UTILIZING SANDTRAY THERAPY WITH CLIENTS DIAGNOSED WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

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- Sandtray therapy was developed by Dora Kalff.
- Based off Jungian theory
- Influenced by Margaret Lowenfeld’s World Technique.
- Developed as a non-verbal therapeutic technique to use with children.
- Utilizes a tray filled with sand and a vast array of miniatures for the client to create a tangible representation of their inner world.

Kalff’s sandtrays are specifically 30 × 20 × 3 in. which are in line with the child’s field of vision.

The tray is blue on the inside to represent the sky or water.

The miniatures made available for clients to choose from include: people, vehicles, food, fantasy characters, trees/plants, houses, and other materials.

Studies show evidence that Sandtray therapy is beneficial with many different types of clients:

- Clients with disabilities, language and behavioral issues, traumatic stress, autism spectrum disorder, and immigrants/refugees.

- It can be used with all ages, both genders, all languages, and across all cultures.

- It can be used individually, with couples, or in groups.

- The therapist is looking for themes, symbols, and metaphorical meaning.
- However sandtray therapy is more about the process than the interpretation.

Clients diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder typically have underdeveloped skills of play and interpersonal skills.

The sand provides tactile qualities.

Miniatures elicit imaginative play which leads to storytelling.

There are two steps to sandtray therapy.

1. The process of the client forming the picture.
2. Telling of the story.

- Sandtray’s can have a calming effect.
- Can help children feel grounded.
- Used with children with sensory or gross motor skills issues.
- Encourages flexibility and expression of self.

Study of 25 students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

- 23 boys, 2 girls
- Ages 7-12
- Implemented sand tray therapy with groups of 6 or 7 students at school.
- 60 minute sessions for 10 weeks.
- Opening ritual, sandtray, storytelling, and closing ritual.

Results:

- Positive reactions, and no negative behaviors.
- Notable improvements in the complexity of use of symbols and storytelling.
- Increased engagement in interaction with others, flexibility, and mirroring.

References

