

Jungian Sandplay Therapy

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Sandplay is a play therapy modality that stems from the work of British physician, Margaret Lowenfeld (1939). Dr. Lowenfeld developed the “World Technique” as a means of communicating non-verbally with children in treatment. The late Jungian therapist, Dora M. Kalff (1980/2003), of Switzerland developed what she termed, “sandplay” for use in Jungian therapy.

The sandplay method consists of the psychotherapy client’s creation of a three-dimensional picture with miniature figures in a tray of sand in the protective presence of a trained practitioner. The sand tray is 28 1/2 inches long by 19 1/2 inches wide and 3 inches deep. The sides and bottom of the inside of the sand tray are colored light blue. By moving the sand aside, the blue coloration can be used to represent areas of water in the sandy landscape. Real water can be added to the sand to make it adaptable to being shaped and sculpted. Miniature figures representing all aspects of life and fantasy are arranged on shelves near the sand tray. A wide variety of building materials out of which the client can fashion needed items is also available.

The therapist invites the client to make whatever he or she likes in the sand tray. The remarkable feature of sandplay is that, as the client fashions and moves the figures in the trays, his or her psyche concurrently moves into new and healthier configurations. This takes place with no intermediary. Instead it is a direct link of psyche, or brain patterns to three dimensional figures that “write” and “re-write” its configuration to healthier, fuller functioning. I know of no other treatment modality that works with this immediacy with the brain and mind. Sandplay is a wonderful treatment modality for children, because it takes place in the child’s own natural language of symbols. The power of sandplay for adults is that it by-passes both the client’s and the therapist’s limited capacities to understand and/or bring about profound intrapsychic change.

Because of this direct movement of the client’s psyche, we work only with individual clients in Jungian sandplay. Although the sand tray and figures are used with couples, families and groups in other theoretical traditions, the purpose of such work takes a slightly different direction. For example, when people work together in the sand tray, they can experience their interactional patterns, their struggles with power, and conflicts with each other. They can discover new ways of resolving these issues by seeing and feeling the changes through the visual medium of the tray. Some therapists also use the sand tray for projective techniques, or as a medium for doing Gestalt work.

All of this work is legitimate when conducted by a thoroughly trained professional. It is simply different than the intrapsychic re-ordering process that occurs in Jungian sandplay.

As the client works in the sand tray the therapist sits nearby making notes of what figures the client uses and what the client says, or does, if anything. The therapist sketches or “maps” a diagram of the sand tray for future. Although no interpretation is made with the client at the time of the production of the sand tray, it is very important that the therapist develops an understanding of what is transpiring in the client’s sandplay process.

A critical aspect of sandplay is that the strength of the method is commensurate with the therapist’s capacity to safely hold the client’s emerging unconscious content. The therapist experiences the client’s emerging symbolic material in a pre-verbal right hemispheric manner. Through right hemisphere to right hemisphere mirror neuron communication, the therapist’s training, understanding of symbolic process, and his or her personal experience of intrapsychic work at the depths of inner development *acknowledge* and support the client’s ability to bring the newly emerging material to consciousness. Although sandplay appears simple at first glance, it requires extensive training to practice appropriately. Clients should look for certification of their potential sandplay therapists by the Sandplay Therapists of America (www.sandplay.org)

Biographic Information

Barbara A. Turner, PhD

Dr. Barbara Turner is author of, *The Handbook of Sandplay Therapy*. In addition to writing several articles and book chapters, she is Director of Publishing at Temenos Press, which has published the *Sandplay Classic Series*. This includes a new edition of Dora Kalff’s foundational work, *Sandplay: A Psychotherapeutic Approach to the Psyche*, a new edition of Estelle Weinrib’s seminal text on Jungian sandplay therapy, *Images of the Self: The Sandplay Therapy Process*, and, *H.G. Wells’ Floor Games: A Father’s Account of Play and Its Legacy of Healing*.

Dr. Turner studied with Dora Kalff in Switzerland, and has over twenty years experience in the field. She is distinguished as both a Certified Sandplay Therapist – Teacher, and as a Registered Play Therapist – Supervisor. She is an engaging and

enthusiastic teacher of sandplay and play therapy to professionals around the globe.
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Sign up for the Introductory Sandplay Course with Barbara Turner, August 8-19, 2011, California Wine Country. For further info visit: www.barbaraturner.org

Suggested Reading

Sandplay: A Psychotherapeutic Approach to the Psyche – Dora M. Kalff, 2003, Temenos Press.

Images of the Psyche: The Sandplay Therapy Process – Estelle L. Weinrib, 2004 Temenos Press.

H.G. Wells' Floor Games: A Father's Account of Play and Its Legacy of Healing – H.G. Wells, 2004, Temenos Press.

The Handbook of Sandplay Therapy – Barbara A. Turner, 2005, Temenos Press
(Available from major book sellers & www.temenospress.com)

Professional Associations in the Jungian Tradition

Sandplay Therapists of America	www.sandplay.org
International Society for Sandplay Therapy	http://www.isst-society.com/
British and Irish Sandplay Society	http://www.sandplay.org.uk
Canadian Association for Sandplay Therapy	http://www.sandplay.ca
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Sandspieltherapie	http://www.sandspiel.de
Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Sandspieltherapie &	
Societe Suisse pour la Therapie par le Je de Sable	http://www.sgsst.ch
Associazione italiana per la Sandplay Therapy	www.aispt.it
Nederlandse Vereniging voor Sandplay Therapie	www.sandplaynederland.org