

Sandtray Directives

I find that gaining insights about each partner's family of origin and communication dynamics by using the Sandtray to be of great value. Partners often find out more than they realized about themselves and about each other through sharing the world and both are then able to see how communication patterns seen/experienced in family of origin might be recreated in the current relationship. This relates to the notion that the way we develop a sense of ourselves and our place in the world has to do with what is reflected back to us by our caregivers.

Prompt suggestions:

- Build a tray that shows what the relationship and communication between your parents, caregivers, etc looked like most of the time as you were growing up?
- Build a tray that shows how things went between you and any of your caregivers when you were worried, afraid, upset, etc?
- Build a tray that shows how the interaction generally went between you and (mom, dad, caregiver, etc) when you got in trouble, made a mistake, etc?
- Looking back at the communication pattern between you and your caregivers, build a tray that represents what you wished would have happened instead?

The Sandtray is also a tool where miniatures and placement of these in the tray provide enhanced awareness of what is desired and is also a diagnostic tool for therapist to uncover unmet emotional needs and what individual capacities around self soothing and attuned listening could benefit from being strengthened.

- Build a tray that represents what you believe a healthy relationship looks like?
- Build a tray that represents what the relationship between the two of you generally looked like in the beginning as you were falling in love? Then create a world that shows when that started to change? Find a miniature that represents “the problem as you see it,” and place it in the sand.
- Build a tray that represents what it presently feels like when being asked to listen to your partner’s view, particularly when you are disagreeing with how he/she is seeing it?
- Build a tray that shows what action is needed/in order for you to have success in listening with the intention of understanding?
- Build a tray that represents what a step forward for yourself within this relationship might be?
- Build a tray that reflects an experience between you and your partner when it felt to you at that time that they really “got it,” and you felt supported.

The Sandtray may also be used to help a couple as they are identifying goals for the relationship. The therapist might prompt the couple to co-create what a “best world,” interdependent relationship with each other would look like.