

SANDPLAY THERAPY

INFORMATION FOR CLIENTS AND PARENTS

Sandplay therapy is a gentle and soothing approach to emotional release, problem solving and finding direction. The tactile and creative nature of sandplay therapy facilitates the expression of the sub-conscious mind, resulting in a sense of freedom, release and clarity of mind and purpose. Clients of all ages have experienced a clearing of emotions and shift in energy and attitude as a result of sandplay therapy.

For parents, it may seem that your child is simply playing in the sand, however there is much more to the experience. The sandtray becomes a setting for children, adolescents and adults to release emotions and gain a different or new perspective on a situation.

The process connects with unconscious material, allowing the child to sort out and make sense of experiences and information. By creating a scene in the sand using symbols (small figurines, toys, ornaments, shells, rocks) a child can regain a sense of strength or hope. During the sandplay experience the child can process their feelings, such as feelings of loss, loneliness, sadness or fear and anxiety relating to being bullied or other troublesome experiences.

Children can unconsciously process an issue by representing it in the sand. Allowing free creation, and working with the 'story' can help to modify acting out behaviour. For example anxieties about school, once expressed through sandplay may be reduced or resolved.

By manipulating the symbols, the child has 'control' of the situation. Many children are overwhelmed with the problems of the world and are able to gain a new perspective by expressing this in a creation in the sand tray. Generally children will create a sandtray without direction or a theme, allowing free play and the mystery to unfold.

The symbols are not interpreted by anyone other than the child. It can be confusing for a child to have an adult or sibling comment on the sandtray or a symbol if the comments are not consistent with the child's own interpretations. For example a monster may represent feeling powerful for the child, whereas another person may interpret it as scary or ugly. Even apparently encouraging comments can be counter-productive, for instance if a parent comments that a tray is 'lovely' or 'very good' when, to the child it represents frustration.

Although it is not usual practice for parents to see the tray at the end of the session, your child may wish to talk about it and share the picture of the sandtray. It is helpful to ask the child to tell you something about it and refrain from sharing your opinions or making comments. A good start could be "Would you like to share anything about your sandtray?", or "What would you like to share with me about your sandtray?".

Your child may not wish to share at all and parents are encouraged to support their child's choice.