

Although these two methods differ in respect to theoretical assumptions, both schools are experience focused, both honor the natural process of the unconscious, and both are non-interpretative.

How does Sandtray Therapy Work?

The client is offered materials and a space in which to work. The therapist's collection of figurines usually contains hundreds of miniature objects to choose from – people, animals, natural objects of all sorts, houses, bridges, ships, fantasy creatures, symbolic objects, religious figures from diverse cultural spheres, and magical figures to mention a few. The client is encouraged to explore the shelves and trays of sand even during his/her first visit to the office. The Sandtray session begins with the clients being invited to walk along the shelves and baskets containing miniature objects and select figurines to which they are drawn by the living experience in their bodies and imagination. The therapist may encourage clients to suspend for a while all judgments, intentions or goals and "let the figure pick you." This refers to the power of the Sandtray process to open the clients to re-experience pre-verbal and non-verbal states. As adults we may have forgotten or never learned words for some of our inner experiences. Yet we may recognize a figurine intuitively without conscious recollection why or what it is.

There is no limit to the number of objects the clients can select. There is no right or wrong way of doing this. The selection stage ends when the clients have a sense of having picked enough objects to start building their World. They can always return to the shelves for more figurines if they feel they need them.

During the building stage, the sandbox is placed between the builder and witness. The intentional use of the terms "builder" and "witness," (by De Domenico) as opposed to "client" and "therapist," demonstrates the recognition of Other-as-peer. In fact, the builder is seen as the expert who teaches the witness. The builder develops a language of figurines and begins to explore a new realm of inner wisdom. She/he constructs a portrayal of the World that is closest to her/him by placing the objects in the sandbox, and/or by molding sand, pouring water or igniting fire. No attempt is made to alter the process, influence the choices the client makes or to modify the client's behavior. In the tray the builders are confronted with their own thinking and feeling made manifest. The communication that takes place in the process is first a communication from the client to his or her self, that is, objectifying an inner reality and then secondly, from the client to the witness.

The witness takes notes regarding the development of the World, object choice and placement. The builder is encouraged to look at the World from all angles. It is believed that psyche reveals several perspectives on an issue, and that different perspectives may be seen when looking at the World from different vantage points. The psyche is seen as an ally who directs the entire play process for the ultimate benefit of the client's growth, development and healing.

Sometimes the client talks about her/his life issues and then the therapist briefly responds; other times both remain silent. The degree of verbalization depends on the judgment of the therapist or the client's need to concretize the experience in words. In Sandtray reductive interpretation is not used because the images often come from a deep archetypal level and are uncensored by the ego. Interpretation actually inhibits the process. Rather than projecting her/his limited concepts,

theories or models onto the images, the therapist *waits* for the wisdom of the client's psyche to unfold in the series of sand pictures. Preferably, the therapist "enters" the Sandtray with the client and participates empathically in the act of creation, thus establishing a strong wordless rapport.

There are two phases for processing: silent reflection and verbal association, followed by joint experiencing. In other words, the builder and the witness are looking silently at the World together; then the builder takes the witness into the World, the builder makes connections, brings it home and shares her/his experiences in response to the World and the process. During the concluding phase, the builder explores the psyche's message/gift/guidance, becomes aware of the growing edge, and does some journaling. At the end, builders are given (or e-mailed) photos and notes of their sand Worlds, if they want them.

Therapeutic Applications of Sandtray

Dr. De Domenico called the Sandtray "laboratory of the world" where clients may learn to access, express, and understand the depth of their personal, social, and spiritual experiences. Each learns how to experience their true self, the inner (invisible) world of images and energy, and the outer (visible) world of physical form. De Domenico suggests that Sandtray may be used as part of a psychotherapeutic or a transformational process; as a way of checking-in-with Self, a special way of quickly solving a difficult problem, a way of working through a crisis so that it will not become "traumatic," a way of marking a rite of passage, a way of retrieving lost parts of self, a means of envisioning alternate realities, a technique to overcome a communication impasse, or an opportunity to bond with a partner, team member, family, children, friends or other associates.

Ideally, Sandtray could be done within the process of "regular" therapy the client is engaged with. It can also be done as its own therapeutic tool with people who are willing to play, experiment and explore the mysteries of the unknown.

Sandtray may be used whenever people seek to increase consciousness and communication, support the process of individuation, socialization and actively enhance the capacity to live purposefully within the interconnected matrix of nature, soul, spirit and all life forms.

For more information about Sandtray Therapy visit the website: **www.sandplay.org**.

Elizabeth Kwasniewski, M.A, CCC offers sessions in individual counseling. Her therapeutic style represents an integration of experientially-based approaches such as Emotion-Focused, Gestalt, and Sandtray Therapy with more mainstream modalities (e.g., Cognitive-Behavioral). She also encourages people who want to use the experience of their spirituality, within or outside the context of organized religious practice, to bring about positive change. If this work interests you, call Elizabeth at 613.302.1573 for more information or to book an appointment.