



# SANDTRAY IN SCHOOLS

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Tricia Norby, LPC, MA, MS  
WSCA Board Member  
Brianna Capesius, Intern  
WSCA Student Director

# WHAT IS SANDTRAY THERAPY?

## *GOODTHERAPY*



Sandtray therapy is a form of expressive therapy that allows a person to construct his/her own world using miniatures (toys & objects) and sand. The scene created acts as a reflection of the person's own life and allows the opportunity to resolve conflicts, remove obstacles, and gain acceptance of self.

You can use sandtray with children, teens, adults, couples, families, and groups.

British pediatrician, Margaret Lowenfeld, is the first person to utilize sandtray as a therapeutic technique.

### Sandtray names to know:

Margaret Lowenfeld, Goesta Harding, Charlotte Buhler, Hedda Bolgar, Lisolette Fischer, Ruth Bowyer, and Dora Kalff

Pam Dyson, Tammi Vann Hollander, Amy Flaherty, Linda Homeyer, Steven Armstrong, Dottie Klein, Theresa Kestly, Daniel S. Sweeney

\*If you are using a sandtray as a way to help re-regulate students-great! If you are going to use directives, make sure you are trained.

# SANDPLAY VS SANDTRAY

## AMY FLAHERTY, SOUTHERN SANDTRAY INSTITUTE

### Sandplay

- Dora Kalff-originator
- Jungian in nature
- Exact sizes required for sand tray
- Professional Membership organization—ISST
- ISST is very guarded with membership-time consuming/expensive to obtain
- No directives in the tray
- Limited to no interpretation in the tray
- Can only call yourself a sandplay therapist after receiving certification from ISST
- Key people in field—Barbara Turner, Kay Bradway

### Sandtray

- No real founder of sandtray
- Open to incorporating several different theoretical orientations
- Therapeutic relationship is key
- Flexible with tray size
- No national certification recognized (yet)
- Can advertise yourself as a sandtray specialist legally after receiving 45 hours of training
- Use of directives
- Some interpretation is the tray but still heavily relies on the client's inner world
- Flexible use of tray in multiple settings-not just clinical
- Key names: Linda Homeyer, Steven Armstrong, Dottie Klein, Theresa Kestly, Daniel S. Sweeney





**WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO SANDTRAY?**



# SANDTRAYS

## Types of Trays

### Wood vs. Plastic

- Wood-more professional, lasts forever
- Plastic-lighter, cheaper, replace more often

### Blue bottom or blue plastic

- Marine paint or stain (water proof)
- Water is one of 4 elements (Jungian)

Child Therapy Toys, Local craftsman, Ikea



## Tray Size

30"x20"x3" is standard

- A 1" lip is recommend so clients can place figures around edge if desired.
- A tray that can be viewed in a single glance is more therapeutically effective (for the client & counselor)
- Round trays can lend themselves to mandala like creations
- Rectangular trays allow for dividing tray into sections for children/clients who want to separate or compartmentalize issues
- Tray should be no higher than usual table top height
- Choose a blue that isn't too dark of a hue-it can bring on grief responses
- The color blue can trigger neurotransmitters which calm the entire body; lower and deepen breathing, eliminating the FFF response (Steinhardt, 1997)

# SAND



Sand & play naturally relate with each other

- Creative abilities & self expression, (sandcastles)

Genesis 2:7- “the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.”

In Eastern & Native-American cultures

- Sand is often used ritualistically

In Western culture

- The sandman helps us sleep
- Sand is equate with grit or courage
- Sand in the hourglass marking the passing of time



Kinetic--Pricy, kids love, colored, fine or beach

Sand Alive—sticks together, messy, kids love it

Jurassic Sand

- Star Dust-sparkly white, miniatures might not stand up as well
- Mohave Desert Sand-soft, anti-microbiobial, tan
- Riverbed Sand-bigger grains
- Garnet Sand-larger graduals, order extra
- Quick Sand-super soft, orange

Home Depot/Menards/Lowes Playsand

- Premium s. basic, can be dusty, not antimicrobial

Sandtastik-more budget friendly, not antimicrobial, white, tan, or black

\*Kids with sensory issues might have a preference. Otherwise, go for cheap sand because kids will spill it and you don't want to freak out about it.

\*Corn meal for kids who might eat tray contents

\*Small glass or plastic beads (which can be sterilized) for clinic or hospital settings





# SANITIZING SAND

## Germy Hands

- Spread sand on metal baking sheet, 4” thick max
- Bake at 250 degrees F for 40 minutes
- Provide ventilation



## Beach Sand

- Rinse sand in clean water
- Rake or filter/sift sand to remove large particles
- Follow ‘Germy Hands’ instructions







# STORING SANDTRAY MINIATURE

## Shelves

Narrow

White

## Baskets

Especially with kids

Label



# MOBILE SANDTRAYS & MINITURES

Multiple Schools?

Traveling Therapist?

No office or not enough office space?



# PLACING MINITURES

“It is through the use of miniature figures that clients are able to express feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and desires that may be too overwhelming for words.” Homeyer & Sweeney

- Recommendation vary from 300-1000
  - Limited collection means a limited symbolic vocabulary-can be emotionally constricting for clients
  - Too many can lead to disorganization and may be emotionally flooding for clients.
  - Select miniatures purposefully.
  - Need not be to scale w/other miniatures
  - Choose items made from a variety of materials: plastic, wood, minerals, ceramic, pewter, etc
  - Place on shelf w/positive on left and negative on right
  - Top to bottom-Spiritual/mystical, people, household, buildings, bridges/fences, vegetation, animals
- People & Family Groups-adults, teens, children, babies, elderly, variety of ethnic figures
  - Brides & grooms
  - Occupations (helpers-police, judge, dr., etc)
  - Hobbies
  - Sports
  - Stage-of-life figures (graduates, Bar Mitzvahs, etc)
  - Historical figures-knights, kings/queens, military heroes, astronauts, pirates, Hitler, etc
- Animals-prehistoric, zoo, wild, farm, domestic, birds, sea-life, insects
- Buildings-houses, business/civil, religious, historical
- Transportation-Cars, trucks, flight, nautical, non-motor
- Vegetation-trees, bushes, etc.
- Fences/Gates/Signs
- Natural Items-Shells, rocks, crystals, fossils
- Fantasy-magical people & animals, monsters, folklore, cartoon & movie characters
- Spiritual/Mystical-cross, Star of David, Torah, Bible, angels, Buddha
- Landscaping & Weather-Sun, moon, stars, clouds, rain, rainbows, tornados, global, caves, mountains, volcanoes
- Household-furniture, tools, beer & wine bottles, etc
- Medical items-
- Rakes, combs, brushes
- **\*\*Don't move around the collection—consistency promotes predictability which promotes safety.**



**WHY SHOULD WE USE SANDTRAY?** |



# WHY?



Counseling/therapy typically depends on talking.

Talk therapy uses the pre-frontal cortex part of the brain—the last to develop

The effects of trauma are most pronounced on the midbrain (limbic system-emotional center). The frontal cortex often experiences a level of deactivation (where the Broca area is located) so there is a decreased ability to cognitively processes & verbalize material.

Expressive interventions allow for information to be processed in the mid & lower parts of the brain.

Children communicate through play.

Trauma memories are encoded not only in the brain, but within the body as well

...gives expression to nonverbalized emotional issues

...has a unique kinesthetic quality

...can create a necessary therapeutic distance for clients

...provides boundaries & limits which promote safety

- “A world without limits is not a safe world, and children do not grow where they do not feel safe.” (Sweeney, 1997)

...allows for therapeutic metaphors to emerge

...effective in overcoming resistant students

...effective communication method for students with poor verbal skills

...cuts through verbalization used as a defense

# WHY SANDTRAY WORKS

## Left Brain

Analytic

Good/Better/Best

Practical, Strategic

In the Western world, 70% of us are 'left shifted' (Ian McGilchrist)

Linear/Square (prefers rectangular trays)

Language Center

## Right Brain

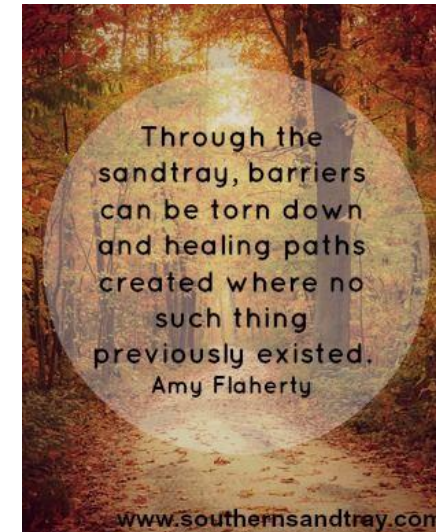
Children tend to 'live' in the right brain; like stories; drawn to circles (round trays)

Navajo Nation (look at world as a more circular-tends to like round trays)

Looks at world in pictures

[The Heart of Trauma: Healing the Brain in the Context of Interpersonal Relationships by Bonnie Badenoch](#)

[Being a Brain-Wise Therapist: A Practical Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology by Bonnie Badenoch](#)



# IMPLICIT MEMORIES

## Explicit vs. Implicit

### Two types of memories

- Explicit memories—gets encoded into the hippocampus
- Implicit memories—below level of consciousness and in our body
  - Trauma (especially severe)
  - Guides our ongoing perceptions and actions
    - Might attribute causation to something that is not accurate because of a triggered implicit memory
  - Formed below level of consciousness
    - Behavioral impulses, affective experiences, perceptions, sensations
  - Cluster together to form mental models
  - Continuing experiences prime the amygdala to anticipate how life works.

Expressive therapy (like sandtray) might be needed in order to heal the whole body

## Split Brain

People who haven't been able to integrate their trauma (stays in the body or the right side of the brain) have similar patterns to those who have had split brain surgery.

- The sandtray allows the images from right side of the brain to move to the left side (language). When you process the tray with the client, clients get better faster because they are using their whole brain.
- Bruce Perry & the nested brain (brain develops in sequence: brain stem, diencephalon, limbic, neocortex)—you can only regulate down

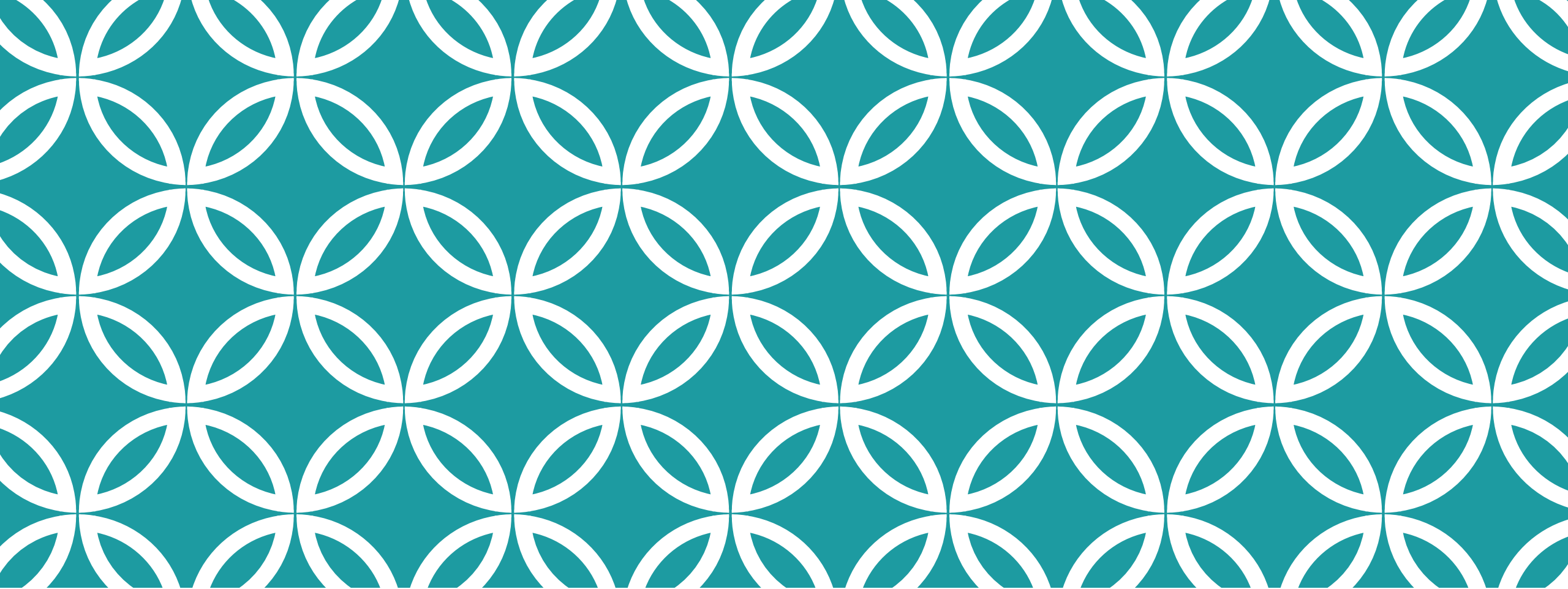
# CO-REGULATION IN THE SAND



- We learn how to self-regulate through our relationships with others
- When we co-regulate with our clients, (provide them with the neuroception of safety, Daniel Siegel calls this *the window of tolerance*) they can take it with them and draw on it when they are alone.
- Social base-line theory tells us that we can do harder things when we have someone with us as support.
- In sandtray, when trauma or implicit memories, which were previously shutdown, we can stand by our clients letting them know that they are safe and they are able to move forward in a way (or at a pace) that they weren't able to on their own.







# PROCESSING THE SANDTRAY



# TYPES OF SANDTRAY THERAPY

## Nondirective

“Make a tray about your world.”

- “No good or bad, right or wrong. I’m going to be sitting here and you just let me know when you are done.”

Each is just a different starting point in the tray.

When you provide a client with neuroceptive safety, they will go where they need to go.

## Directive

“Make a tray about your school.”

“Make a tray about your home-life.”

“Show me what your social life is like in the tray.”



# SANDTRAY BY AGE

WWW.SOUTHERNSANDTRAY.COM

## Tray Setup

- $\leq 3$  Uncontained; track the progress rather than the finished tray
- 4 Ordering-look for disruption, lining the tray
- 5 Order-beginning story “magic”
- 6-8 Very busy-’random’ story telling
- 9-10 Sequential story telling; beginning abstract images
- 11-14 More static, ordering stories, lack of moving worlds
- 14-18 Resemble adults-journeys
- 18-25 Journeys, gatherings, centering
- 25+ Journeys, gatherings, mounds and voids
- 50+ Journeys, quests, centering, meeting of ego and divine, obstacles, scarcity

## Figures

- $\leq 3$  Sharks, monsters, babies, parents; anything they can reach off the shelf
- 4 Categories of figures, farm animals, family figures, babies, houses
- 5 Fantasy figures, babies, houses
- 6-8 Cars, weddings, fantasy, ego figures, setting fires
- 9-10 Knights, soldiers, horses, family, constellations
- 11-14 Mythic fantasy, dungeons, princesses
- 14-18 All—more abstract
- 18-25 Ideal masculine, feminine, churches, temples, wedding items, couples
- 25+ Babies, children, eggs, mother and child, father and child, gardens, treasures, families
- 50+ Mystery, unknown, hidden spiritual figures



# SANDTRAY WITH PRESCHOOL (PAM DYSON)

## Preschool Age (Chronological or Developmental)

- Always have a mat on the floor
- Put tray right on the floor (set rules—no feet)
- Wood or plastic tray is okay (Don't use expensive sand)
- Be comfortable with the mess
- Provide buckets, rakes, funnels, sifters, large miniatures (in case of dumping)
- Non-directive
- Don't take notes during session—stay focused on child
- Meet them where they are at

## Minatures

- Animals (farm, exotic, sea/ocean, pets)
  - Different sizes
  - Families
- Construction
- Stones, Gems, Rocks
  
- *Play is how kids process their world!  
Trust the process.*
- *Track and summarize what's  
happening in the tray.*

# WORKING WITH CHILDREN

## Playing *IS* the therapy

- This is how children process their feelings
- You are holding the ‘free & protected space’
- Children often have moving worlds
- Use reflection, not interpretation
- Every child has within them the ability to grow and actualize the way they are meant to.
- Goals of treatment
  - Self-control and responsible freedom of expression
  - Respect for themselves
  - Their feelings are acceptable
  - Responsible control of their feelings assume responsibility for the self.
- Often, when children leave the office after using the sandtray, children will verbalize what they were processing non-verbally in the sandtray.
- You may not get feedback but teachers/parents notice that students/client is getting better.

## Children may want you to join them in the sandtray

- Children feel safe enough to invite you into their world
- This may be an attachment exercise for children
- Hide & Seek (use whisper technique)
  - “Okay, where should I look?”
  - Child stays in control
- Don’t take over the tray!
  - Child directed “What should I do now?”
- Miniatures
  - animals of all sorts (families), dragons & dinosaurs, vehicles, stones, gems, fantasy figures & people (older children)
- Gary Landreth—child centered play therapy

# SANDTRAY WITH TEENS

## Teens

- Teen are not adults!
- Prefrontal cortex isn't mature until 25.
- Teens want to feel heard and understood
- Can use directive or non-directive tray
- Teens are often very concrete but might have one or two abstract theme.
  - Take note of the abstract, "I noticed that you said...tell me more about that."

## Minitures

### Some animals

- Families, smaller

### Fantasy figures

- Medieval themed
- Branded or not

### People

- Multigenerational
- Various races or generic

### Buildings

- Houses, school, church



# USING SANDTRAYS IN A GROUP

## What do you need?

- Already established group w/feelings of safety (3-5 students)
- Trays for each participant or one large tray
  - Try to have the same type of sand in each tray
- Large selection of miniatures w/duplicates
  - Consider a collection of buttons or charms
  - Or if doing group co-regulation, have same implements for each participant.
- Enough space to move around for miniature selection
- Enough time to process the trays after creation
- Only use with students who have good coping skills
- Group Tray Rules: Only work in your own tray; don't touch anyone else's sand or miniatures; be respectful of each other and their trays (no comments about what should or shouldn't be in someone else's tray).

## What does it look like



- The week before, let students know that you are going to try something new and different in the next session.
- Have the table set-up with the trays (covers on) and miniatures ready to go before students arrive.
- “Today we are going to try something a little different. Each of you is going to use a sandtray to create your world. You will have 5-10 minutes to select miniatures to place in your world and when you are done, those that would like to share their world can do so with the group.”
- Notice similarities &/or differences between trays.
- Ask student what they thought about this process.
- Thank students for sharing and let them know if they would like to come back to talk to you individually about their tray they can.
- Either cover each tray with a cloth or have students put miniatures away before they leave.



# HOW TO START & END A SESSION...

## Starting

- Kids will generally just jump in.
- For older students or adults, explain to them what sandtray is and how it works
  - It works with the whole brain so that you get could feel better faster
  - It can help me understand you better
  - It can help you understand yourself better
  - Let students know that it may feel weird at first
  - Give a directive

## Ending

“It seems like we are finished for today but can you take one last look to see if there is anything that needs to be moved, added or taken out of the tray.”

## Sessions

- Introduce sandtray
- 15-25 min for sandtray
  - 5-10 min to build
  - 5-10 to process/discuss
  - 5- min to wrap up session
  - Cover tray or clean-up





# NOTICE HOW THE MINIATURES ARE PLACED

- Center: self or present
- Left: past
- Right: future (goals)—opposite in cultures where you read from right to left
- Top: spiritual or power
- Bottom: less power OR a more prominent issues in the client's life
- Opposite corners: possible conflict
- Buried Objects: possible secrets, conflict, something not ready to see
- Objects facing client: less open
- Objects facing away: more open to sharing
- Smaller trays usually represent just the present time
- Empty world: sadness and depression
- Unpeopled world: possible pain or abuse
- Fenced or closed world: possible compartmentalized or protected issues, rigid or schematic world
- Rows: possible control or hiding abuse
- Disorganized, incoherent world: possible lack of control, chaos
- Aggressive world, war: possible exposure to violence, anger

# SANDTRAY THEMES

**Emptiness**—1/3 or more of tray is empty is often indicative of depression, apathy, or hopelessness

**Laying Out Miniature Flat in Tray**—depression or loss of control

**Fences**—guardedness or high anxiety levels

**Dumping**—feeling out of control and chaos

**Centering**—feeling in control is present and an inner locus of control

**Journey**—sign of hope and health moving towards a positive future

**Differing Categories**—Lack of rigidity and expansive thinking about client's world

**Bridges**—hope and connection between differing parts of life



# FENCES

Fences are indicative of anxiety, separation, and/or guardedness

When are fences placed?

- First-extreme guardedness & anxiety
- Later-better coping

Where are the fences?

- Outside-vulnerability & wanting protection
- Only sections of tray-ask or pay attention to what is inside the area

Spacing between fences

- Tight-extreme guardedness
- Loose (especially over time)-making progress

Type of Fences---a fence is never just a fence

Removal of Fences=progress



"The more healthy relationships a child has, the more likely he will be to recover from trauma and thrive. Relationships are the agents of change and the most powerful therapy is human love."

-Bruce Perry



[www.southernsandtray.com](http://www.southernsandtray.com)

# RESOURCES

Amy Flarety, Southern Sandtray Institute

Facebook Groups: The Sandtray Movement

Sandtray Therapy, A Practical Manual, Linda E. Homeyer & Daniel S. Sweeney, 2017