

Sandplay Therapy

Carla Hulslander, LCPC

I'd like to introduce you to a unique and self-guided approach to therapy called sandplay therapy. Sandplay therapy is a creative and expressive therapy wherein individuals, children through adult age, choose elements and figures to place in a sand tray. As the objects are placed in the sand the individual begins to create a scene that represents their inner world of feelings, thoughts, and conflicts. Sometimes entering therapy can feel difficult, scary or unsafe and individuals can naturally put up their defenses. The sandplay approach provides a safe way to express oneself when words fail or when it is too difficult to get out of one's own "head". This type of therapy can be particularly effective for individuals who have experienced a significant loss or trauma because speaking of the pain or grief may, at times, worsen symptoms. Expressing these feelings in the sand does not require one to speak aloud or to re-experience a difficult experience. When given appropriate time and space, sandplay therapy is an effective tool in helping individuals begin to heal and transform parts of his or herself.

If you, or someone you know has experienced a trauma or loss that they have difficulty discussing or coping with, the sandplay process can help facilitate growth and change and begin to restore an individual to emotional wholeness.

Here are some commonly asked questions about the sandplay process:

What figures are used in sandplay therapy?

1. Buildings
2. Trees and bushes
3. Fences and gates
4. Wild animals
5. Domestic animals
6. Transportation vehicles
7. People
8. Shells, stones, and driftwood

What will the therapist and individual do during a sandplay therapy session?

1. The therapist will sit near the individual and provide a safe and calming presence.
2. The therapist will mirror and reflect the creative work being done in the sand.
3. Once the tray has been completed, the individual and their therapist can look for metaphors, create a meaningful story, or discuss what the figures represent or symbolize.
4. Lastly, the individual may develop new insights and decide to make changes to his or her world before clearing it at the end of the session.

