

# SANDTRAY SUITE

## MODULE 2: HOW THE BRAIN WORKS IN SANDTRAY

So, since we've talked about the different parts of the brain, we're now going to talk about why does sandtray work with the whole brain? So, one thing to recognize here is the sandtray is a brain informed method, meaning it actually changes the brain. Now how this happens is that when we can get the whole brain to come on-line and really talk to each other, and also have this mindful experience where we are turning inward to feel what our body is feeling, what happens is the road between our prefrontal cortex, our thinking part of the brain and our back part of the brain, our limbic system, actually gets thicker. What you can see is the myelin sheath that surrounds the neurons actually gets thicker. You can see it in an FMRI. And so what happens and what that means then is that the communication system between the limbic system, which maybe is experiencing anger or fear or whatever, can communicate in a quicker way to the thinking part of our brain which is the prefrontal cortex and the prefrontal cortex is able to modulate and make sense of those emotions so that we don't flip our lid like what Daniel Siegel talks about when he talks about the hand model of the brain. So sandtray helps us do that. And it even helps us even more than just like meditation or something else because we are able to have someone else providing that neuroception of safety in the sandtray. So it's kind of like taking a healing method, putting it on steroids, when we're able to be with our clients when they're working in sandtray.

So, I want you to think about how you can incorporate this explanation into your work, maybe during intakes, or when you're working with some people in your office, or higher ups to try to figure out why is this sandtray thing so awesome?

So, when we talk about the brain, we need to understand how the brain processes information. So what happens is when information comes up

from our body, it gets processed as non-verbally first and then linguistics get attached to it. This is very important because when trauma comes up, or even just information that just doesn't get encoded at the hippocampus, it gets laid down in that right hemisphere, that doesn't have words. So then, what happens is, that as adults we will develop cognitive blocks, whereas our left brain is just, we are not going to talk about it in our right brain, or maybe we just don't have access to it. But what happens then, is the sandtray, because you're using your hands, and you're working with you're whole body, you're able to bypass some of those cognitive blocks. Or, it never gets a chance, the left brain doesn't get the chance to come in and go, "No, no, no, we don't talk about that! No, no, no, no, no!" So the right brain is able to bring that information up and show it in a way that they left brain doesn't get a chance to block any of that.

So, here, this is talking about Bonnie Badenoch, and you guys have heard me talk about her before. This it's a beautiful, beautiful way to really understand why sandtray works in the brain. She says oftentimes while referring to working in the sand. So Working in the sand invites the implicit world, which is home of our earliest attachment wounds, to take symbolic form. Sometimes it provides a road around defenses, which is what we're talking about here, with right brain stuff, and then the left brain doesn't even get a chance to come in and go, "Nope. No. Not going there." Often it lets preverbal pain emerge, which before when we didn't have words for preverbal, meaning we didn't have language, so, but that pain will still run the show and gets laid down on our body. Sometimes it makes concrete the feelings that the person has had difficulty communicating; sometimes it externalizes and contains, (very important when we're talking about the neuroception of safety as well), externalizes and contains inner anguish that has been too powerful to call into consciousness in other ways. The left brain is just not able sometimes to go there and it's too scary to go there and talk about the trauma, whereas, the right brain is able to go, "Hey, I'm here. Let me be heard." And how it does that it is through the sandtray. So, again, this is why things happen in the sandtray that often clients aren't ready for. Another reason why we need to be trained and understand the power of sandtray because oftentimes things will get triggered and come up in the

tray, and we need to be there to hold and contain that anguish that has been too powerful to call into consciousness in other ways.