

Stephanie Anismatta for the Metro Diagnostic Treatment Center: Game-Based CBT Track
NJPA Written Narrative

As a graduate student in the School Psychology doctoral program at the Rutgers Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology, my clinical experiences have shaped me into becoming a “trauma-informed clinician.” As a practicum student, I was involved with the Robert Wood Johnson pediatric surgery department. With a dedicated multidisciplinary team of surgeons, nurse practitioners, social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists, we created and implemented an initiative to screen patients for early predictors of traumatic stress. Our goal was to connect the dots between physical injuries and psychological symptoms, and to provide support for those who needed it. This experience allowed me, in addition to the medical physicians, to ask the right questions. Instead of asking, “What is wrong with you,” we need to start asking, “What happened to you?” That is the question medical physicians and mental health professionals should be considering when facing a child who had experiences adversity. As Nadine Burke Harris once said, “The science is clear: Early adversity dramatically affects health across a lifetime.” Since I’ve had this experience, I decided that I would like to continue to evaluate and treat children and adolescents who have experienced trauma in their lives. This influenced my decision to apply to externship sites that provided trauma-informed therapy in multidisciplinary settings. When I came across the Game-Based CBT externship at Wynona’s House Child Advocacy Center, I knew I would be getting the training and experiences I wanted working with this population.

As an extern in the Game-Based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Track at the Metropolitan Regional Diagnostic and Treatment Center, I am working with children and their families who have been impacted by child sexual abuse, physical abuse, and neglect. Before I began seeing clients, I received extensive training and supervision in treatment and assessment of child maltreatment using the Game-Based CBT model, an evidence-based manualized treatment for child abuse. I am currently seeing two individual clients and leading one Game-Based CBT group. I am also involved all aspects of group therapy including recruitment, pre-treatment screenings, post-treatment planning, case management, behavioral observations, and clinical writing. In addition to the group therapy experience, I conduct psychosocial evaluations, which entails a semi structured interview with the DCP&P worker, non-offending parents, and the allegedly abused child. Within our training experience, we attend didactics on a variety of topics including physical abuse, play therapy, and training in Trauma-Focused CBT by one of the certified clinicians. I work at the center approximately 16-20 hours per week and receive two hours of individual and two hours of group supervision per week. Being an extern at the RDTTC has allowed me to expand my experience working with diverse families who have been impacted by trauma. Through my work, I have learned the importance of being a culturally competent clinician and my role as an advocate in a child’s life. I am especially inspired by the resilience I see at the center and how the trauma does not define the individual, but in fact, shapes them into stronger children. As a graduate student, I greatly appreciate the NJPA grant as it alleviated the expenses needed to be present at the center each day, thus allowing me to gain the clinical experiences and professional growth I am looking for.