

SANDTRAY SUITE

Module 3: How to Start Sandtray Sessions

Oftentimes, I get the question from new sandtray therapists wondering, “How do I even start sandtray sessions?” Now the good news is, is when you’re working with kids, you don’t really have to say much. They just come in and they’re like, “Oh my gosh! Sand! Miniatures! Or toys. They will usually say toys. And then they’ll start building and you go from there.

Now when you work with adults, they might just be kind of a little bit more skeptical about it. So the way that I handle this, is during the intake, is that I tell them that I’m a sandtray therapist and what I like to use is a thing called sandtray. And I bring them back into the sandtray room and I will really go over with them the no fail sandtray script that I’m attaching at the bottom where I explain to them what sandtray is and how it works. And when I set that up in that:

1. “It works with the whole brain so that you get better faster”, and then
2. “It helps me understand you better, so again, you get better faster.”

Then it’s really hard for the client to go, “No, I don’t really want to get better faster. I’m not really interested in it, so I don’t want to do that.” So it leads to that, “Yes,” which, again, is what we want.

So, during the intake I’m setting them up as, “This is probably something we’re going to be doing next time you come see me.” So, again, they’re already familiar with this. They’re already kind of being exposed. I don’t have to re-introduce all that and do that work during the first session. So, again, how do I bring the client? How do I start actually the session?

I will say, “OK. Today I want us to do a sandtray. And again, like we talked about before, here’s what we call miniatures. And here’s what I want you to do.” And usually I start off with a non-directive tray if I’m

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working with a client for the first time. And I will say, “I want you to build your world in the sand. There’s no right or wrong, good or bad. Take as much time as you need. I’ll be sitting here quietly and you let me know when you’re finished.” And so then they may just kind of go, “What? What? I don’t know.” And I say, “I know. It kind of does seem weird at first. But I want you to really look at the miniatures and whatever catches your eye and seems to belong in your world, you can put it in there.” And sometimes you may need a few promptings. But, oftentimes, once they start building, they kind of, almost kind of forget you’re there. So, and when you do that, it’s a really good way to set yourself up for success and then allow the client to know what is being expected.

Now, again, if you’re starting with a directive, it’s the same type deal. You bring them in and you go, “OK. Today we’re going to do something a little bit different. Today I want you to make a tray about your marriage. I want you to make a tray about school.” And from there, they are able to build whatever, you know, the tray from the directive you gave them. So that, again, if you do those two things. Set it up during the intake and then give them direction during the first of the session. You’ll be fine. And, really one of the things to remember is that if you don’t freak out and you don’t make it weird, it’s not going to be weird for them as well. So, I encourage you to do this, and let us know in the facebook group how this is going with some of your first sessions.