



# THERAPY NEWS

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## Jungian Analytical Play Therapy

Some things in life require that a person slow down. Young people seem to move so quickly in our high-speed culture that they may feel obliged to act in hasty response just to adapt to the pace. Quick reactivity gives little time to learn the problem-solving essential to succeed in various life arenas. Learning to predict the range of results for various choices, and choosing the best one, is an important skill. This kind of cognitive processing requires deceleration. When a child experiences a trauma that negatively affects developmental movement, they may need to linger and process what has taken place to resolve the upset and move forward. Have you ever wondered about the ways a child therapist can assist with the healing process? Jungian child therapy explores the symbolic meaning of a child's play in an attempt to understand internal

experiences regarding a crisis. This method makes use of a child's ability to work through their own complexities using symbolic work.

Carl Jung (1875-1961) believed the unconscious consisted of archetypes or classic symbols that represented inner images shared by humankind. Dr. Jung emphasized the value of the therapeutic link between patient and clinician in the healing process. This method is suitable for those working through a crisis, as well as addressing the difficult tasks of normal stages, like adolescence. When children face traumas, such as abuse, physical injury, natural disaster, bullying or family changes, they need a safe person with whom they can sort through these events. The therapist helps the child bring to awareness what is out of their notice in the role of a sensitive and accepting witness. Being tuned-in



*The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect, but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity.*

*The creative mind plays with the objects it loves.*

*- Carl Jung*

and present, the clinician allows the child to lead the way. Jungian therapists believe that most children instinctively know where they need to go emotionally to heal themselves. Jung thought it helpful for patients to connect these internal archetypal symbols to integrate negative events into a cohesive narrative in order to process and resolve pain. This type of depth therapy can be more instructive in

August 2012  
Volume XI, Issue III



### Creative Interventions

- **Mandalas:** Circular drawings representing the "Self." Magic circles are colored as a personal symbol and serve as a protective boundary of physical and psychological space. Stories are composed from a series of drawings and include color maps to dialogue various feelings.
- **Sandtray:** The sand and tray is a base symbolizing the "Self." Through active imagination using figurines to create stories, symbols appear as unconscious expressions of behaviors, thoughts and feelings.
- **Fairytales/Narratives:** Myths assist psychological growth and healing by the connection of themes to a child's own unconscious emotional struggles. Themes of Good vs. Evil emerge. The ego is strengthened, as they use imagination to become the champion of their own story giving a life direction.
- **Dreams:** Artwork is used to depict dreams to gain mastery over difficult emotions and fears.

Green, E. (2012).

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## Resources

- Gil, E. (2010). *Working with Children to Heal Interpersonal Trauma. The Power of Play*. NY, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Green, E. (2012, June). *Jungian play therapy: Theory, mandalas and dreams and Jungian sandplay with children: Use of fairy tales, narrative therapy and expressive arts. Workshop presented at Appalachian Play Therapy Center at Lindsey Wilson College.*
- Jung, C. (1961). *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*. London: Fontana Press.



*Back to School: Have a Great Year!*

## Analytical Jungian Play Therapy—continued

that the therapist may provide certain experiences to excavate maladaptive elements related to the trauma to resolve reactive symptoms. A child's personal themes and images are explored through stories, art, mandalas, dreams and sandtrays to guide them to personal growth, transformation and self-healing. Through semi-directive experiential activities, the child is encouraged to bring out unconscious material by exploring the meaning of their symbols in progressive stages of creative and written work. For example, the distressed child client may create a sandtray world, use their imagination to craft a story of personal meaning from the tray and further develop the storyline via writing. The themes of their efforts reflect present concerns, as well as ones out of immediate awareness. The therapist may ask processing questions to help amplify imagery in a sand scene. For instance, in order to illuminate past, present and future, the clinician may ask, "What was happening in this world before the scene occurred?" "What story does this world tell?" "What happens in the end?" "If you were to give this world a title, what would it be?" By elaborating on the images, kids become increasingly familiar with what they think and feel. In pondering, reorganizing, visualizing and expanding the material, they slowly bring unconscious content into awareness where it can be dealt with therapeutically. The therapist can then

link the client's symbolic play with their personal observations and past pertinent events from the child's life. In addition to the client's internal processing, the therapist's insightful words can be helpful in encouraging behavioral change. Creation of therapeutic movement helps the client see their own positive potential future and can come to terms with what has occurred in the past. Again, this type of healing takes time and commitment. The treatment plan involves the child attending sessions twice a week, a parent-child play session every couple weeks and the therapist's occasional consultation with professional peers to provide a more holistic focus benefitting the client and family.

Individuation is one goal that results from leading clients through emotional roads to assist in their expression of unconscious awareness. Jung thought of individuation as connecting the space between the unconscious symbolic world and the everyday world of the Ego to actualize the unique possibilities of the human psyche. It may be unrealistic to strive towards a state of 'perpetual joy' as an aim of therapeutic work. A more reasonable end might be to discover value and consolation regarding our painful experiences, to gain acceptance about what has happened in life and to recognize the power in the images representing our stark, yet promising reality.