



## **Sand, Art, and Aggression in Synergetic Play Therapy™**

### **Learning Objectives:**

1. Explain how to use regulation as a way to help integrate aggressive energy in the playroom
2. Describe how to facilitate the use of sand from a Synergetic Play Therapy™ perspective in the playroom
3. Explain how to facilitate the use of art from a Synergetic Play Therapy™ perspective in the playroom

### **Sand in Synergetic Play Therapy™**

- The tray itself represents the child's emotional body and the sand represents the child's e-motions.
- In order to turn your tray into a regulation tool, you need a turkey baster, sifter, funnel, scoop and bucket.
- The tools help simulate the flow of energy in the nervous system.
- Sand can be flooding for some children/therapists. Don't assume it feels good.

### Working with Sand

- Do not put hands in the tray unless invited to do so.
- Help cultivate mindfulness in the child when possible.
- You don't always have to use words. Sound, breath and movement are ways to regulate the child while they are in the sand tray.
- Continue to use observational statements and avoid evaluation and interpretation.
- Your presence and engagement is the container that helps hold the intensity and supports the child's ability to move towards the uncomfortable memories, thoughts, feelings and sensations that arise.
- The child's process in the tray will be a reflection of the activation in their nervous system.

When the child uses toys in the sand, many therapists want to search for meaning. Instead, what is the feeling that is arising as a result of how the child is playing in the sand? What is the Set Up?

### Notes:

### **Art in Synergetic Play Therapy™**

- Working with art is similar to working with sand as the art itself will also be a reflection of the activation in the child's nervous system.
- In SPT, we focus on the process of creating the art over the end result.

- Avoid evaluation or interpretation.
- Approach art as if it were another toy- what is the feeling that emerges as they create and relate to their art?

#### Tips for working with Art

- Important we are present throughout the entire process.
- Let the child know how much time they have when they start an art project.
- Avoid questions during a non-directive process, as we want to keep them in the experience.
- If a therapist asks too many questions or the child perceives them as invasive in their space, the child may not feel free enough to express themselves.
- Approach art as if it's another toy, what is the set up?
- Regulate the art process as needed with regulation.
- Make observational Statements.
- Is the art itself hyperaroused or hypoaroused? What the creation of the art a hyper-aroused or hypo-aroused process?

#### Notes:

### **Aggression and Death in the Playroom**

*Finish reading Aggression in Play Therapy: A Neurobiological Approach for Integrating Intensity*

#### What is the Purpose?

- Aggression and death play are symbolic expressions of hyperarousal and hypo-arousal.
- The goal is to integrate the energy, not shut it down or stop it.

#### Regulation: Need to Regulate!!!

- If therapists do not regulate during intense play, they risk increasing the intensity of the play (in a dys-regulated way)
- If therapists do not regulate during intense play, they risk experiencing “vicarious trauma” and “compassion fatigue”.
- The therapist’s ability to stay present and within their own window of tolerance is the container when intense play arises.
- If the therapist is not present/grounded/authentic, the child will increase the intensity until the therapist has no choice but to “show up!”

### Boundaries and Limits

- In SPT, limits and boundaries are set to help the therapist stay present, unless there is a safety issue.
- Boundaries are organic and arise as needed.
- We try not to say “no,” and instead empathize and redirect.
- Try not to power trip the child, this will increase their desire to test you and not stay engaged in the play.

### Notes:

### Regulate through Hyperaroused/Aggressive Play- fighting, bombs, danger in environment, etc

- Breathe! (especially in between hits, shots, swings, etc)
- Ground the energy.
- Match intensity- how would you really respond if this were happening to you?
- Be Vocal! This is not the time to be quiet.
- Be authentic! Don't pretend or fake it.

### Notes:

### Regulate through Hypoaroused/Death Play- you are dead or can't move

- Breathe, breathe, breathe!
- Wiggle your toes.
- Bilateral input.
- Imagine filling the room with your energy- get as big as the room (don't let yourself disappear energetically)
- Contemplative Practices- your mind will wander, you will get sleepy, you will want to check out. Notice and come back to your body/breath.

### Notes:

### What to do when you are Dead

- Stay Dead!
- Dead people can't talk.
- Talking exception: If the child is young and a lot of time goes by, you can remind the the child that they are in charge and can make you come alive when they want to.

- Talking exception: Hold child accountable to the time, still give time warnings for the session ending.
- Fall facing the room in the fetal position with your head covered (protect).
- Don't fully close your eyes or find a way to peek. Keep tracking the play silently.
- Set boundaries as needed.

Notes:

### Sword Fighting

- Don't win, lose your power slowly.
- Don't be "too good".
- Ground and breathe in the pauses.
- Get backed into a corner/couch.
- If asked to become the challenger or aggressive, have the child script the play and go very carefully.

Notes:

Remember ONE FOOT IN AND ONE FOOT OUT! It is essential to have a neuroception of safety while simultaneously feeling the dys-regulation.

*Review your notes on Flooding from Class 3*

Thank you so much for joining me on this journey. I hope you found new learning, inspiration, growth and new possibility in this course. Remember that you are the most important toy in the playroom.

Take a deep breath, trust yourself and rock the baby.

In Gratitude, Lisa

**To Work On:**

1. Take the time to journal about what you learned about in this course. What are you taking away from your learning? What do you still want to understand?
2. Do something really nice for yourself to tell yourself thank you for taking the time to learn and study and grow. You were worth it.

**Quiz Review:**

1. In SPT we turn the sand tray into a regulation device.
2. The sifter, turkey baster, scoop, funnel and bucket are the essential tools for an SPT sand tray as they help simulate how energy flows through a nervous system. A shower curtain and small dustpan/broom are also useful.
3. We are looking for full flow to indicate that the child's nervous system has arrived into a state of regulation.
4. Some children may not like playing in the sand. Don't assume the sand feels good to every child.
5. It is important to make observational statements and statements that support the child in becoming mindful of what they are doing when they are playing in the sand.
6. We do not put our hands in the sand tray unless we have been invited to do so.
7. Your presence and engagement is the container with art, sand and aggressive play. The child will often escalate the play if they do not feel you or perceive you as incongruent or hiding your emotions.
8. Children continue to set us up while using sand and art while creating sand and art that is reflective of their nervous system state.
9. It is useful to name parts when we have many emotions or internal experiences about the play.
10. It is very important that we name just the facts instead of interpreting or making assumptions about the play.
11. It is important not to interpret the final product made in art as the process is the most important part.
12. It is really important to let a child know how much time they have when they begin their art process.

13. It is important that we regulate the dys-regulation that arises during sand and art play to help the child stay connected to themselves and move towards the challenges they are working through.
14. It is important to keep our evaluations of “I like it” or “I don’t like it” out of the sand or art process.
15. We want to integrate the aggressive play, not stop it.
16. If you don’t regulate during intense play, you will risk increasing the intensity in the playroom and increase the risk of compassion fatigue.
17. Boundaries are important in the playroom.
18. The time to set a boundary is when you can no longer stay present with what the child is doing and you are about to go outside your window of tolerance.
19. We set boundaries by empathizing and redirecting.
20. In order to have an authentic reaction, it is important for a split second to imagine that it is real.
21. It is important to regulate through both aggressive and death play.
22. If a child asks you to become the challenger in some way, it is extremely important that you have the child script it.
23. It is important to use observational statements and track the child as well as regulate with movement, sound, and naming the experience during a play therapy session. All are necessary to help a child integrate their challenging thoughts, emotions, and sensations.
24. Flooding happens in all play therapy models, because flooding is part of relationship.
25. When flooding happens, the only goal is to create a neuroception of safety.
26. Repair is an important part of the process after a rupture happens.