

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 one’s 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.

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How Does One “Do” Sandplay?

There is no way a person can fail in Sandplay! One client may dig in the sand or make intricate designs with her hands; another may simply place miniatures on the sand surface. Sometimes the sand scenes are simple; other times complex. The key elements are trust and safety.

What Does the Therapist Do?

The Sandplay therapist allows the client to move into 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 observes from a distance and quietly notes the client’s interaction with the sand and the items chosen. When the client indicates he is done, the therapist and client view the scene and honor the work in ways that create and maintain a safe and healing environment.

The therapist’s records of the trays record the process, over time. At an agreed-upon time, therapist and client review images of the completed process for insights into the client’s journey toward healing.

Why Have Your Clients Used Sandplay?

Individuals and couples have used Sandplay to calm stress, to heal from trauma or abuse, to honor their life’s journey, to resolve relationship issues, to know Self, and 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