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PROMOTING THE ETHICAL PRACTICE OF SAND THERAPY

## Book Review: Humanistic Sandtray Therapy

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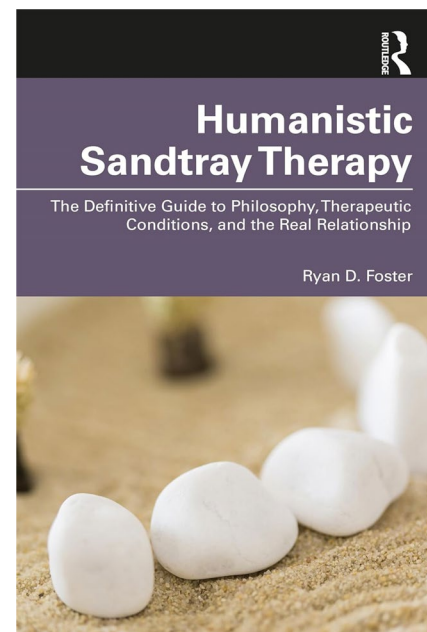
Foster, R. (2025). *Humanistic Sandtray Therapy: The Definitive Guide to Philosophy, Therapeutic Conditions, and the Real Relationship*. Routledge.

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In his new book, *Humanistic Sandtray Therapy*, Ryan Foster revisits Steve Armstrong's model of humanistic sandtray therapy and helps to more clearly define the philosophical assumptions underlying the model, the skills needed to apply the model, and the nature of the therapeutic relationship required to operationalize the model. He and several co-authors provide in-depth applications to several different client populations and settings. They do this through a beautiful combination of professional writing and personal reflections.

Foster defines humanistic sandtray therapy as "a dynamic, experiential philosophical approach to sandtray therapy grounded in a synthesis of person-centered and gestalt theories in which the power of the here and now is harnessed to invite clients into increased awareness and paradoxical change" (Foster, 2025, p. 5). Foster's explanation of how to integrate these two different theoretical approaches into a systematic method of understanding human nature, personality development, and maladjustment and his rationale for how this approach can help clients move forward in their lives is thorough and convincing.

In addition to explicating the philosophy and concepts underlying humanistic sandtray therapy, Foster's concrete description of practical considerations related to sand trays, sandtray figures, and the physical space appropriate for conducting therapy sessions is helpful and complete. He also outlines five different phases



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in the humanistic sandtray therapy process: precreation phase, creation phase, processing phase, post-creation phase, and clean-up phase. Each of these phases is clearly described, making it very clear how a practitioner of humanistic sandtray therapy would proceed through the process with a client. Foster then delves deeper into the skills and strategies for the processing of trays with clients using the HST model—providing in-depth suggestions for how to facilitate client growth through the experience, with small vignettes designed to help the reader “get” the nuances of the practice, along with a chapter on neurobiology, trauma, and HST for clinicians who work with clients who have experienced trauma and conceptualize their work using the lens of neurobiology.

Using an intersectional model called ADDRESSING (which stands for Age and generational influences, Developmental disability or other Disability, Religion and spirituality, Ethnic and racial identity, SES/ social class, Sexual orientation, Indigenous heritage, National origin, and Gender; Hay, 2022) the chapter written by Foster, Munsey, and Mărcuş on multicultural adaptations of HST is both practical and thought-provoking. They provide specific information (including miniature selection, sandtray prompts, and case study examples) about working with clients on religious and spiritual identities and experiences; ethnic and racial identities; socioeconomic status (SES) and social class; sexual and affectional orientation and identity; national origin and language; and gender expansive identities. Foster addresses the subject of age and generational influences in a chapter that details ways of adapting HST for working with preadolescent and adolescent clients. He and several co-authors (Robin Elkins and James Turnage) address the subject of disability in a very comprehensive chapter on adaptations of HST for working with clients who have developmental delays, neurodevelopmental diagnoses such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), as well as those who have inborn or acquired physical disabilities with case studies and practical suggestions for an inclusive set of miniatures, considerations for accessible sandtray spaces, and using HST when counseling clients in in-home or group home settings.

For those practitioners who work in a variety of settings, the book has chapters focusing on the practical aspects of doing HST with groups, with couples and families, in schools and community settings with concrete case studies and detailed suggestions for adapting the work to each of these specific settings and the populations served in them. It also includes chapters on training in HST, supervision, and research, with a call for more research in sandtray therapy and in HST specifically. Foster ends the book with a tiny chapter on contemporary issues and future directions. It feels like a clarion call for readers to help spread the word about humanistic sandtray therapy and its promise as a healing path for clients. This reader was moved and touched by the book and this inspiring approach to working with clients using sandtray. This reader also knows how very proud Steve Armstrong would be of Ryan Foster’s continued work in Humanistic Sandtray Therapy.

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