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PROMOTING THE ETHICAL PRACTICE OF SAND THERAPY

Focus on Miniatures: Signs

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Wayfinding is the process of using visual cues (including signs) to navigate a space. These visual cues and markers are known as signage. Wayfinding can utilize signage but also can include the use of additional tools such as maps, floor, or ground markings created in both static and digital forms (Sarratte, 2024). In Australia, there is evidence of sandstories (Aboriginal drawings in the sand) and markings that share with other community members cultural knowledge, directions, and perhaps even dreamtime narratives, if not ways to communicate where to find each other. These drawings or signs also reinforced human beings' connection to the land (Green, 2014). Other cultures referred to signs as well. The stars, ocean currents, and birds were signs utilized by ancient Polynesian civilizations (Bellwood, 1987). This information would be shared via oral tradition and were signs that provided directional information to travellers.

Though signs are used in wayfinding, they can also be symbols that communicate messages, a story, or values familiar to many people or those from a specific social location. Faith communities, for example, have symbols such as crucifixes, a Star and Crescent, or the Star of David. Another example of a sign (probably recognizable to many) is the World Olympics sign of five rings that represent the five parts of the world, according to the founder of the Olympic Movement, Mr. Pierre de Coubertin. Another well-recognized sign is the American Hollywood sign, which has overlooked the city of Los Angeles since 1923. Individuals around the world recognize this sign from movies or photos. Other sign examples include traffic or speed signs in places with vehicle transportation or even washroom signs found in public areas for people travelling or away from home. Signs can help us figure out where we have been, where we are, or where we are going. Signs can be utilized, therefore, in the sandtray in much the same manner.



Two therapists shared their utilization of signs in the sandtray. One is an art therapy student, and the other is a Licensed Professional Counsellor who integrates sandtray with a phenomenological approach, Schema Therapy, and Internal Family Systems. Both clinicians work with individuals across the lifespan. They believe that sometimes their clients utilize signs to mark a space, a memory (that may be spoken or not), or may symbolize family life.

One therapist identified that a mirror was sometimes utilized as a sign to represent the tendency of introspection and even self-criticism. The other therapist identified that clients often used toy wooden signs in her therapy space. She found these repurposed from a Thomas-the-Train kit. She also added that clients often used a sign with a circle on it with a red line crossing out the circular symbol.

Case Example

A sand therapist shares with us a case example of doing trauma work with a young female adult who experienced sexual abuse. She, the client, used signs in her sandtray as we worked through some of the secondary effects of sexual victimization. The woman didn't trust herself nor recognize signs of danger in potential relationships.

Her sandtrays became journeys in the world where she could find safety while also recognizing bumps in the road that represent danger. She utilized signs such as no left turn signs, closed road signs, speed signs, etc. This practice of being curious about what the sign meant assisted her to practice trusting her intuition about where she should go or not go. Most interesting was the phase of treatment where signs were present but not visible, which she identified as helping her recognize that in some families there is intergenerational trauma where things can be felt but might not seem initially apparent. These intergenerational experiences were nonetheless present in the world and her nervous system.

Conclusion

The sign that was the most meaningful for me, as the person of the therapist, is a welcome sign. This sign means that not only are all people welcome here, but all experiences are also welcome here. This sandtray world can hold it all.



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