The Healing Power of Sandtray Therapy

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“There is a road from the eye to the heart
that does not go through the intellect.”
-Gilbert Keith Chesterton

“Creativity and imagination are not frosting on a cake:
they are integral to our sustainability.
They are survival mechanisms.
They are of the essence of who we are.
They constitute our deepest empowerment.”
-Matthew Fox
The Healing Power of Sandtray Therapy

Agenda

Introduction
Group Sandtray Experience
Break
Dr. Margaret Lowenfeld
What are the Benefits?
Nondirective/Directive Sandtray
Guidelines for Therapist as Silent Observer
Glimpses of a Sandtray Group: DVD
Processing the Tray
Break
Individual Experience of Sandtray Therapy
Closure
"The child is confronted by a piece of his own feeling, thinking, remembering...life set out by himself for his own study."

-Margaret Lowenfeld
Nondirective /Directive Sandtray

The Building Stage

Nondirective Sandtray:
- Create a sandtray scene about your world; build your world.
- The toys are for you to use. Look at the toys until you find the ones that your heart chooses.

Directive Sandtrays:
- Create a scene in the tray that shows what it's been like after the divorce.
- Create a scene in the tray showing your family with everyone doing something.
- Create a scene showing what it is like getting ready for the new baby.
- Create the visits to your mother’s.
- In one half of the tray build what it’s like visiting Dad, and in the other half what it’s like living with mom.
- Create a scene all about Mom and you.

Honor the process, the product, and the client.
Observe and listen; enter the client’s world.
Sometimes it’s hard to get started.
Allow time to work. Trust the process.
Participate in the silence together.
Sandtray play is powerful. It is cognitive, behavioral therapy that stimulates our capacity to experience. Play is less gentle, more focused, less relaxed, more intense. There is more challenge to the ego and defenses with more access to the core self.

Guidelines for the Silent Observer
The Building Stage

- Being fully present to each moment.
- Watching, listening
- Allowing, wondering
- Noticing, honoring
- Creating safety
- Giving space
- Being totally present with intense curiosity like a two year old
- Holding with love
- Staying focused
- Thinking... What is that? What are they feeling? Where did they come from? What’s it like to be here? But...not figuring it out and not asking.
- Not worrying
- Being with what is.
- Not judging, eating, writing, talking, distracting.
- Not touching the tray or miniatures
- Not labeling any miniature, as a giraffe may be an elevator, a car may be a magical carriage, etc.

Carol B. Stanley, PCC-S, 2015
Processing Sandtray Therapy

Be totally present with intense curiosity like a two year old, only not saying or doing anything. Think..."what’s that?" but don’t ask.

When the builder has completed the tray:

- Ask to be invited into the builder’s world and be silent together, seeing. Be on opposite sides.
- Tell me about your world. What is it like to be there?
- Then join the builder on the same side....silence again. Same side....retelling, mirroring.
- Reflect, be there. If some words seem especially important to remember, it is okay to take notes.
- Ask questions pertaining to the happenings in the world.
- Help the builder experience every element of the world.
- If I were __________, what would I feel?
- What is that like to.....?
- What was it like for ......?
- What’s going on in that house right now?
- Does anyone in this world know about his plight?
- Is there someone here who understands what is going on here? (If you notice a healing spot in the tray.)
- As a character is described, "Notice what’s that like for her." (A character the builder has described.)
- We respect by not touching the world.
- Refrain from telling anyone what she is experiencing, or what she means.
- Do not ask...what is that?
- Do not ask why questions. i.e. Why did you choose that?
- Remember play is a process, so no judgment.
- Trust that the builder has all the equipment needed to play with her joys, pains, suffering.
- Awful suffering may show up, but wisdom can come out.
- Receive the builder’s world with lots of mirroring. Mirroring the builder’s exact language is helpful.

- What do you think your heart is teaching you here today?
- What is important about knowing that?
- How does this scene fit into your own life?

- “Rely upon the client’s wisdom rather than the therapist’s knowledge.”