists to elicit their first-hand accounts of mindfulness in the therapeutic relationship with their paediatric clients. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using a phenomenological approach.

RESULTS
Four key themes were identified and include: fostering a safe space, enhancing presence, being authentic, and cultivating acceptance.

CONCLUSIONS
The findings offer insights regarding the potential affordances of mindfulness to support clinicians as they form of therapeutic relationships with children and youth. This study highlights research priorities for future inquiry.