

Melbourne-based psychologist Gulcin has spent over 15 years working with children in primary and high school settings, nurturing their emotional and educational needs.

"I've always known I wanted to work with and help children," Gulcin says, her passion for helping children evident from the very start of her career. Initially seeking a master's in Child Psychology, she pivoted to a master's in Educational Psychology due to limited education options. That desire for child-focused specialisation has now come full circle for Gulcin as she starts her journey into a private practice that will allow her to engage with children in more direct and profound ways.

Challenge: The next step in a child-centred career

Having spent a considerable amount of time in the school setting, where her role encompassed a range of responsibilities, including counselling, short to medium-term interventions, parent work, and assessments, Gulcin gained a well-rounded set of skills. **However, the ultimate goal was not just to enter private practice but to become highly skilled in catering to the unique needs of children.**

"I'm very old school, so I always feel like I need to be thoroughly prepared. Although I've had many years of experience in education, I wanted to look into specific skills around working with children."

For this next stage of her career development, Gulcin sought a psychology supervisor with experience in play therapy. "I wanted to do it as part of my registration as a psychologist," Gulcin explains, "I was looking to get some supervision in play therapy or with someone familiar with it."

Delving into the various frameworks of play therapy, while valuable, made Gulcin realise she needed more than just guidance; she needed training to fully grasp the subject and bridge the gap between theory and practice.

"Supervision is great, but to truly understand, I needed more than just that. I needed dedicated training, a structured learning process."

Solution: Professional pathway and specialist training

Gulcin considered various options, including a Master's program and other interstate training, but the constraints of time and location led her to seek a more flexible solution. **Credibility and professional recognition in her field were of the utmost importance when selecting the right course**, and Gulcin found an ideal fit in the Sydney Centre for Creative Change's Graduate Certificate in Play and Art Therapy led by Jacki Short.

The advantages of the program for Gulcin were that Jacki is well regarded in the field of play therapy, and the program offers the flexibility of structured online training. **Critically, the program also provided graduate certificate qualifications upon completion and a professional pathway towards Gulcin's registration as a psychologist.**

"I've never done a program like Jacki's before. I've done online courses, but never anything so intensive."

Several elements of the unique program particularly stood out for Gulcin:

Roleplay

Engaging in role play has enhanced Gulcin's professional practice.

"The most powerful aspect of the program for me was the opportunity to engage in roleplay."

"Roleplay is hard for everyone, but our group warmed up to it with Jacki's supportive guidance. Her careful approach helped us become more comfortable with roleplaying, making it progressively easier. **Roleplay was how I was able to actually see the dimensions of play therapy.** You can read about it, but you can't conceptualise it until you've experienced it."

Reflection

Gulcin's overall learning in this course has been significantly enriched by the incorporation of reflective practice.

"I could really reflect on how it feels to be the therapist and how it feels to be the child. That was huge."

"It was special, reflecting on yourself as a child. It was a really nice way to learn. Experiencing all that is what made this course invaluable."

Responsive

"Post-COVID, we've all done lots of workshops with everything offered online, the presenter just presenting and you can switch yourself off so you're listening but not completely there. That's not possible when you're doing play therapy training with Jacki. **We were very focused on what we were doing, the information and what she was teaching us.**"

"There's reflection at every point, something that we have to give back or share, which keeps you engaged, thinking and on your feet."

Result: Paradigm shift in practice

"The frameworks, the foundational skills, the understanding of the Play Therapist and their role in therapy has had a big impact on how I work."

Gulcin's participation in Jacki's Graduate Certificate in Play and Art Therapy has brought about a profound transformation in her approach as a psychologist. Traditionally trained in directive methods of therapy and counselling, the course introduced Gulcin to the world of child centred play therapy, leading to a paradigm shift in her professional mindset.

"As a senior member within my school, I have the opportunity to influence decision-making at a higher level. The CCPT certificate course has provided me with an excellent framework for working in a manner that is both respectful and dedicated to empowering children. This is something I advocate in all my interactions with school leaders."

The course has also empowered Gulcin as she steps into her vision of private practice, enhancing her confidence along with her therapeutic skills. This shift aligns with her commitment to more long-term, impactful interventions, moving beyond the traditional CBT and solution-focused practices.

"I wanted to jump into private practice last year, but I wanted to feel more prepared. It was about my confidence; I needed that from a professional standpoint before opening my private practice."

Jacki's course has not only enriched Gulcin professionally but also connected her with a supportive community of play therapy focused individuals. She values the network and professional development opportunities it provides. "Sydney Centre for Creative Change is a place where I can connect with like-minded people," Gulcin says, "it offers a platform for me to further enhance my skills across various areas in therapeutic intervention with children."

"The program has had a profound effect on me personally and professionally."

"I've found my passion. Now, play therapy is the majority of my work."