

A Brief Look at Sandplay Therapy

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What Is Sandplay Therapy?

Jungian-oriented Sandplay is a nonverbal, active therapy experience, for adults and children. Clients can express ideas, sensations, and feelings without relying on words. Sandplay invites adults and children to create a personal journey to healing and wholeness.

The client chooses miniature objects and figures—people, animals, trees, houses, common objects, mythological figures, and fantasy creatures—in order to make a three-dimensional scene or story in a specially-made tray containing sand. Doing this work creates opportunity to resolve life experiences that may be keeping the client “stuck” in some way.

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Viewing Sandplay through the lenses of neurobiology, psychology, and mythology helps us to understand the powerful healing and transformation that can occur in this work.

The training of a Jungian-based Sandplay therapist is intensive, extensive, and ongoing.

What Are the Benefits of Sandplay?

In the course of this work, the client can say a great deal without needing to talk. Sandplay experience is spontaneous and non-threatening. A process in Sandplay can build self-confidence, resolve inner conflicts, reduce anxieties, increase motivation, improve the ability to focus, and/or increase a client’s sense of self-worth. Research shows the powerful effect a Sandplay process can have on clients who feel “stuck” or are dealing with crisis, relationships, transitions, mild brain injuries, chronic illness, abuse, end of life, grief and loss, or the effects of a trauma.

How Does One “Do” Sandplay?

There is no way for a client to fail in Sandplay! There is no pattern or “right approach” to this process. One client may dig in the sand or make intricate designs with her hands, while another may simply place the miniatures on the sand surface. Sometimes the scenes are simple; other times complex. The key elements are trust and safety.

What Does the Therapist Do?

The trained Sandplay therapist allows the client to open to the process at his or her own pace. The therapist serves as a trusted witness and guide. While the client works in the sand, the therapist is usually quiet, observing the client’s interaction with the sand and the chosen items. When the client indicates he is done, the therapist views the scene and honors the work in ways that create and maintain a safe and healing environment.

The therapist’s notes and photos of the trays record the process and data over time for insights into the client’s journey toward healing.

How Have Your Clients Used Sandplay?

My clients have used sandplay for calming, to heal from trauma or abuse, to honor life’s journey into death, to resolve issues with partners and family members, to know Self, to imagine possibilities, to create a couples’ tray, to work through a journey with cancer,

MarthaElin Mountain is an STA Board-Certified Sandplay Practitioner and has been working with Sandplay since 2000. It is her joy to serve as a guide for clients who choose Sandplay as part of their therapy process.

“The hands know how to solve a riddle with which the intellect wrestles in vain.”

Carl Jung, 1954