



Class 6: Sand, Art, and Aggression in Synergetic Play Therapy®

Class 6 applies what we have learned so far to sand and art while also exploring ways to work with aggression and extreme states of dysregulation

Learning Objectives:

- Explain how to use regulation as a way to help integrate aggressive energy in the playroom
- Describe how to facilitate the use of sand from a Synergetic Play Therapy® perspective in the playroom
- Explain how to facilitate the use of art from a Synergetic Play Therapy® perspective in the playroom
- Explain the concept of flooding in the playroom for both you and the child and list ways to create a neuroception of safety

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

- It's 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 hyper-aroused or hypo-aroused? Was 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.
- Attempting to control the child will likely increase the child's desire to test you and not stay engaged in the play.

Regulate through Hyper-aroused/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.

Regulate through Hypo-aroused/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.

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 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.

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 possibilities 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

Reflective Questions:

- What did I learn about facilitating art and sand that I did not know before?

- How do I typically respond when a child becomes aggressive in the playroom?

- What can I do to regulate myself and my client next time aggression enters the playroom?

- How have I grown as a therapist and as a person in this course?

- What is my favorite part about Synergetic Play Therapy®?

- What questions do I have for my Consultant?

- What questions did I miss in the quiz?

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: (Multiple Choice & True/False)

1. While the child is working with art/sand, what is important to avoid?
 - a. Observational statements
 - b. Body reflections
 - c. Evaluation and interpretation
 - d. The use of the funnel

2. In SPT, the following would be an example of how a boundary is set?
 - a. Providing a warning
 - b. Empathizing and redirecting
 - c. Firmly say “no” until the child stops
 - d. Using the “stop” hand signal
3. What is true when working with sand?
 - a. Refrain from putting your hands in the tray unless invited to do so
 - b. Help cultivate mindfulness in the child when possible
 - c. Sound, breath, and movement are ways to regulate the child
 - d. All of the above
4. What is the goal when working with aggression?
 - a. Shut down the energy
 - b. Integrate the energy
 - c. Strengthen the energy
 - d. Teach the child how to be calm
5. If a child asks you to become the challenger in some way, it is extremely important to:
 - a. Have the child create the script
 - b. Make up your own play/way to be the challenger
 - c. Acknowledge and redirect if it is outside your window of tolerance
 - d. Answers A and C
6. What can therapists do to regulate through hyperaroused/aggressive play (ex: fighting, bombs, danger in the environment, etc.)?
 - a. Breathe!
 - b. Move their body
 - c. Be vocal and authentic
 - d. All of the above
7. When playing dead in a session, it is important to (choose the one that doesn’t fit):
 - a. Stay dead
 - b. Only talk to hold the child accountable to the time, or if the child is young and a lot of time goes by
 - c. Fall facing the room in fetal position with your head covered
 - d. Fully close your eyes, no peeking
8. True or False: The most important part of a child’s art work is interpreting the final product, not being in the process.
9. True or False: Regulation in a session is only needed when “the baby is crying” (I.e. the child’s nervous system is activated and/or the therapist’s nervous system is activated).
10. True or False: The child will often escalate the play if they perceive the therapist as incongruent.