



WORLD JOURNAL FOR SAND THERAPY PRACTICE

PROMOTING THE ETHICAL PRACTICE OF SAND THERAPY

Journey Through the Path of the Sand Therapist

Dee Preston-Dillion¹, Yolanda Fountain Hardy², Julia Knach³

¹Sand Therapy Training Institute, Brandywine, MD, USA

²Play Wellness, Roswell, GA, USA

³Julia Knach, My Crossing Paths Counseling Center, Timonium, MD, USA

Panel Description: The professional development of a Sand Therapist may entail many steps and take different turns as clinicians are impacted by their own theoretical approaches, lived experiences, and dynamic processes with clientele. What are some helpful steps professionals can engage in at various phases of the career path as they learn and grow that promote core competencies in Sand Therapy and enhance the client experience? This lively panel discussion provided opportunities for renewal, vision, and clarity about the pathways of growth, helpful steps and maybe even a few pitfalls to avoid on the journey. The 90-minute discussion panel addressed the ongoing professional evolution of the Sand Therapist.

Reflections on the Conference Theme and Preliminary Questions

Dee Preston-Dillon, Panelist

My perspective is shaped by 40-plus years of working with symbols in sand. With my counseling masters, my initial training was Kalffian Sandplay with founding members, including Dora Kalff. My subsequent doctoral research in psychology examined the parallels with indigenous healing practices and what is problematic when using Sandplay with non-Western peoples. My fieldwork with indigenous participants' sand scenes was grounded in cultural anthropology, phenomenology, and critical hermeneutics.

Driving concerns with social justice, indigenous and women's rights movements of the '70s and '80s led me to examine the social-cultural-political dynamics within which sand therapies and training are embedded. I wondered what the dangers and potential misuse are, why there are seemingly pervasive

Dee Preston-Dillion  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8429-1375>

Yolanda Fountain Hardy  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6889-582X>

Julia Knach. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dee Preston-Dillion at her email:

admin@sandtherapytraining.com

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misunderstandings that sabotage the healing potential of sand therapy? How do we shore up ethical concerns, scope of practice, and support therapists in their own healing process?

I am an educator in my bones. While working on sand therapy competency scales, my approach evolved into Narrative Sand Therapy, an existential-narrative foundation. My contributions and commitment are teaching clinicians how to process symbols with clients and supervisees, immerse themselves with depth and meaning in their work, and develop therapists' innate intuitive voices. There are layers of stories and voices in every sand scene. This is what I believe and what I teach.

What was and remains compelling is the depth, healing, and transformative potential for clients and therapists.

Yolanda Fountain Hardy, Panelist

The journey to becoming a sand therapist can be one of the most rewarding and arduous. To remain effective, clinicians must intentionally practice a deepened level of self-awareness neurologically, somatically, intergenerationally, and culturally. The intersection of neurological and somatic awareness allows the sand therapist to ground the therapeutic atmosphere and alliance and provides the "being" aspect required for ultimate attunement, discernment, and wisdom. Clinicians are tasked with being attentive to the ongoing messages in their mind and body and helping clients interpret internal and external cues that may surface in the sand or with the symbols. Clinicians are dually challenged with looking in the mirror to continually assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (known as the SWOT analysis in business) within themselves, their clients, and the therapeutic relationship through the sand therapy process.

Lastly, the intersection of intergenerational and cultural awareness sets the precedence for sand therapists to engage in growth that is counter-cultural, as the U.S. society (and some extensions of the world at large) is rooted in denial and repression (Bell, 1992). This advanced level of being promotes sand therapists who can broach issues of culture, ethnicity, and race (Day-Vines et al., 2007), who engage in cultural competency (Campinha-Bacote, 2019), and who possess the courage to change the status quo of relational being. To operate in this space, White European sand therapists must dare to override conditioned patterns of thinking and behaving and to develop a new set of morals that typically position them as targets (instead of "overseers") within the general society. Melanated sand therapists must reposition by learning to trust their cultural wisdom, persevere through personal and professional griefs and traumas, and lean into collective resilience.



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Julia Knoch, Panelist

Sandtray therapy has not always had a place in my journey as a professional. When I started in the counseling field, I was taught primarily top-down methods. My first introduction to sand came many years later in the field as a clinical supervisor, having to move a sand tray from one office to another and wondering what the purpose was. Information about sand therapy wasn't as prevalent as it is now, so I had limited knowledge of what I should do in the sand. As a result, I went out and bought a bag of animal miniatures determined to figure this out with my individuals. It didn't go well for the first few times.

Fast forward to today, and I couldn't imagine my practice without sand therapy. Sand has become an integral part of my practice, including training my staff on the benefits of sand and how to incorporate it into sessions. When the time came for me to write my dissertation, *Using Sandtray Therapy to Encourage Healing from Adverse Childhood Experiences*, the choice to explore and document the benefits of sand therapy was an easy one; however, figuring out how to show others what sand tray therapists already know was the challenge. Having my dissertation published and sharing it with everyone, not just sand tray-like minds, has been a wonderful experience. I would not be where I am, personally and professionally, had I not been willing to explore the sand.

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