



## **MODULE 5: PROMPTS FOR WORKING WITH COUPLES IN THE SANDTRAY**

When you're working with couples, sandtray can be a hugely effective treatment because, many times when we have couples in there, it's easy to just talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, and maybe you hear a certain thing, but it's a lot easier to understand when you are actually seeing it in the tray.

Now, again, word of caution here. Much like when you're putting families in the tray, you need to be able to set the rules ahead of time and the boundaries ahead of time, because likely these couples are in your office for a reason, oftentimes because they are not very good at communication and respecting each other's boundaries. So, again, it's going to be up to you to set that up before they even get into the sandtray. And, so some of the boundaries that I like to set with some of the couples would be that you're not able to move things in the other partner's tray without their permission. This would seem to be like, "Well, of course not." But again, these couples are used to being all up in each other's space. So, I've even had husbands who will say, "No, no. That's not what it is," and move the wife's tray in a way where he sees fit. So, again, it's easier to have that just not be an option because you've set those rules and those boundaries from the beginning.

Another one would be that you don't talk over each other. If the one person is talking about their tray, then you can allow them to discuss it pretty freely without the other person butting in or being able to talk over them. So, again, it's important that you set up whatever these boundaries are before you even put in the session. And I also would allow the couple to have input on what they feel like they need to be safe when they're building these trays with their partner.

So, one simple technique that is super effective to use with couples is, you want to have each of them, maybe they're in the same tray, maybe they're in separate trays. Let's just say, for instance, you only have one tray in your office. So, put a line down the middle and have one spouse

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build, maybe it's the wife, build what marriage feels like for her—what her marriage feels like for her—and then on the other side have the husband do what his marriage feels like for him. And then you can have each discuss what they saw or what they felt during, when they were building it, and have the other person really listen. And oftentimes you will be able to see this empathy that happens, and then all the sudden the dam kind of breaks and they're really able to really have this moment of empathy that they weren't able to before. And so, that's where I would start in using sandtray with couples. You can be as creative as you want after that, but that's a real simple one to get started when working with couples in the sandtray.