



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

Module Focus: Explore how to facilitate sand, art and aggression through an SPT lens

Supportive Tenets:

1. **The therapist is the most important toy in the playroom.** In SPT, toys and language are not required.

Reading: *Read whatever chapters you haven't yet and/or finish reading Aggression in Play Therapy: A Neurobiological Approach for Integrating Intensity*

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

Handouts Needed: Take time to re-read all of the handouts for a final integration

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 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/Offering?

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.
- The therapist continues to be the external regulator, just like when facilitating sand.
- 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?

Working with Art

- It is important to be 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.

Notes:

Aggression in the Playroom

- Aggression and death play are symbolic expressions of extreme states of hyperarousal and hypo-arousal.
- The goal is to integrate the energy, not shut it down or stop it.
- Remember ONE FOOT IN AND ONE FOOT OUT! It is essential to have a neuroception of safety while simultaneously feeling the dys-regulation.

Regulation: Need to Regulate!!!

- If therapists do not regulate and co-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!"

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.
- If asked to become the challenger, have the child script the play and go very carefully.
- Set boundaries as needed.

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.
- Set boundaries as needed.

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 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.

Notes:

Reflective Questions:

- What did I learn about facilitating art and sand that I did not know before?
- What can I do to regulate myself and stay connected to the child the 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?

To Work On:

1. Take the time to journal about what I have learned in this course. What am I taking away from my learning? What do I still want to understand?
2. Do something really nice for myself to tell myself thank you for taking the time to learn and study and grow. I was/am worth it!

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

