

Workshop: Sand Tray in Therapy

Introduction

The use of the sand tray is, generally, a powerful tool of exploration with a client. The sand tray is used with both adults and children in therapy. The use of the sand tray as a medium of exploration provides the client an opportunity for expression that bypasses any requirement to speak, explain, or justify (though this might remain an internal dialogue for the client).

The use of creative mediums may be useful to lessen the intensity of the relational process that is sometimes experienced by the client. Sometimes, and perhaps not always recognised, is that the acceptance and undemanding position of the therapist can appear threatening and suspicious for some clients. The use of creative distractions can help in these situations, and the sand tray allows for this. Additionally, the sand tray is useful when there is clear exploration presenting in the work. Perhaps you notice over several sessions the work seems not to be going anywhere; or circles around a topic without a shift for the client.

What Does It Do

What does it do? Lots! Let's read, here what Feldman (2000) recounts:

- components of movement and narrative **invites exploration** of many layers of meaning simultaneously.
- **bypasses inhibitions** about one's creative abilities by providing an appealing array of ready-made symbols.
- Through **imaginative play** with the chosen figures, a solution to a conflict or dilemma often emerges **and a sense of resolution or healing can occur**.
- This can happen entirely **on a symbolic level**.
- the **safety of staying with the metaphor** allows the client to process material which may be too painful to talk about directly, and still gain a sense of closure or reconciliation
- can be **deeply healing** for children, adolescents, and adults
- can help the adult client **access the imaginative, playful inner self**.

(Feldman, 2000)



Sand Tray in Therapy ... emerging thoughts

Sand Tray in Therapy ... emerging thoughts

So there we have it:

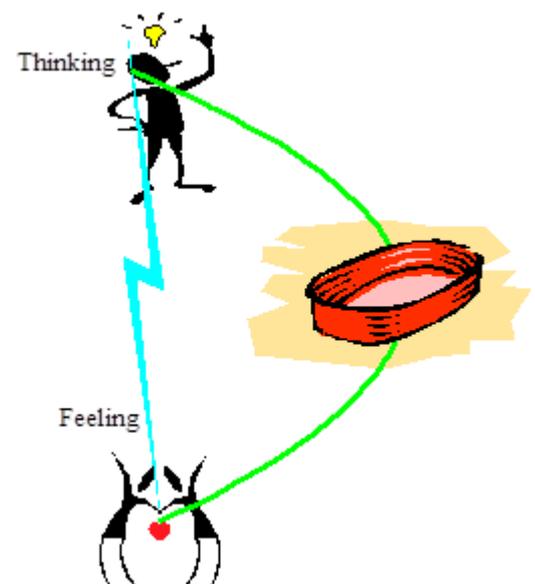
Invites exploration, bypasses inhibitions, allow for resolution, symbolic level, safety of metaphor, deeply healing, accesses imagination.



How Does it Do This

Disconnection

Inhibited emotions are disconnections between cognition and affect. Emotions are the feelings associated and integrated with situations of experience. So, for example, the gentle fall of snow on the face may evoke the emotions of a time when younger; the loud argument overheard might evoke the emotions of a situation that posed a threat. A solution to having a fear triggered is to maintain a separation of feelings from the current situations being experienced. This allows the individual to function well enough without having fears or traumas reactivated.



The use of the sand tray, on its own or with objects, offers a situation that is minimally threatening for the individual to engage with. Working with the sand tray is utilising projective techniques to place aspects of



Sand Tray in Therapy ... emerging thoughts

the individual that are too difficult to own, or access, into a separate (not-me) dimension. This allows for a freer access to exploration.

The use of the sand and objects does not require words from the individual. This will support the construction and telling of situations that are not (at this time) expressible. Indeed, with regard to trauma

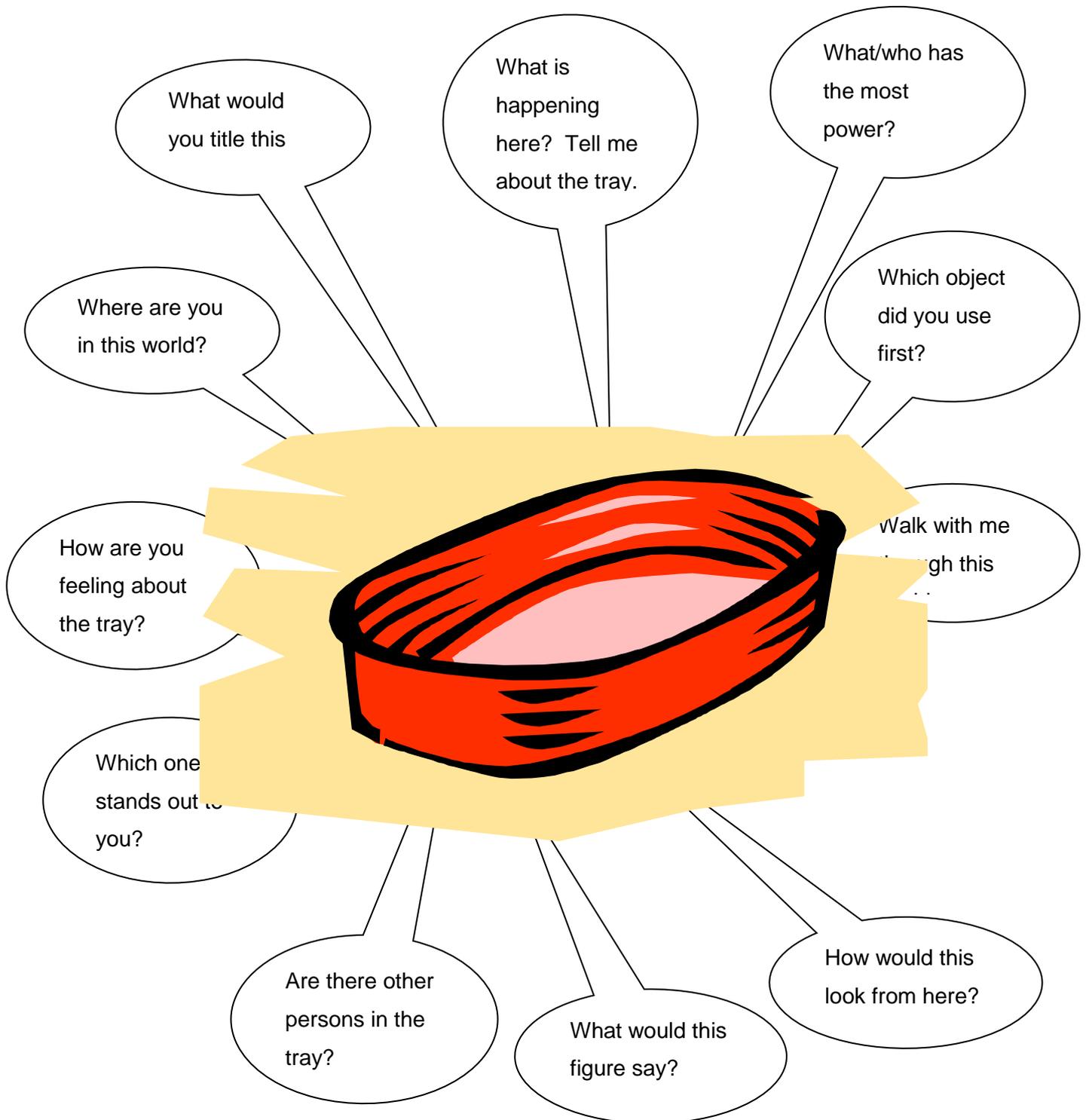
When a person cannot directly express or speak of their trauma, either because they were too young to have a language or frame of reference for their experience, or because adults' threats or refusal to listen has silenced them, no verbal link can exist between disconnected parts. Without any way of verbally representing the trauma, they might find other ways of communicating their separated experiences of themselves. (Etherington, 2005)

The sand and tray may be used to show the story. The witnessing and being present with the client and their story is important; and to be acknowledged. An exploration between therapist and client is not always required.

Sand Tray in Therapy ... emerging thoughts

How to Explore

Interventions and engagement with the client:



Sand Tray in Therapy ... emerging thoughts

References

Etherington, K., 2005. Researching trauma, the body and transformation: A situated account of creating safety in unsafe places. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 33(3), pp. 299-313.

Feldman, R., 2000. *Sand Tray Therapy*. [Online]

Available at: <http://www.innerimagery.com/at-sand.html>

[Accessed 20 June 2008].