

Certificate in Integrative Palliative Care – 3
Dr. Geeta Joshi
Dr. Piyush Gupta
Dr. Col. Yashavant Joshi
International Institute of Distance Learning
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Week-10
Lecture 77: Sand Tray Therapy

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Sandplay therapy: A healing Journey



• Prof. Madhurima Pradhan

• Vice President, NAPCAIM, IIP

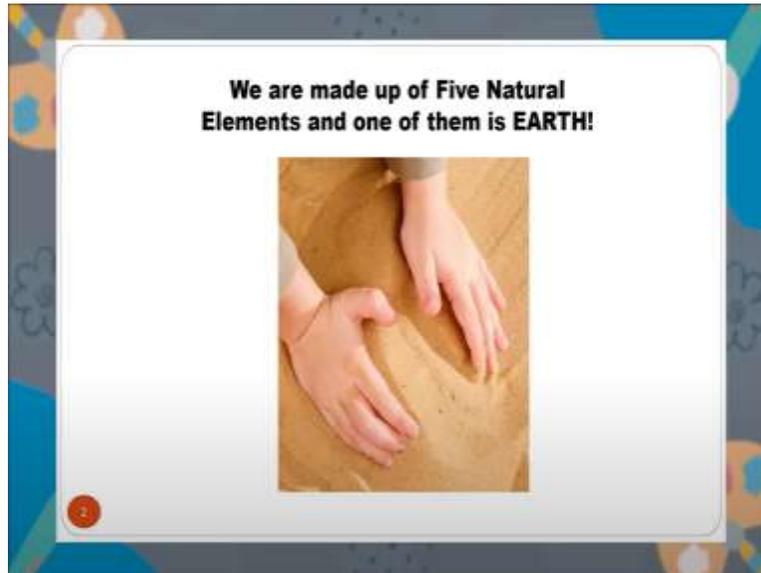
• Former Head, Department of Psychology, University of Lucknow

• Member, Cancer Aid Society, Ethics committee.

The image shows two sand trays. The left tray features a central spiral pattern surrounded by various colorful objects like sticks, beads, and shells. The right tray has a central purple and red circular object with other colorful items around it. The background is a light-colored sand surface.

Hello students, the topic of this session is sand play therapy, a healing journey. Why I have asking is as a journey because when the person is given an opportunity to play with sand, he may feel quite resistant or not keen to do it. But if after some time he starts this journey, he make wonderful things with sand and heal the inner psyche and get rid of the traumas and the negative emotions which are buried in our subconscious mind.

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So we all know that we are made up of five natural elements, the earth, fire, water, ether and air. So these are the five natural elements which are the building blocks of our existence on the planet. Out of these five elements we find that earth is the most important element in Ayurvedic system of India.

It is believed that if we take care of all these five elements, we can get rid of all mental issues especially the earth element. And this earth element is crucial, very crucial because it imparts structure and firmness to our physical form. and it encompasses the 12% of our existence, our bones, skin, hair, fat, muscles and tissues. They are made up of this earth element.

If we remain connected with this earth element then we can heal very quickly and the body region of this earth element is the root chakra or the Muladhara chakra.

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So when we play with the earth it is we find that we are very quickly healed although it is very traditional method in India or all other countries maybe because playing with the sand we all can remember the days when we played with the sand and we just enjoyed the moments and with the playing with the sand you can connect with the earth element within the body.

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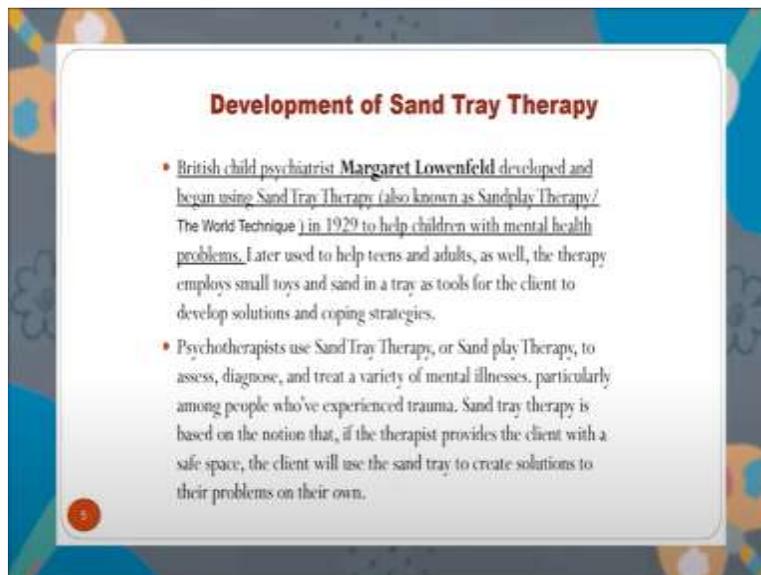


And as I told that it is made of 12% element of our existence is the earth and it is encompasses our bones, skins, hair, fats, muscles and tissues. And if this earth element is imbalanced in our body, we have developed the feeling of insecurity feeling, we are

fearful, we are anxious, frustrated and we have a lack of purpose in our own life. But when this earth element is balanced or the root chakra is balanced then we develop the sense of inner strength, we feel safe, secure, happy and grounded.

To empower this earth element we have to work on the root chakra or the Muladhara chakra and the sand therapy can help us to connect with earth that is very crucial for our existence.

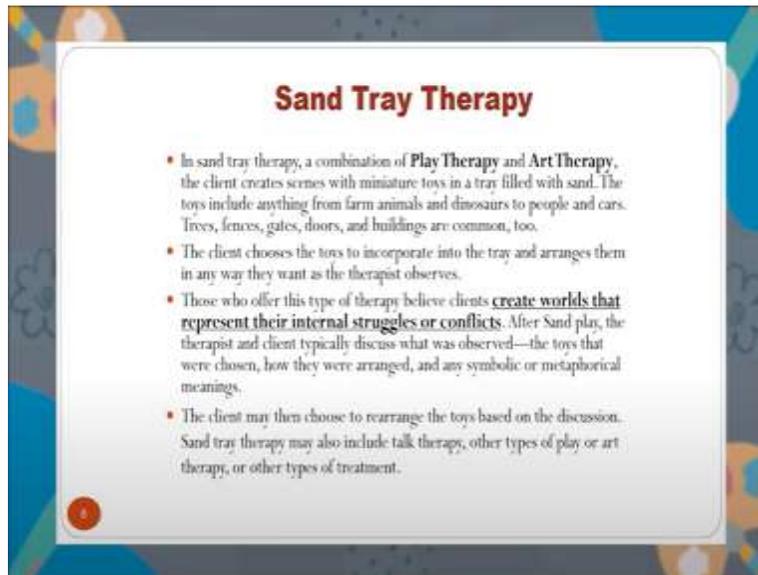
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When we talk about the development of sand tray therapy, we find that the British child psychiatrist Margaret Lowenfeld developed and began using sand tray therapy which also known as sand play therapy or the word technique in 1929. It was used to help children with mental health problems and later it was used to help teens and adults as well as the therapy employs small toys and sand in a tray as a tools for the clients to develop solutions and coping strategies. Psychotherapists use sand tray therapy or sand play therapy to assess, diagnose and treat a variety of mental illnesses particularly among people who have experienced trauma. Sand tray therapy is based on the notion that if the therapist provides the client with a safe space, the client will use the sand tray to create solutions to their problems on their own.

As we already know that this sand tray therapy or the sand play therapy when introduced by Margaret Lowenfeld. He called it the word technique. It means that while playing with the sand, the client can create his or her own inner world in the form of the sand. So it's a very playful technique, especially helpful for the children or the people with psychiatric problem or issues but it can be used only with those who are willing for this.

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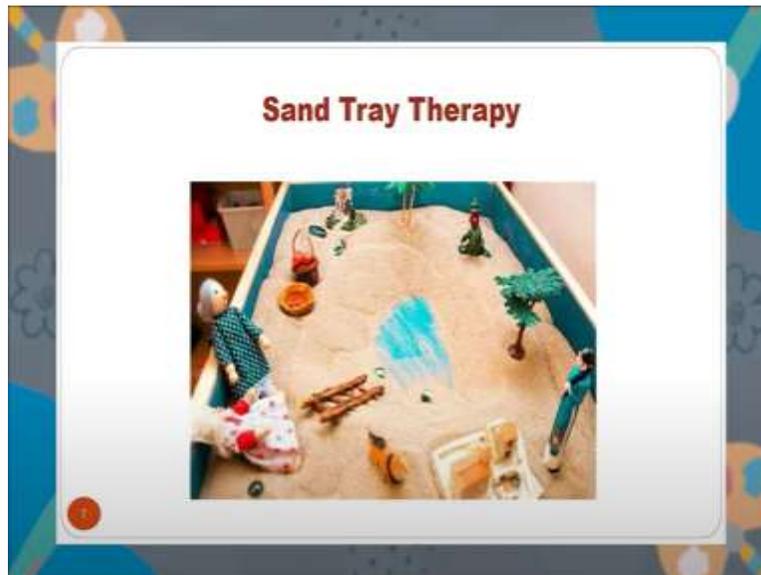
In sand tray therapy, a combination of play therapy and art therapy is used and the client creates scenes with miniature toys in a tray filled with sand.

The toys include anything from farm animals and dinosaurs to people and cars, trees, fences, gates, doors and buildings are common too. And the client chooses the toys to incorporate into the tray and arranges them in any way they want as it is observed by the therapist. Those who offer this type of therapy believe that clients create worlds that represent their inner struggles or conflicts. After sand play, the therapist and client typically discuss what was observed, the toys they were chosen and how they were arranged and any symbolic or metaphorical meanings. Usually, it has been seen in my sessions that I find that when the child creates the inner world, if he has struggled in a struggle with a certain figure, maybe the father or the mother, the child can use ferocious animals.

If the child is very fearful, he may choose the animals like rabbit or the cats which are not that much ferocious. The type of animal the child uses represents the inner world, especially the inner dialogue which the child uses while making the miniature world. It is very meaningful for the psychotherapist. The client may then choose to rearrange the toy. The rearrangement is very important because how the child uses it keeps the things in one place then shifts in another place then do another things.

So, the talk or the narratives which the child creates, the story which the child tells while making this inner world is very meaningful for the treatment which should be given for the person using sand tray therapy.

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So, in sand tray therapy there can be many things as shown in the figure may be trees, may be colours, ladder, and animals or dolls figures and in symbolic way the child can represent what is there in his or her own mind.

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And there are certain commandments of using sand tray therapy. First is to allow the clients to name miniatures. Sometimes the dinosaur is used and it is given the name of a person that this dinosaur is that person and this dinosaur is doing it means that person is doing that thing.

The name can be given by the client to the animals or the things which the child, the person uses. Secondly, it can keep your hands out of the tray. The therapist should not use his or her hand. They should keep your hands out of the tray. And no, sand tray therapy looks different across ages.

It looks different for people. of different ages. The child can work differently as an elder person or aged person. So, each person can experience or perceive the things which are kept in the sand tray differently and the person should be trained before you undertake sand tray therapy Because, not only that you can allow the person to use sand tray, but the interpretation of the verbatims or the dialogue with the person says is very important to be understood and which can be used for the psychotherapeutic purposes. Next, you should know the miniatures are enough.

The what type of miniatures you are using you should understand that are these miniatures suitable for the person for which you are using. So, for example, one child was suffering from sexual abuse at a young age, then the things which can arise imagination in the child to use that experience can be used and the person can be allowed to make a miniature world, inner world and the toys and the things which are used should be enough. You can use anything in the sand tray and you should be curious and refrain from assumption. You should, the counsellor, the therapist should not show his interest or anything or give suggestions to the client so that he may find that he is doing good or bad or this thing is not suitable for him. It is not likeable for the people.

The person should be flexible to choose the animals or the objects. And the person should get creative with miniatures. They can use anything. And the client should be allowed space for silence. Sometimes the client may not be able to start the work.

There are certain clients we find in our counseling sessions that there are certain people who do not know what to do with the sand tray. The person should be given opportunity to remain in silence you don't want to do anything you just sit for some time and it can be and usually it happens that the next time when the person comes for the session, the person think that okay, I can make this I can do this. So, you should be able to accept the silence of the client because sometimes your silence speaks louder than your words. And you have to trust the process, you have to trust the client that if the person is taking time it has his or her own reasons to be silent so you should be allowed to be silent.

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There are different types of play therapy and sand tray therapy is one of such therapy, bibliotherapy, cognitive behavioral play therapy, Filial therapy with the parent and the child work to promote their relationship.

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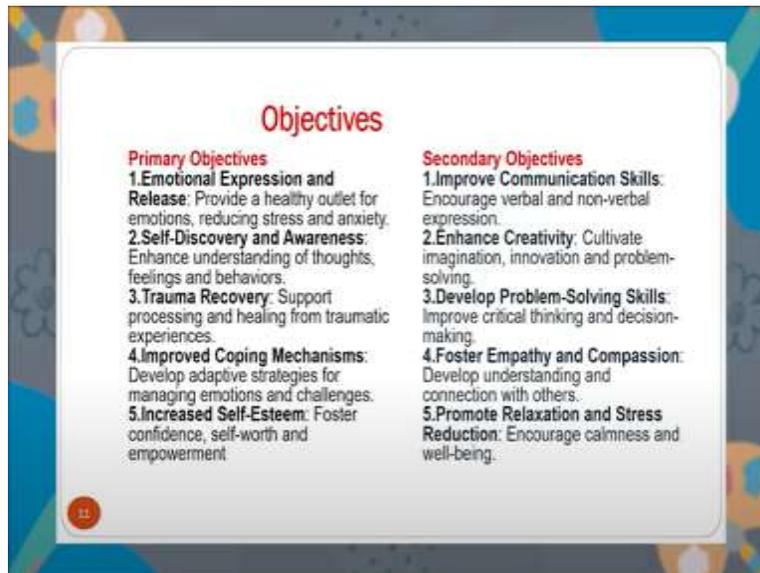


Imaginary play. So there are different play therapy and sand tray is one of such therapy. And the goal of all these play therapies is to foster empathy and compassion between the client and the therapist and to promote relaxation and stress reduction of the client. And it may have specific goals for the people from different populations. For example, if we are

using the signed therapy for children, It can address the developmental issues, ADHD, autism and social skills challenges. If we are using it with adults, we can help them to manage their stress, anxiety, depression and trauma recovery.

The goal of using sand tray therapy for senior or aged person can be to help them support age-related concerns, grief and life reflection. The goals can be different for different people.

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The objectives, the primary objectives of scientific therapy or any type of play therapy is to emotional expression release. Provide a healthy outlet for the emotions, especially the negative emotions and reduce stress and anxiety. Self-discovery and awareness is the objective, primary objective.

So, that the client can enhance understanding of thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Trauma recovery is the primary objective because it has the person to support and process the healing from traumatic experiences. To improve coping mechanism is a primary objective in which the the client develops adaptive strategies for managing emotions and challenges. Increased self-esteem is the primary objective because the main purpose is to foster the self-esteem and confidence and a sense of self-worth within the client. Whereas the secondary objectives are to improve the communication skills, verbal and non-verbal, to enhance the creativity, imagination capacity, innovation and problem solving within the client to develop critical thinking and decision making within the client to foster empathy and compassion and when the client uses different people so the emotions which he has for a particular person is depicted in the verbalization of the client.

It also promotes relaxation and stress reduction within the client.

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The techniques which can be used in sand play therapy are free play because unstructured activity can be given to the client. It gives the opportunity to freely play with the sand. The directed play can be done. The therapist can guide the themes of scenarios of making a product.

Symbolic expression can be a technique while making the creation of other people can be client can be asked to interpret that creations and while interpreting those creation the therapist or counselor can understand what these things represent in the mind of the person.

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Reflective sharing can be a technique after making a product the client can reflect upon experiences and insight developed and develop insights in the sand play therapy sessions and an imaginary sand play therapy as I told you it's based on jungian's personality theory it is deeply rooted that where that symbols are the language of the psyche of the inner self whatever words we use whatever miniature things we use it is the inner word of the client. So it represents something and it needs a lot of experience by the counselors and the therapist to explain the meaning of the verbalization and the inner word with the client makes in the creations and water can be used to make different things. These are certain examples of sand creations on beaches and the person can make one's own creation or can be asked to explain the already created creations.

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Sand creations on beaches



SAND THERAPY



Imaginary Sand Play Therapy



Sand Immersive Therapy



In this picture we can see the sand therapy in which the whole body is immersed with the sand and the person is having the experience of the sand, the touch, and the smell of the sand and around the sea beaches and in imaginary sand play therapy some instructions can be given by the therapist to make a inner world to make a scene to make a animal or tree or anything out of sand and in the sand immersive therapy the client is given certain experiences of sand with certain hypnotic suggestions can be given, certain auto suggestions can be given to the client to experience how he can experience the feelings which are arising and to write down the feelings during this therapeutic sessions.

As I told you that the sand play therapy is not a one time event it is a journey.

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Seven Phases of Sand play Therapy

- Freedle (2006) discovered seven phases of psychological development that emerged from the sand play processes of adults with traumatic brain injury. Findings suggested that psychological development is stimulated by the multisensory aspects of sand play in the presence of the attuned sand play therapist and progresses through seven phases:
- I. Expressing one's phenomenological experiences and everyday struggles
- II. Accessing one's resources to cope
- III. Figuring into darkness, negativities and despair in life
- IV. Reflecting, transcending and generating hope (pathways & agency)
- V. Touching totality, Divinity & wholeness
- VI. Bridging and understanding the opposites & integrating them into life.
- VII. Returning to everyday life with a new perspective.

So it occurs in certain phases and in the beginning the client may feel resistant in playing with the sand and in the first stage the client can be asked to go down the memory lane to experience the past things or everyday struggles that the person can be asked to remember the negativities or shortcomings in one's own life and gradually the client can be asked to reflect upon the problems with the person is having and gradually the person moves on seeing the things in perspective and as a whole thing. When the person takes a new perspective of the situation, the healing process begins and a bridge is made between the two polarities of the life. The person can experience that there are happy moments in the life, there are sad moments in the life. How to bridge the gap between these two and gradually the client develops a new perspective of experiencing the situations of the life to find solutions of the different challenges in the life.

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The seven phases of sand play therapy: were generally sequential, but not linear

- It involves some overlap and revisiting of phases before movement to the next phase.
- These phases are based on
- **Jung's Theory of Individuation**

Carl Jung's theory of individuation is a psychological process that involves integrating the conscious and unconscious aspects of the self to achieve a harmonious personality. In art therapy, this process can be facilitated by analyzing the symbolic language of dreams and fantasies, exploring archetypes, and uncovering unconscious conflicts and desires.

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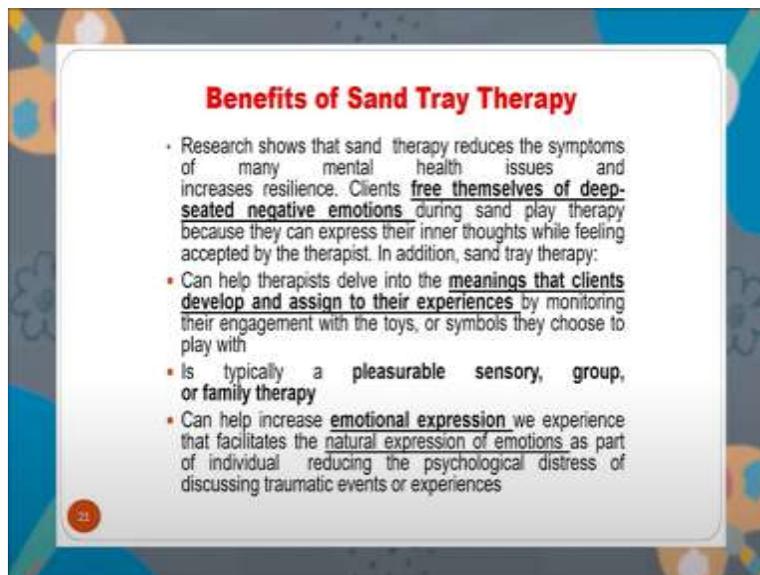
So there are different phases of sand play therapy and it is based on the Jung's theory of individuation and according to this theory the psychological process involves integrating the conscious and the subconscious mind. Sometimes the person does not know what is there in the subconscious mind but while playing with the sand the client can understand that there are certain things which he never thought about while playing the sand when the person becomes connected with the subconscious mind then the healing begins the journey begins and the person tries to find out the solutions of complexities of life to find the solution of different issues in the life and there are many situations for which this therapy can help the for the benefit for the adhd patients for the people with aggression, anger management, anxiety situation, depression situations, the situations which people feel while grief and loss.

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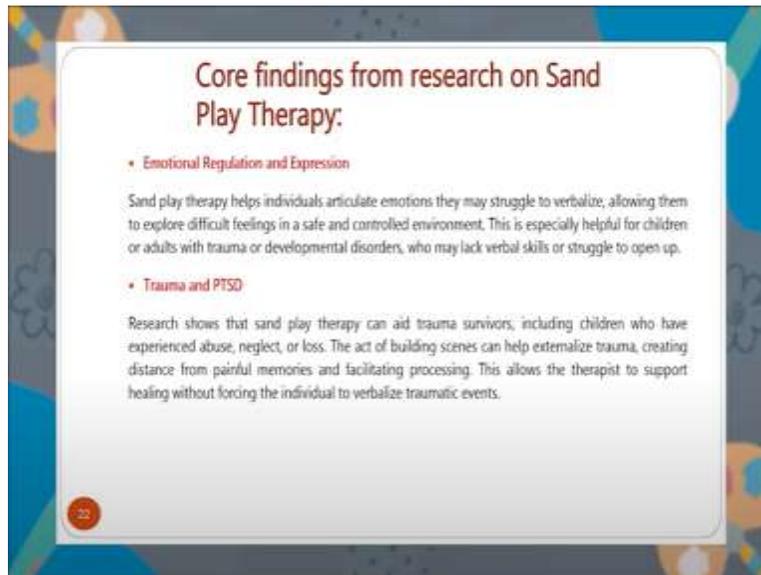
Some people have so low self-esteem problem there are certain children who have learning disability problems, school related problems, social issues.

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So in each situation this can help and there are different benefits for deep seated negative emotions and gradually the client learns to assign meanings to their own experience and they gradually learn that whatever challenges are there in their life they are here tell something to learn something new in their life they develop the ability to naturally express. So, there are different findings core findings from researchers on sand play therapy.

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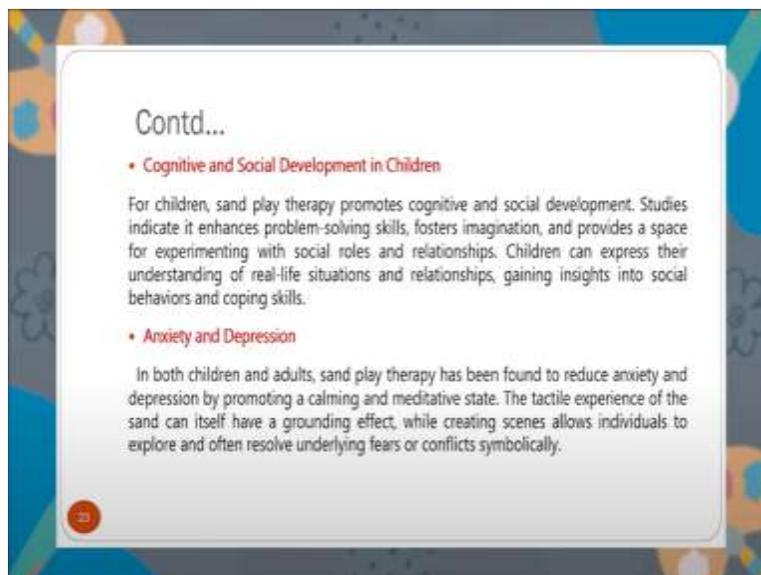
Core findings from research on Sand Play Therapy:

- **Emotional Regulation and Expression**
Sand play therapy helps individuals articulate emotions they may struggle to verbalize, allowing them to explore difficult feelings in a safe and controlled environment. This is especially helpful for children or adults with trauma or developmental disorders, who may lack verbal skills or struggle to open up.
- **Trauma and PTSD**
Research shows that sand play therapy can aid trauma survivors, including children who have experienced abuse, neglect, or loss. The act of building scenes can help externalize trauma, creating distance from painful memories and facilitating processing. This allows the therapist to support healing without forcing the individual to verbalize traumatic events.

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These researchers explained that sand play therapy helps in emotional regulation and expression. We have certain times that we have negative emotions but how we can express them in a regulated way. We can learn with the sand play therapy. In the trauma and PTSD symptoms, post traumatic stress symptoms, the client has a feeling that this the trauma can never be forgotten. So while playing in with the sand the client can understand the challenges behind this trauma and how he can overcome with them.

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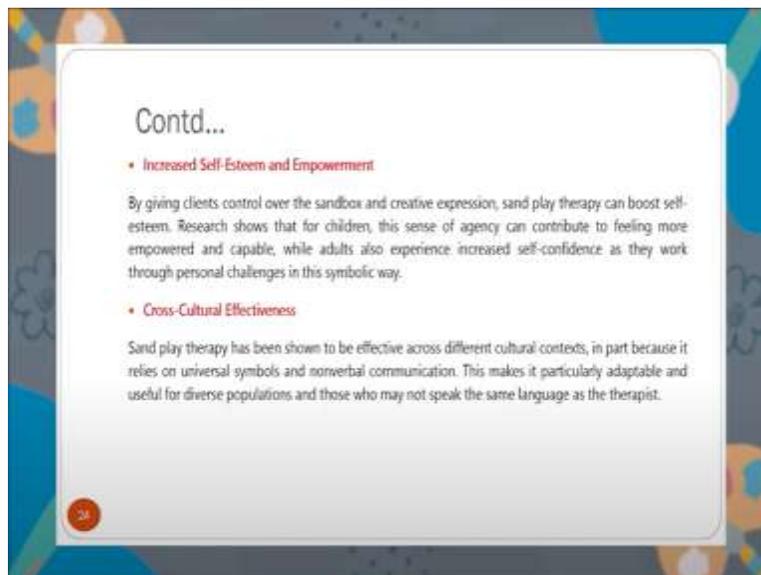
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- **Cognitive and Social Development in Children**
For children, sand play therapy promotes cognitive and social development. Studies indicate it enhances problem-solving skills, fosters imagination, and provides a space for experimenting with social roles and relationships. Children can express their understanding of real-life situations and relationships, gaining insights into social behaviors and coping skills.
- **Anxiety and Depression**
In both children and adults, sand play therapy has been found to reduce anxiety and depression by promoting a calming and meditative state. The tactile experience of the sand can itself have a grounding effect, while creating scenes allows individuals to explore and often resolve underlying fears or conflicts symbolically.

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The cognitive and social development of the children can be facilitated because there are certain children despite being a mature level of development they are still younger than their what is expected from their own age related expectations. So they are not able to meet those expectations. So when the child's development is hampered, this type of therapy can help them to grow up socially, cognitively and emotionally. Sometimes the people may be too anxious or depressed so this therapy can help them to distract from their life challenges the sources of anxiety and depression and heal themselves.

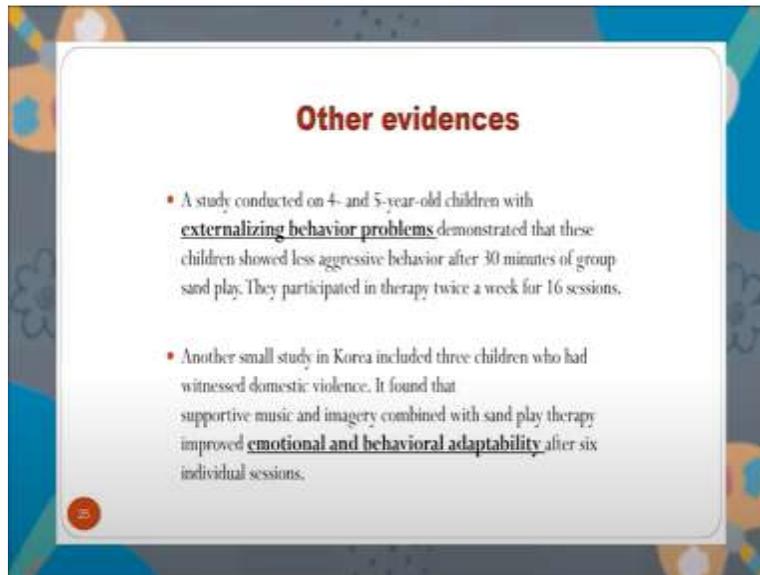
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It can increase their self-esteem and empowerment because the person feels a control over the situation whether it may be a sand tray therapy or sand play therapy the person can develop a sense of confidence and the product which is made during the sand play it can enhance or boost the self-esteem of the person.

It is helpful for people across cultures because it is a technique which is not suited to a specific culture. It is a culture free technique because each technique has a meaning for a particular culture. So, it is a culture free technique and effective for people from different cultures.

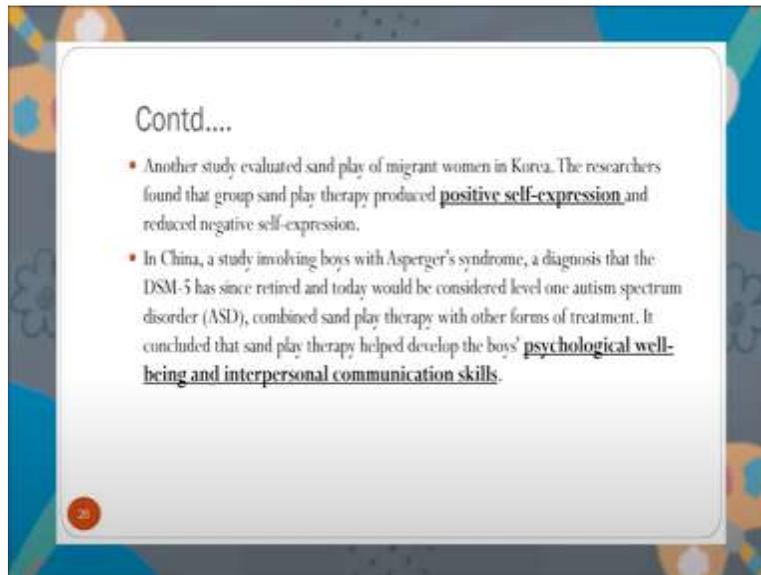
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There are different evidences that the children who have externalizing behavioral problems. By externalizing behavioral problems, I mean that if the person or the children is having anger or feeling of anxiety he can develop the habit of pulling the things or showing behavior temper tantrums throwing, not behaving in a disciplined way the person can be a problem child for the classroom for the home.

So these behavioral problems can be treated and there are evidences that if 16 sessions are given to a child, it can have important implications or can help the child of 4 to 5 years to get rid of the behavioral problems. It can help in a small study it was felt that in Korea done in Korea it included three children who had witnessed domestic violence and it was found that supportive music and imaginary combination with sand play therapy. Sand play therapy can be used alone or it can be used in combination with other therapy and in this study this therapy was combined with music therapy and imaginary techniques and it was helpful in these children for their better emotional and behavioral adaptation after 6 consecutive sessions.

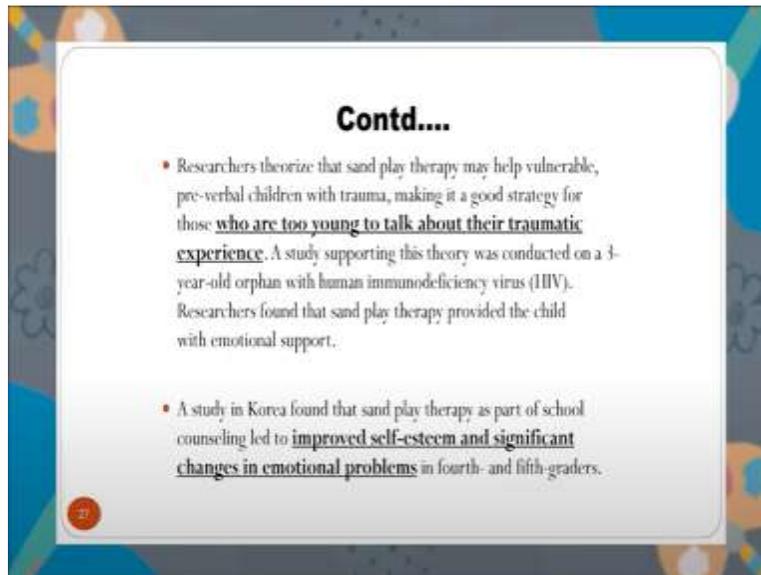
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In another study which evaluated and play of migrant women in Korea, the researchers found that group sand play therapy produce positive self-expression and reduce their negative self-expression. In a study done in China, it was involving boys with Asperger's syndrome.

A diagnosis that the DSM-5 has since retired and today would be considered level 1 autism spectrum disorder, ASD. A combined with sand play therapy with other forms of treatment, it was concluded that sand play therapy helped the client to develop the boys psychological well-being and interpersonal communication skills.

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- Researchers theorize that sand play therapy may help vulnerable, pre-verbal children with trauma, making it a good strategy for those who are too young to talk about their traumatic experience. A study supporting this theory was conducted on a 3-year-old orphan with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Researchers found that sand play therapy provided the child with emotional support.
- A study in Korea found that sand play therapy as part of school counseling led to improved self-esteem and significant changes in emotional problems in fourth- and fifth-graders.

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Another study the researchers theorize that sand play therapy may help vulnerable pre-verbal children with trauma making it a good strategy for those who are too young to talk about their traumatic experiences. Another study done in Korea found that sand play therapy as a part of school counselling led to improved self-esteem and significant changes in emotional problems in 4th and 5th grade students.

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Therapeutic Outcomes

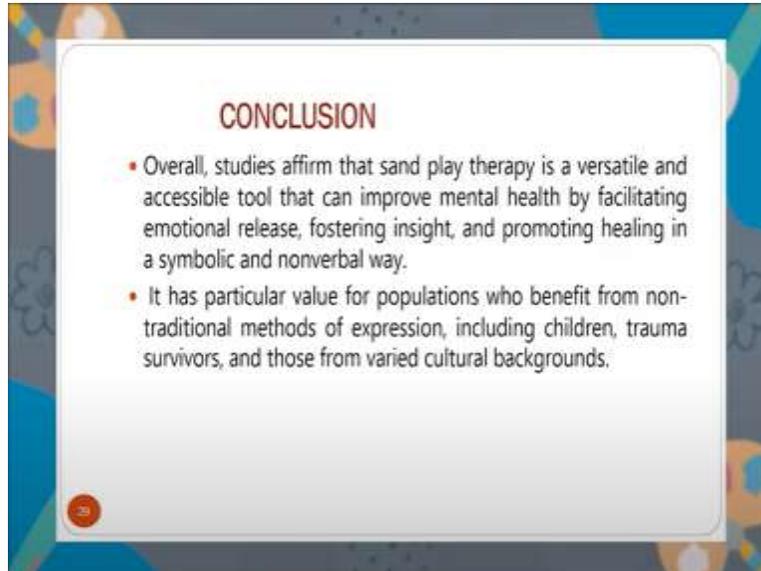
1. Improved emotional regulation.
2. Enhanced cognitive functioning.
3. Better interpersonal relationships.
4. Increased resilience.
5. Improved overall mental health and well-being.

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So, the therapeutic outcome of sand play therapy, we can summarise them that the therapeutic outcome the therapists have is improved emotional regulation, enhanced

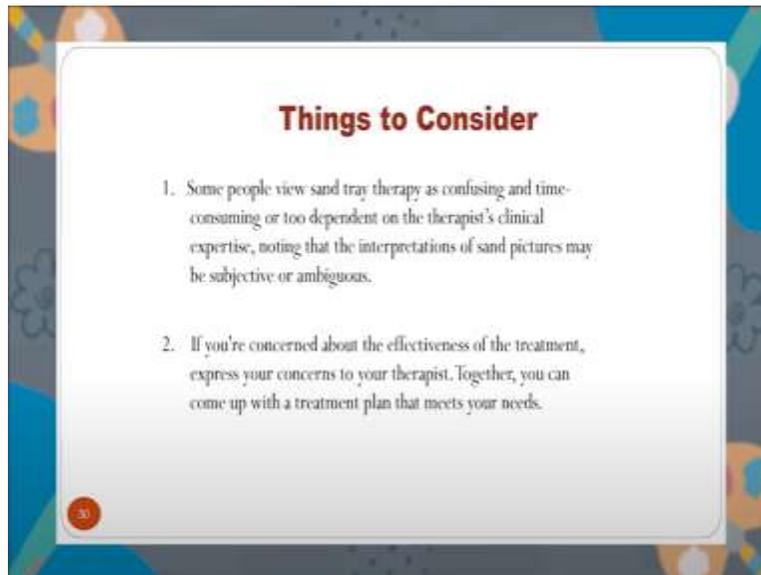
cognitive functioning, better interpersonal relationship, increased resilience, improved overall mental health and well-being.

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And we can conclude this session by saying that overall all these studies affirm that sand play therapy is a versatile and accessible tool that can improve mental health by facilitating emotional release, fostering insight and promoting healing in a symbolic and non-verbal way. It has particular value for populations who benefit from non-traditional methods of expression including children, trauma survivors and those from varied cultural backgrounds.

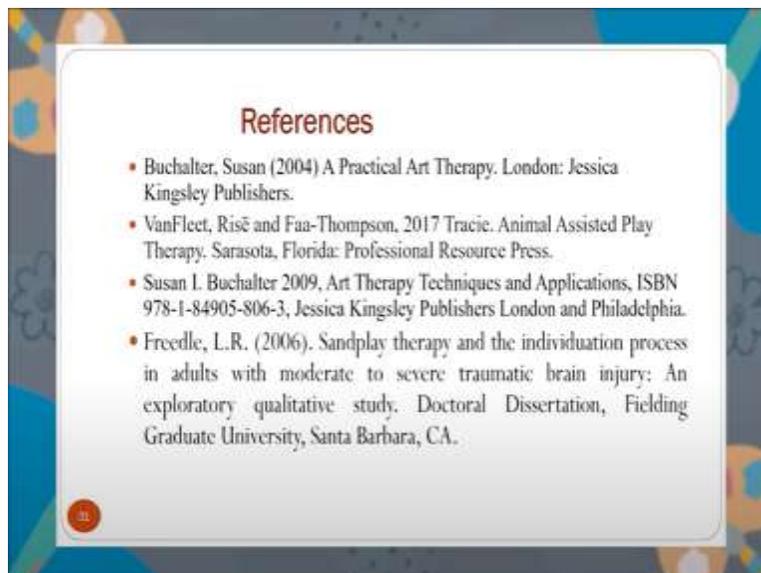
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And we have to consider certain things that some people view that scientific therapy is confusing and time consuming and too dependent on the therapist. Clinical expertise nothing that the noting that the interpretation of pictures may be subjective or ambiguous. You have to be very cautious because we cannot solely depend on this therapy.

The experienced therapists combine it with other therapies to get a better outcome of this therapy.

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RESOURCES

- Amy Morin, LCSW, is a psychotherapist and international bestselling author. Her books, including "13 Things Mentally Strong People Don't Do," have been translated into more than 40 languages. Her TEDx talk, "The Secret of Becoming Mentally Strong," is one of the most viewed talks of all time.



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There are certain references of certain books and papers which are published on the research and sand tray therapy. You can refer these studies for future references and resources. Thank you very much.