



PLAY THERAPY NEWS

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WHAT IS SAND TRAY THERAPY?

Sand Tray Therapy's interesting history goes back to H.G. Wells' apparent realization of his two sons working through their own personal problems on the floor with miniature figures. Psychiatrist, Dr. Margaret Lowenfeld, then developed the "World Technique" as a psychotherapeutic tool. Dora Kalff, Jungian Analyst, expanded the method a bit further, granting it the name "sandplay."

Sand Tray Therapy entails a sandtray with very specific properties of size and color, a water source and shelves of a variety of miniatures to represent the "World."

Sand Tray Therapy refers to the uniquely-powerful way a person may creatively express inner thoughts and feelings. The sandtray is used as a means of communication and an avenue for healing and personal growth, as play is in and of itself, a natural adaptive process for human beings. The tray serves as a bridge between the individual's inner personal world and the reality of their outer life.

Aspects of awareness are channeled between the unconscious (nonverbal) and the conscious (verbal) parts of the mind.

This method works by using a person's natural human capacity for play. The act of handling the organic sand, adding water and making or changing scenes, calls forth healing and transformation; important goals of therapy.

One can "build" a World in a tray of sand and then share their intimate impressions with a trusted observer, such as a therapist. The focused attention of the therapist's witnessing the client's building is an essential piece that activates the process. Following behind the person, rather than imposing a structure on their creativity, allows the person's psyche be the guide to their inner world rather than the therapist. It is a world that the "self" creates. The practice of changing energy into matter, symbolic thoughts and feelings forms into

visible physical shape, leads a person towards that for which most humans strive; to be real and understood by him/herself and others.

After the World is created, the therapist engages the client in interpreting the language of their creation to discern personal meaning of their inner and outer experiences for the purpose of mutually meaningful insights.



I talked lots about everything that happened, but here, I have been very quiet; I've been thinking. Thinking is hard coz no one hears you, but this sand picture is a sort of a thinking picture, isn't it? You can see it out loud.

- A child participant in Harper's Australian Sand Tray Play Study, 1986



Volume V, Issue III
August 2007

Sandplay with Children

Many of us have happy memories of playing in a sandbox, but sandplay is useful as a profoundly powerful communication tool. The beauty of the sand is that it naturally invites a child to play. However, in this context, the sandtray incites a child to express buried feelings and solve problems related to their daily life. This play brings their inner and outer worlds together through imagination. The sandtray provides a place to work through phases of self-healing and development leading to the experience of wholeness.

There is a distinction between sandplay and sandtray therapy, as the later emphasizes the spontaneous and dynamic traits of the creative

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Sandplay with Children

encounter itself. Sandplay's basic nature is symbolic and non-verbal. The tray and relationship with the therapist provides the "free and protected place" (Kalff, 1980). Here the child and therapist play with sand, water and figurines over a series of sessions building actual expressions of the child's inner world. The unconscious is stimulated by the tray, the sensory experience of smooth sand and a variety of figures, as well as with the trusted therapist nearby. When the symbolism in the child's work is realized, the healing can occur instinctively at the unconscious level.

Because children can recognize language meaning before they can speak, sandplay is also helpful in

opening the child to re-experiencing pre-verbal and non-verbal states.

In the drive towards healthcare economics and the impact of modern-day values, sandplay therapists must continue their important work in understanding the psyche. The deep wisdom and simplicity of sandplay will preserve its integrity always as a place of sacred sanctuary and healing.



RESOURCE CORNER

Hurried lifestyle & heavy academic, extracurricular load taking toll; balance is needed—

A new report from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) states that free, unstructured play is healthy and essential for helping our children reach developmental milestones and in management of stress. Go to: <http://www.aap.org/pressroom/lay-public.htm>

Go to Search and type "Play." Scroll down and click on "New AARP Report..." or go to the PDF file for the full report.