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PROMOTING THE ETHICAL PRACTICE OF SAND THERAPY

## Adlerian Applications of Sandtray Play Therapy

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Sandtray play therapy is one of the 6 strategies used in Adlerian play therapy. Adlerian play therapy is a counseling approach that integrates Adlerian psychological concepts and techniques into the practice of play therapy (Kottman & Meany-Walen, 2016). In addition to non-directive skills (e.g., tracking, restating content, returning responsibility to the client, limiting), Adlerian play therapists use 6 different broad strategies in their work with clients: adventure therapy activities; dance, movement, and music experiences; art techniques; metaphors and storytelling; structured play activities, and sandtray play therapy experiences (Kottman & Meany-Walen, 2018). There are 4 phases of Adlerian play therapy: (a) building an egalitarian relationship, (b) exploring the client's lifestyle, (c) helping the client gain insight into his/her/their lifestyle patterns, and (d) reorienting and re-educating the client. Adlerian applications of sandtray play therapy follow these same 4 phases, using the modality of sandtray as a tool for (a) building a democratic relationship with the client; (b) exploring the client's patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving based on how the client sees self, others, and the world; (c) helping the client gain insight and make new, more adaptive decisions about self, the world, and others; (d) teaching the client new skills for relating to and interacting with others and helping the client practice new skills for solving problems, resolving conflicts, appropriately expressing feelings, and getting his/her/their needs met (Kottman & Meany-Walen, 2016, 2018). If the client is a child, the play therapist consults with parents and teachers, often using sandtray play therapy as a tool for working with them to gain insight into their relationship with the child, develop more positive perspectives on the child, and learn encouraging tools for interacting with and supporting the child. Adlerian play therapists who work in schools do a similar process with teachers.

## Types of Trays Used in Adlerian Applications of Sandtray Play Therapy

Adlerian play therapists use many different types of trays in the sand tray process:

spontaneous trays, non-directed trays, semi-directed trays, directed trays, quasi-directed trays, therapist-created trays, and co-created trays.

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- Spontaneous Trays—these trays happen spontaneously at the request/initiation of the client.
- Non-Directed Trays—in non-directed trays, the therapist simply invites the client to put figures in the tray without any kind of direction at all by saying something like, "Would you like to make a tray?" or "You can put in any figures you want anywhere in the tray you want to put them."
- Semi-Directed Trays—when setting up semi-directed trays, the play therapist gives limited direction for making the trays. For this type of tray, usually, the directive is stated as an "Attracts and/or Repels" prompt—the therapist suggests that the client choose things that attract and/or repel him/her/them. For younger clients, the play therapist changes this language to something more developmentally appropriate because younger clients might not understand what "attracts" or "repels" means—for these clients, the play therapist would say something like, "Choose figures that you think are cool and/or figures you think are gross or yucky." The therapist could even frame the directive as "choose figures you like and/or dislike" to make things very simple. Another form of semi-directed tray might be a super simple direction like a "My World" tray, without any specification of what "my world" could entail.
- Directed Trays—these are trays where the play therapist gives very specific directions about the focus of the tray, although the client always gets to choose figures and where to put those figures in the tray. Examples of this type of tray would be prompts such as, "Do a tray on things you are good at doing." "Use the tray to show a time when you were super proud of yourself." "Choose figures to make a tray about what things are important in your culture." "Do a tray on how you react/handle new situations or meeting new people." "Put miniatures into the tray to show what kinds of things get you into trouble." "Choose a figure for each person in your family doing something."
- Quasi-Directed Trays—this is a more abstract kind of tray usually reserved for working with teens and adults. The purpose of quasi-directed trays is to help the client access the "unconscious," which Adlerians describe as the container of information and intuitions currently out of the client's awareness. To set up a quasi-directed tray, the play therapist and the client generate a question to be answered by the tray. These questions are usually very abstract/philosophical/speculative in nature. Some examples of this type of question would be, "How do you want your relationship to look?" "What would really be satisfying in your job?" "How do you want your retirement to feel?" "What about God?" The play therapist asks the client to avoid consciously thinking about the question and simply choose figures that attract and/or repel the client. After the client has finished creating the tray, the play therapist re-introduces the question and explores the tray together, hoping to find insights that might answer the question and help the client gain access to his/her/their own hidden wisdom and knowledge.
- Therapist-Created Trays—in Adlerian play therapy, the play therapist frequently creates trays designed to help the client gain insight or learn a new behavior or skill. The Adlerian play therapist always has a very specific objective for these trays. Some

examples of objectives for therapist-created trays designed to help the client gain insight would be a tray showing a client's pattern of self-defeating behavior with the objective of helping the client recognize this pattern. Another example would be a tray demonstrating how the client's misbehavior is a vehicle for meeting a need. The therapeutic objective of this type of therapist-created tray would be to help the client recognize the underlying need(s) that are motivating his/her/their misbehavior. Another objective would be to shift the client's energy and attention toward meeting his/her/their need(s) more appropriately. Examples of specific objectives for trays the therapist is using to teach the client a new behavior or skill might be using a tray to illustrate how an anger-management skill might work or telling a story in the tray that illustrates a specific social skill. While these trays can simply be constructed by the therapist and shared with the client, they can easily evolve into co-created trays. Part of the therapist's responsibility in creating trays is to invite participation/correction from the client. It is essential that the therapist avoid getting attached to the client agreeing with his/her/their presentation of what might be happening or what it means. These trays should always be invitations, not mandates or pronouncements.

- **Co-Created Trays**—these are trays where the therapist and the client work together as a team to develop a tray. Sometimes these trays are initiated by the therapist, with either a suggestion that he/she/they work together with the client to create a tray or the therapist starting a tray set-up and inviting the client to co-create the tray by adding figures, rearranging the figures, or taking figures out of the tray. Other times, co-created trays are initiated by the client, who invites the therapist to participate in the creation of the tray.

One more important distinction in types of trays is the difference between static and dynamic trays. A static tray is a tray in which the client places the items and then verbally discusses the contents and the process of doing the tray; a dynamic tray is a tray in which the client moves figures around in the tray and tells a story that goes with the movement in the tray. The steps described in the next section are more focused on static trays and less on dynamic trays. With dynamic trays, the therapist does not usually need to invite the client to verbally process the tray or rearrange the figures because the client is already talking about the tray and moving the figures in the sand tray.

### **Logistics for Creating Sand Trays in Adlerian Applications of Sandtray Play Therapy**

Adlerian play therapists can use many different configurations of sand trays in their work—different shapes, different sizes, and different materials—there are no rigid rules about the style of tray that can be used. The list of figures for sandtray work from an Adlerian perspective includes the generic figures that most people who use sandtray as a play modality use (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2023), plus figures that the sand tray therapist (or their clients) might find evocative. Many Adlerians include miniatures representing comic book characters, superheroes, video game characters, and characters from popular movies or television shows. Because Adlerians do not assign a one-to-one correspondence of symbolism to figures, the client always gets to make his/her/their own individual interpretation of the meaning of each of the figures selected to go in the tray.

There are 7 "standard" steps for creating sand trays in Adlerian play therapy. They are similar to the steps outlined in Homeyer and Sweeney (2023) and Homeyer and Lyles (2022). Although an Adlerian play therapist usually follows these 7 steps in order, it is essential to remember that this is a guideline rather than a rule. For an Adlerian play therapist, flexibility is the prime directive—adapting to the needs of the client in a customized process is one of the hallmarks of the Adlerian approach. This distinction becomes important when working with clients who do dynamic trays, which seldom unfold in this linear fashion.

1. Preparing the room/preparing yourself for the session--in this step, it is important for play therapists to check out the sand tray collection, making sure that the figures are in their usual, predictable placement. To prepare themselves, therapists should be sure they are grounded, regulated, and present in preparation for the sandtray process.
2. Introducing the current sand tray to the client--Adlerian therapists should have already considered what kind of tray they want to facilitate during this particular session. If the plan is to be non-directive or semi-directive, the invitation to create the tray is deliberately vague... "Pick whatever you want to put in the tray." (non-directive) or "Choose the figures that attract and/or repels you." (semi-directive). If therapists have therapeutic objectives that would be better suited by a directive prompt, they would usually give the client a choice of several different very specific instructions on the topic of the tray. For instance, they could suggest that clients pick figures and make a sand tray about what's going on in school or work, choose a figure for each person in their family doing something, or pick figures to represent a problem they are having with another family member.
3. Creating the sand tray--this is the part of the process where play therapists usually serve as a witness by quietly holding space for clients to choose the figures and place them in the sand tray. However, it is important during this process for play therapists to "match" the energy of their clients and follows clients' lead for how this part unfolds. For instance, if the client wants to talk during the process of choosing or placing the figures, the therapist can engage verbally with the client. Some clients like to narrate what they are picking and why they are picking those figures or verbally process the symbolism of specific figures while putting them in the tray. When this happens, therapists' primary job is to simply witness, do some limited tracking, restate content, and metacommunication without asking a lot of questions. If the client is silent while making choices of figures and placing them in the tray, therapists should join in that silence.
4. Experiencing and offering the possibility of rearrangement--the purpose of the "experiencing" part of this process is to invite the client to consider all of the aspects of the tray and experience a variety of perspectives on the tray. Sometimes looking at a tray from a particular side can give the client a different way of thinking about a problem, situation, or relationship. In this step of the process, therapists invite the client to experience the tray from all sides. This can be accomplished by asking the client to walk around the tray, pausing on each side, or spinning the entire tray on the surface where it is resting, pausing so the client can experience each viewpoint. The second part of this step is the "rearranging," accomplished by therapists asking the client, "Is there anything that you would like to add, take out, or move around?" If it is possible that a client might take this invitation as a criticism of what he/she/they put in the tray (like pleasers are

wont to do), it can be helpful to use a slightly more abstract way by saying something like, "Sometimes at this point, people decide they want to add something to the tray, take something out, or move something around in the tray." It is essential to be sure clients do not feel pressured to make any changes--it needs to be clear this is just an opportunity, not a criticism.

5. "Touring"—this part of the process involves extending an invitation for the client to describe what is in the tray. There are innumerable ways to set this up. Play therapists can say something like, "Tell me what's in here..." or "What have you put in your tray?" or even "Give me a tour of your tray." Many clients will begin to talk about what the figures and their placement means (processing) during this section, blending the "touring" step with the processing step.
6. Processing and offering possibility of rearranging--the processing step is the formal step in which Adlerian play therapists collaborate with the client exploring the meaning of the figures and their placement. In many cases, they may also explore the process of creating the tray as well. Some clients just dive right into this without even needing to be prompted. Others often need therapists to scaffold the talking about the tray contents and the process of creating it. With clients who need more structuring for talking about the tray and the process of creating it, therapists can point to objects in the tray (without touching them) and use the phrase "I notice that..." and describe what they notice (e.g., "I notice that all the figures except this one are very small." or "I notice that the figure you chose to represent your mother is in the exact opposite corner as the figure that you chose to represent your father." or "I notice there is a bridge in between the soldier and the scary looking guy.") After therapists tell the client what they have noticed, it is time for quiet, leaving room for the client to respond. If the client responds to the "noticing," therapists can use the client's response as a springboard for further exploration and deepening. If the client does not respond to their initial "noticing," they can move on to the next noticing. If the client consistently doesn't respond to "noticing," therapists might want to consider using some other strategy, like making some guesses about what figures or placement might mean based on additional information they have about the client and his/her/their patterns. All of this processing can stay in the metaphor if the client consistently uses an indirect approach to the figures and does not identify them as people or situations in the "real" world to be respectful to the client's need to stay metaphoric rather than direct. With a client who weaves in and out of metaphor (e.g., "the witch is really my mother" or "I put the bridge in there because I feel like I am the soldier and my boss is the scary guy"), therapists can follow the client's lead, coming in and out of the metaphor, making connections from the tray to the client's life. This conversation is then followed by the second round of invitations to rearrange when therapists say something like, "Is there anything that you would like to add, take out, or move around?" This can also be a chance to ask the client what would happen if specific figures were added, removed, or moved to another place in the tray.
7. Documenting—this usually involves taking digital photographs of the tray for documentation and taking notes on the process of creating the tray, the contents and placement of the figures in the tray, and the verbal processing of the process and the contents and placement. In Adlerian play therapy, therapists will emphasize lifestyle

themes such as the client's mistaken beliefs or patterns of having difficulty making friends or negative feelings about self that might be evident in the tray.

8. Dismantling the tray—the Adlerian sandtray play therapist gives clients a choice for the dismantling process. The therapist asks whether clients want to (a) take the figures out of the tray and put them away themselves, (b) leave the figures and have the therapist take the figures out of the tray and put them away after clients leave the session, (c) the therapist takes the figures out of the tray and put them away while the client watches, or (d) collaborate with the therapist taking the figures out of the tray and putting them away together as a cooperative venture. [This procedure is pretty radically different than what most sand tray therapists do, which is to take the figures out of the tray and put them away after the client leaves.] This gives clients the power to decide how this process unfolds. Sometimes the therapist will get a sense that there is one method of dismantling that will work better for this particular tray--the therapist can still outline the choices and suggest one or just outline the choices and give clients the power to decide.

### **Phases of Adlerian Applications of Sandtray Play Therapy**

Just as in other therapeutic modalities based on Adlerian theory (Adler, 1958; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Sweeney, 2019), there are 4 phases in Adlerian play therapy (Kottman & Meany-Walen, 2016) and in Adlerian applications of sandtray play therapy: building an egalitarian relationship, helping the client explore his/her/their lifestyle, helping the client gain insight into his/her/their lifestyle, and reorienting/re-educating the client by facilitating changes in thinking, feeling, and behaving. Therapists can use sandtray play therapy in all 4 of these phases.

#### ***Phase 1: Building an Egalitarian Relationship with Clients***

In Phase 1, Adlerian therapists usually employ non-directed trays and semi-directed trays to begin to make a connection with the client. This involves asking the client if he/she/they wanted to choose some figures and put them in the tray and/or suggesting the client choose figures that attract and/or repel him/her/them. Because the first phase is dedicated to building the egalitarian relationship, therapists may also create trays to introduce themselves and/or the sand tray process to the client or co-create a tray with the client. They may even use a directed prompt to help support the evolution of the relationship with the client. In Adlerian play therapy, therapists have explicit permission to "make up" new techniques and new sand tray prompts based on their understanding of each individual client. The following are some examples of trays that can be conducted in Phase 1:

- Client does a tray to introduce himself/herself/themselves to the therapist.
- Client does a general "my world" tray.
- Therapist does a tray to introduce self to the client.
- Client does a tray on "things that are interesting to me."
- Therapist and client co-create a tray about "things we have in common."

- Client does a tray on what he/she/they know/have been told about coming to counseling.
- Therapist does a tray on what he/she/they know about the presenting problem.
- Therapist does a tray on how the play therapy process (or sandtray) works.
- Client does a tray about "things that bug me" or "the problem(s) in my life."
- Client does a tray about "things I like about my life."

Because Adlerian play therapists also use sandtray in their work with parents during Phase 1, here are some examples of sand trays conducted with parents during Phase 1:

- Parent does a tray on "My Child's World."
- Parent does a tray about the differences between how the parent sees the child's world and how the child sees the child's world.
- Parent does a tray on "My World."
- Parent does a tray about "things that bug me" or "the problem(s) in my life."
- Parent does a tray about "things I like about my life."

### ***Phase 2: Helping Clients Explore Their Lifestyle***

During Phase 2, the goal is to explore the lifestyle of the client. Adlerians define lifestyle as the individual's characteristic way of understanding situations and interacting with others. As play therapists discover the client's lifestyle, they begin understanding how the client views self, others, and the world (Kottman & Meany-Walen, 2016). There are many elements that contribute to a client's lifestyle: (a) culture, (b) family constellation, (c) family atmosphere, (d) goals of misbehavior, (e) Crucial Cs, (f) personality priorities, (g) assets, (h) mistaken beliefs, and (g) private logic. These elements are all ingredients that form and influence the client's behaviors, cognitions, emotions, and attitudes. The sand trays described in this section can be done with adult, adolescent, child clients, and parents, depending on the therapeutic objectives for the session.

Culture (which consists of the intersection of ethnicity, heritage, race, religion, age, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender, education, nationality, generation, ability/disability) shapes beliefs, experiences, and worldviews and is an important element of lifestyle. The following are examples of trays Adlerian therapists can use to explore the impact of culture on clients' lifestyles:

- Client does a tray about how he/she/they think and feel about his/her/their culture(s) or the the culture(s) of his/her/their family.
- Child does a tray on how people who aren't part of his/her/their culture treat people who are part of his/her/their culture.
- Client does a tray on the stories, music, food, and traditions that are part of his/her/their culture.
- Client does a tray on times when someone has treated him/her/their family badly because of their culture.
- Client does a tray about his/her/their heritage or race.

The purpose in gathering information about family constellation and birth order is to help therapists understand the client's perception of her/his/their place in the family and the methods

he/she/they have chosen for gaining a sense of belonging and significance (Kottman & Meany-Walen, 2016). Because each birth order position has certain typical assets and challenges, Adlerian play therapists gather information about psychological birth order position to find ways of encouraging the client by building on assets. Therapists can also use this knowledge as the basis for helping the client with challenges inherent in each of the birth order positions. Several examples of trays Adlerian therapists can use to investigate birth order are:

- Client does a tray about what it is like to be the oldest, second, etc. for all of the children in the family.
- Client does a tray about what it is like to be in his/her/their birth order position.
- Client does a tray about what makes his/her/their birth order position the best.
- Client does a tray about what makes his/her/their birth order position difficult.

Family atmosphere is the general affective tone of the family. It is influenced by several different factors, including (a) parental attitudes toward the children, (b) parental discipline philosophies, (c) parents' lifestyles, (d) family values, (e) the stability of the spousal relationship, (g) the parenting skills of parents, and (f) any personal problems that might interfere with parents' ability to provide warmth, respect, and structure for the children (Kottman & Meany-Walen, 2016). Family atmosphere is an important component of the formation of lifestyle because it impacts how every family member views self, others, and the world. Some examples of trays that could be used to explore the atmosphere of clients' family-of-origin and the impact of the family atmosphere on clients' lifestyles:

- Client does a tray about how the family deals with conflict.
- Client does a tray about how the family members would solve a problem.
- Client does a tray about family values ("What is important to the members of this family?").
- Client does a tray on how he/she/they think the members of this family show love.
- Client does a tray about family rules.
- Client does a tray about family hierarchy ("Who is in charge in this family?").

Adlerians believe that all behavior is purposive, including misbehavior, and that misbehaving children are discouraged children. According to Nelson, Tamborski, and Ainge (2016), discouraged children's misbehavior is their way to trying to get their needs met and to find a way to belong and gain significance. The goals of discouraged children fall into four primary categories of striving: attention, power, revenge, and proving inadequacy (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964). To help discern the specific goal of child's misbehavior using sandtray play therapy, therapists can use directed sand trays to gather information about the child's feelings and behaviors, the feelings and reactions of adults who interact with the child when he/she/they are misbehaving, and the child's responses when corrected or given constructive feedback (Kottman & Meany-Walen, 2016). Here are some examples of sand trays that would help explore goals of misbehavior:

- Child does a tray on what kinds of things get him/her/them into trouble.
- Child does a tray on what happens when he/she/they get in trouble (consequences of his/her/their misbehavior).
- Child does a tray about how adults react when he/she/they misbehave.
- Child does a tray on how he/she/they get attention.



- Child does a tray on how he/she/they get what he/she/they want.
- Child does a tray contrasting situations when he/she/they are in control and situations when he/she/they are out of control.
- Parent does a tray on how he/she/they feel when the child misbehaves.
- Parent does a tray on how the child reacts when corrected.

The Crucial Cs were developed by Amy Lew and Betty Lou Bettner (1996, 2000), who synthesized the research on resilient children, which suggested that children who are successful in life have strong relationships with others, feel valued by others, and have a perception that they have control over some of the facets of their lives. The Crucial Cs are Courage, Connect, Capable, and Count. In Adlerian play therapy, therapists explore how well clients have incorporated the following beliefs into their self-perceptions and worldview: they are *connected* to others, they are *capable* of taking care of themselves, they are valued by others and they know that they *count* and can make positive contributions to others, and they have the *courage* to try things without a guarantee of success. Therapists can use the sandtray process to explore which of the Crucial Cs are a strength for a particular client and which of the Crucial Cs might be a struggle for that client so that they can work with the client (and in the case of a child or adolescent client, the parents/caregivers) to help the client better develop any weak Cs. The following are some examples of directed trays therapists can use to assess a client's incorporation of the Crucial Cs in his/her/their lifestyle:

- Client does tray on things he/she/they are good at or are proud of doing. (Capable)
- Client does tray on situations in which he/she/they give up without trying. (Courage)
- Client does tray on how she/he/they deal with being afraid or worried. (Courage)
- Client does tray on his/her/their friends. (Connect)
- Client does tray on how to make (and/or keep) friends. (Connect)
- Client does tray on what he/she/they contribute to home/school/work. (Count)
- Client does tray on how he/she/they make an impact at home/school/work. (Count)

Many Adlerians use personality priorities as another element of lifestyle. Kefir (1981) described personality priorities as a person's usual mode of thinking about situations and conducting relationships with others based on the individual's desire to avoid specific stressful situations. The personality priorities are Control, Pleasing, Superiority, and Comfort. By using a sandtray experience to explore the particular situations a client is wanting to avoid and the positive purpose toward which he/she/they is striving, therapists can gather useful information about lifestyle. Here are several examples of sand trays therapists could use for this goal:

- Client does a tray on things that stress him/her/they out. (Comfort)
- Client does a tray on how he/she/they feel when things don't go the way they are "supposed" to go. (Control)
- Client does a tray about methods he/she/they use to avoid feeling out of control. (Control)
- Client does a tray on what he/she/they does to prove that he/she/they are good enough. (Superiority)
- Client does a tray on the ways that he/she/they try to avoid being rejected. (Pleasing)

Because Adlerian theory has a particularly strong slant toward encouragement, therapists will often use sand trays to explore clients' assets and positive personality traits. It can be

particularly helpful to explore which of the clients' assets they "own" and which ones need to be bolstered through the therapeutic process. The following are examples of trays designed to explore assets:

- Client does a tray to show the things he/she/they like about himself/herself/themselves.
- Client does a tray about something in his/her/their life he/she/they feel good about.
- Client does a tray to illustrate how others (teachers, friends, grandparents, parents) see him/her/them in positive ways.

Young children constantly observe what happens in their worlds, but they are frequently inaccurate in their interpretations of events and interactions (Adler, 1958; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Sweeney, 2019). As their lifestyles emerge, they may incorporate some of these faulty interpretations into their basic convictions about themselves, others, and the world and their ideas about behaviors that will help them gain a sense of belonging and significance (Kottman & Meany-Walen, 2016). Some of these conclusions become "mistaken" beliefs—ideas about self, others, and the world that can be self-defeating and discouraging. Because they "act as if" these mistaken beliefs are true, individuals develop a kind of "private logic" that frequently remains out of their awareness but is the foundation for discouraged reasoning and for many of their negative or self-defeating assumptions, decisions, attitudes, and behaviors (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). One way play therapists can help clients explore their mistaken beliefs and private logic (and perhaps bring them into clients' awareness) is by inviting them to do sand trays focused on what they tell themselves about themselves, others, and the world when they are feeling discouraged.

Based on the information gathered during the second phase of therapy, Adlerian therapists develop a conceptualization and treatment plan designed to guide their interventions in Phases 3 and 4. The focus in Phase 3 is on helping clients gain insight into their patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving. The focus in Phase 4 is on facilitating clients to substitute more positive, self-affirming patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving for the self-defeating patterns they want to change.

### ***Phase 3: Helping Clients Gain Insight***

There are several tools Adlerian therapists regularly use in play therapy to help clients gain insight: metacommunication, spitting in the soup, therapeutic metaphors, directed sand trays, therapist-created sand trays, and co-created sand trays (Kottman & Meany-Walen, 2016, 2018).

Metacommunication is an umbrella skill that often involves reflection of feelings, questions, speculation about underlying messages, interpretation of the meaning of reactions or behaviors, and so forth (Kottman & Meany-Walen, 2016, 2018). When therapists metacommunicate, they share information about what they have noticed about patterns of client cognitions, behaviors, and/or emotions. One form of metacommunication is spitting in the client's soup. Adler (1958) used the metaphor of a person finding a bowl of soup less appealing if someone else spits in it to explain that a client will be less likely to fall into a self-defeating pattern if someone else has pointed out that the pattern is self-defeating. When therapists "spit in the client's soup," they point out (often with gentle humor) that the client is "acting as if"

mistaken beliefs and/or private logic are actually true (and they aren't). They can also do this by targeting self-defeating behaviors or other patterns that are no longer working for the client. When working with sand trays, quite often Adlerian play therapists will use metacommunication or spitting in the client's soup to underline some pattern that is evident in the tray and may be out of the client's awareness. By addressing these patterns, play therapists can move clients from being stuck in their own mistaken beliefs and private logic toward healthier ways of seeing self, others, and the world.

Adlerian play therapists also design therapeutic metaphors for clients who naturally express themselves through stories—using storytelling to communicate indirectly about patterns that are not working for the client or about assets the client is not fully embracing (Kottman & Meany-Walen, 2016, 2018). Clients telling stories (using puppets, art, music, costumes, and/or sand trays) can help them gain an awareness of their own patterns without evoking a defensive response. Therapist-created and co-created trays that revolve around telling a story can serve the same purpose. The following are examples of some trays where therapists could use a metaphoric approach designed to help clients gain insight:

- Therapist uses a sand tray to tell a story together about an imaginary situation that resembles a troublesome circumstance or relationship in the client's life.
- Therapist tells a story in the sand tray about a character who has goals of misbehavior that are similar to those of the client, emphasizing that the character is getting his/her/their needs met in dysfunctional ways.
- Therapist makes a maze or obstacle course in the sand tray, adds a figure that could metaphorically represent the client, and asks the client to use that figure to find solutions for dealing with the obstacles along the way.

Therapists can also create trays for clients that are designed to show them more directly a self-defeating pattern or offer an alternative (more functional) way to think about themselves, others, and the world or solve a problem. Here are some examples of these trays:

- Therapist creates a sand tray depicting how the client sees self.
- Therapist creates a sand tray about how the client gains significance in negative ways.
- Therapist makes a tray illustrating a specific problem the client is trying to solve and what is keeping it from being solved.

#### ***Phase 4: Reorienting/Re-educating Clients***

As clients begin to gain insight into their own patterns, it is time to move into Phase 4, where therapists can use many strategies to help clients learn and practice (with either direct teaching or indirect teaching) (Schaefer & Drewes, 2014) new ways of seeing self, others, and the world; new ways of solving problems and communicating with others; alternative methods of building and maintaining friendships; and so forth. Sandtray play therapy can be a valuable tool in the process of teaching new skills, such as anger management skills, friendship skills, anxiety management, time management, and negotiation skills. Therapists can create trays for clients to model more appropriate ways to gain a sense of belonging and significance or solve problems, they can invite clients to co-create sand trays designed to give them a chance to practice newly acquired skills, and/or they can use directed trays to allow clients to explore additional ways to

deal with behavioral or emotional issues. The following are sand trays designed to facilitate changes in clients' behavior, emotions, attitudes, and cognitions:

- Therapist does a tray to model specific relationship skills, communication skills, anger management skills, assertiveness skills, negotiating skills, etc.
- Client does a tray to practice specific relationship skills, communication skills, anger management skills, assertiveness skills, negotiating skills, etc.
- Therapist sets up a tray illustrating a situation in which the client could appropriately use new behaviors and the client responds in the tray as to what he/she/they would/could do in that situation.
- Client does a tray on how he/she/they wish the family (or the members of his/her/their class) would solve conflicts.
- Client does a tray showing how to solve a problem or resolve a conflict as a "consultation" with a puppet who has a similar problem.

In Adlerian play therapy, therapists can also use sand trays in the termination process. They can ask clients to do a tray summarizing the therapeutic journey they have been on together. They can ask clients to do a tray summarizing the tools they have learned during therapy and ways they are going to apply those skills in a ongoing way. Clients can do a tray on the assets they now "own" and will use in their everyday lives. The variety of trays Adlerian play therapists can use for client closure is only limited by their imaginations. As in all Adlerian play therapy processes, creativity and an understanding of the specific needs of individual clients combined with therapeutic intentionality allow for custom-designed sand tray prompts and sand tray play therapy procedures.

## Summary

Sandtray play therapy is one strategy frequently employed in Adlerian play therapy. Because Adlerian play therapists value flexibility and imagination in their efforts to individualize their interventions based on clients' interests, aptitudes, and modality of expression, they can choose from a wide range of sand trays: spontaneous, non-directed, semi-directed, directed, quasi-directed, therapist-created, and co-created. Sand trays are a tool Adlerian play therapists use with child, adolescent, and adult clients, as well as with families and in parent (and teacher) consultation. While there are 7 steps in most Adlerian sand tray play therapy sessions, therapists can use their discretion in adapting the process to the needs of clients and the therapeutic objective(s) for the session and the long-term therapeutic process. Adlerian play therapists make use of sandtray therapy in all four phases of therapy: building the relationship, exploring clients' lifestyles, helping clients gain insight into their lifestyles, and reorienting/re-educating clients by facilitating changes in behavior, emotions, and cognitions.

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