



WORLD JOURNAL FOR SAND THERAPY PRACTICE

PROMOTING THE ETHICAL PRACTICE OF SAND THERAPY

Ethics in Sand Therapy

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Conference Description: This experiential workshop will explore ethical theories, models, and codes relevant to the practice of Sand Therapy. There will be a focus on exploring and understanding a specific ethical decision-making model with applications to the sand therapy process. Emphasis will be given to aspects of the Association for Play Therapy Practice Guidelines and the Sandplay Therapists of America Standards for Professional Conduct. Using case examples and vignettes, attendees will explore various legal and ethical decisions and actions. Exploration of ethical challenges will include experiential and sand therapy exercises. Attendees should plan on having 25-30 sand miniature figures available.

Ethical practice in any therapeutic setting should begin with the essential elements of seeking appropriate consultation and ensuring appropriate documentation. The workshop spent considerable time talking about competence – primarily the competence of the sand therapist, as well as the competence of clients, which focused on working with minor clients.

Competence was defined by examining the Play Therapy Best Practices (Association for Play Therapy, 2022) and the STA Standards of Professional Conduct (Sandplay Therapists of America, 2019). The importance of practicing within the scope of the therapists' expertise and the essential need for adequate training, supervised experience, and ongoing consultation were examined. Multicultural competence was also considered.

A refresher on basic ethical principles was discussed, including autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, justice, fidelity, veracity, and self-care. This was followed by considering the fundamental purpose of ethical codes, including 1) protection of the public; 2) education of the members of the profession about what constitutes sound, ethical conduct; 3) providing a means to ensure accountability by enforcing the standards; 4) serving as a catalyst for improving practice; and 5) protecting the profession from government, allowing the profession to regulate itself & function more autonomously.

Ethics when working with minors was presented. This included an examination of informed consent and its three basic requirements: 1) Disclosure of relevant

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information to prospective clients about therapy; 2) The client's comprehension of the information; and 3) The client's voluntary agreement, free of coercion and undue influence, to participation in therapy. Since minors – subject to state law – are considered legally incompetent, they are not able to provide informed consent.

Several questions related to ethics in sand therapy were considered and discussed, including the potential ethical issues involved with:

- The ethics of selecting a sand therapy theory/approach/model?
- The ethics of selecting the materials used in the process?
- The ethics of determining the involvement of parents in the process when working with child clients?
- The ethics of determining who should be directly included in sand therapy interventions?
- The ethics of interpreting symbols/metaphors/meaning of sand therapy miniatures and creations?

Finally, several fundamental ethical practices in using sand therapy were considered, including: 1) Practice play & sand therapy within the limits of competence (i.e., your training and supervised experience); 2) Be thoroughly aware of privilege & confidentiality – & limitations within your state; 3) Have a very clear Informed Consent and Professional Disclosure Statement; 4) Ensure that these documents clearly define the limits of confidentiality; 5) Ensure that these documents are appropriately signed by all parties, including the therapist; 6) Fully discuss the roles and expectations of guardians when working with child clients; and 7) Keep complete, accurate and objective records of all therapeutic interactions – including any interactions outside of the therapy room.

References

Association for Play Therapy. (2022). *Play therapy best practices: Clinical, professional & ethical issues*.

https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.a4pt.org/resource/resmgr/publications/best_practices.pdf

Sandplay Therapists of America. (2019). *STA standards of professional conduct*.

<https://www.sandplay.org/wp-content/uploads/STA-Standards-of-Professional-Conduct-Sept2018.pdf>

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