



SANDPLAY THERAPY Information for Parents

As an observer of Sandplay Therapy, it may appear that your child is simply playing in the sand. This is not so. The sandtray becomes a setting for children, adolescents and adults to 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. The feelings related to the death of a pet or someone close can be expressed in a sandplay. 'Bullying' is another common theme in the sandtray.

Children are often asked to explain behaviour or verbalise how they feel. This information may not be easily accessible to a child. She or he may not know *why* they behaved in a certain way or *how* they feel. Symbols provide a means for expression and exploration in non verbal form.

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. An adult labelling it as scary or horrible can be counter productive. Commenting that a sandtray is 'lovely' or 'very good' may undermine the child's confidence if the sandtray 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 your own opinions and comments. A good start could be: "Would you like to share anything about your sandtray?" "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 accept this too.

