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The Creative Attachment Interview: Using Sandtray to Reflect on Relational Dynamics in Creative Supervision for Play Therapy and Child Mental Health Practitioners

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Abstract

This paper presents The Creative Attachment Interview, a creative and symbolic approach that utilizes sandtray to explore an adult's attachment history, with the potential for illuminating relational patterns that may impact current caregiving relationships. The author intends to particularly highlight the potential for this approach in clinical supervision for play therapists and mental health practitioners. To provide context, the author explains the theoretical ground and original reasons for developing the Creative Attachment Interview. She then provides a rationale for its application in clinical supervision by briefly exploring the intersectionality of attachment and sandtray, summarising support for using sandtray in clinical supervision and discussing requirements for facilitating this approach. The author describes the Creative Attachment Interview with a discussion of a case example.

Key words: Sandtray; Attachment; Clinical Supervision

The Creative Attachment Interview was originally developed by the author as an element of The Windfall Centre's "Nurturing Families Programme," funded by the National Lottery in Wales, UK, from 2022 – 2025 (Eisele, 2022). The "Nurturing Families Programme" is an early intervention approach based on two fundamental concepts: the critical role secure attachment continues to play throughout the lifespan to ensure successful development, and the value of play as the basis for children's healing and progress. The programme is both reparative and preventative, with the focus on the relationship between caregiver and child. One of the key elements is the use of the interactive behaviours seen in the early years of development between parent and infant.

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These behaviours should come naturally, underpinning secure attachment and healthy child development; however, a wide variety of challenges can undermine the parent-child relationship and create the need for additional support and guidance. Based on core ideas from Filial Therapy (Guerney, 1964; Cornett & Bratton, 2015) and Mentalization Based Treatment (Bateman & Fonagy, 2013), the Nurturing Families Programme is specially designed for parents and carers who want to strengthen their relationship with their babies or young children. British Association of Play Therapists (BAPT) Registered Play Therapists[®] specifically trained in Filial Therapy, Mentalization and Infant Mental Health deliver this program.

Play therapists introduce The Creative Attachment Interview in the sixth out of 18 Nurturing Families Programme sessions. It is a creative and symbolic approach that utilizes sandtray to explore an adult's attachment history, with the potential for illuminating generational patterns that may impact current relationships and parenting and bringing these patterns to awareness in a safe and supportive context. The Creative Attachment Interview is resource-focused and underpinned by attachment theory, drawing on the dynamic concepts of "secure base" and "safe haven" as articulated in the Circle of Security[™] (Powell et al., 2014) and also informed by the caregiving/care-seeking goal-oriented behaviours identified by Una McCluskey (2010) in her analysis of the dynamics of therapeutic relationship, based on her work with Dorothy Heard and Brian Lake (Heard et al., 2009).

Application of Attachment Theory

The concept of a felt sense of safety that comes from a secure and playful attachment base was fundamental to the development of the Nurturing Families Programme. An infant needs a regulatory other to be able to self-regulate. Someone looking out for them and caring for them as appropriate for each sequential stage of development, which supports them to develop the ability to care appropriately for others (Bowlby, 1969; Perry et al., 1995; Porges, 2007; Schore, 2005). The presence of a regulating secure base from infancy, and the provision of a safe haven throughout childhood, nurtures in the child an internalised perception that the environment can meet their needs most of the time and that support is available if necessary. This creates a felt sense of the world as a safe place to explore, play, learn, and grow in relationships. If the environment overwhelms individual resources, then there is a safe haven to return to for reassurance and resourcing. This balance in the availability of a secure base and a safe haven throughout childhood is considered the optimum foundation for mental and emotional health across the lifespan. Ideally, care-seeking behaviours are recognised, acknowledged, and any needs are met most of the time throughout caregiving in infancy and childhood; this matures into the individual's ability to seek out the care they need, recognise need in others and give care in return. This profound insight into relational dynamics conjures a view of attachment through



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a systemic, spatial, and environmental lens and highlights the ongoing relational patterns that influence development across the lifespan.

However, family dynamics are rarely ideal, especially amongst those who seek support, and bringing attention to the impact of early attachment experiences on how we engage with the world can bring understanding and motivation for change, "... parents' comfort or discomfort in answering their children's needs is strongly influenced by how their own childhood needs were met or unmet" (Powell et al., 2014, p.4).

For the Nurturing Families Programme, the therapists needed a gentle, playful, and creative approach that would raise parents' awareness of their own early childhood experiences, highlight their resourcefulness in adapting and surviving, and provide them with a reference point to support their explorations of current dynamics within their families.

Intersectionality of Attachment and Sandtray

The Creative Attachment Interview uses sandtray to explore a caregiver's relational patterns developed from infancy to adulthood through symbolic representation in response to a sequence of simple prompts. The use of the sandtray as a creative medium offers opportunities for the exploration of implicit memories, using symbolic communication to map inner territory and render it visible in the frame of the sand tray, scaffolded by an attuned therapist sensitive to and resonating with the client's embodied presence. The sandtray process and the supportive relationship offered by the therapist provide physical and psychological containment (Kalff, 2003). This containment provides a secure base and a felt sense of safety, a core principle for state regulation, encouraging playfulness and expansion into imagination (Perry et al., 2000). The miniatures that the client chooses usually exert a certain, unconscious energetic charge or meaning that draws the person towards them (Gil, 2013). The use of symbols to communicate experience through nonverbal action gives permission to show only that which feels safe to share, "without compelling verbal disclosure" (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2022, p. 2).

Homeyer and Lyles (2022) provide a masterful analysis of the intersectionality of attachment and the sandtray. They draw on Bowlby's insights into the role of the therapist in providing a secure base for the client to explore their inner worlds, "(c)lients will reveal their inner dialogues, typically occurring outside of their conscious awareness, with their bodies and their words while engaging the sandtray materials" (Homeyer & Lyles, 2022, p. 139).

The regulating presence of the therapist provides an attuned, non-intrusive witness to the emergence of emotional and sensory fragments from the client's past, brought into the present in symbolic form. Symbolic representation feels safe because it draws on the 'as if-ness' of play, where something can be real and not real in the same moment, and the client can distance themselves from pain, projecting the intensity of representation into the figures. The co-regulatory resonance between the client and therapist keeps the client in the here and now,



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providing the possibility for a coherent narrative to emerge from internalised pain and confusion, crucially under the client's control (Prendiville, 2014). By staying in the metaphor, being alongside, and remaining gently curious, the therapist makes it possible for the client to express from their inner world perspective, verbally and non-verbally, through the sandtray process.

As Homeyer and Lyles summarise so beautifully:

It can be daunting to enter into awareness of all that mentalization offers after a lifetime of self-protection informed by relational woundedness; actually, it can be quite overwhelming. Sandtray therapy, with its nonverbal privileging, imagery externalizing, and distance-optional approach, allows clients to wade into awareness in their own time, experimenting with noticing inner parts while being relationally supported to make new meanings. (2022, p. 141)

The therapist's capacity to acknowledge and contain emotional experiences, including distress, supports the client in staying regulated and provides a safe haven to return to in moments of dysregulation. This has echoes in early attachment theory where, through mirroring and empathic responding, and being there for the child in moments of overwhelm, an attuned parent enables their child to cope with big feelings and eventually to develop a capacity to recognise and empathise feelings in others (Steele et al., 2002). Being seen and heard in an attuned therapeutic relationship in turn, activates parental reflective functioning, awakening the ability to hold in mind their child's state of mind, feelings, and intentions and adjusting their own accordingly (Luyten et al., 2017). The Creative Attachment Interview aims to raise a caregiver's awareness of the impact of early relational experiences on developing a sense of self-in-representation using sandtray.

In the context of the Nurturing Families Programme, the Creative Attachment Interview is just one element of a longer process that is designed to support, educate, and empower those parenting young children. Including the Creative Attachment Interview sandtray session within the programme can be enormously helpful for caregivers in providing insight into the impact of their own developmental history on parenting their children.

The author now provides the underpinning theory and rationale for applying the Creative Attachment Interview in clinical supervision.

Using Sandtray In Clinical Supervision for Play Therapy and Mental Health Practitioners

"Clinical supervision is a distinct intervention provided by an expressly trained and experienced member of a particular profession to a less experienced member of that same profession" (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004). The use of sandtray in clinical supervision in play therapy and mental health practice is advocated by a range of respected sources (Bratton et al., 2008; Mullen et al., 2007; Morrison & Homeyer, 2008; Anekstein et al., 2014; Perryman et al., 2016). It is recommended that clinical supervisors complete a recognised supervision training



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that includes creative strategies and has a coherent theoretical basis, and that specific experience in sandtray processes is necessary to ensure clinical competence (Perryman et al., 2016; Homeyer & Sweeney, 2022; Anekstein et al., 2014). Hartwig and Bennett (2017) advocate for the Integrated Developmental Model for play therapy supervision (Stoltenberg et al., 1998). They propose four approaches to using sandtrays in the supervision of play therapists: teaching sandtray as an intervention, using sandtrays for case consultation, developing self-awareness of the supervisee, and using sandtray in group supervision. They also recommend that supervisors be competent in sandtray before using it in supervision. They cite Morrison and Homeyer (2008) in this regard, who, along with Bratton et al. (2008), recommend the supervisor's integration of Roger's (1980) core conditions of empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence that encourage reflection, insight, and growth for supervisees. It is important that supervision matches the professional developmental needs of the supervisee. Ray's (2011) levels of competence support decision-making in implementing creative strategies that encourage self-awareness and integration. A 'Level 3' supervisee has a stable professional identity and demonstrates autonomy in their professional practice.

Ray (2011) indicates that supervision at this level is led by the supervisee and the focus is typically on the therapeutic relationship and providing unconditional positive regard for clients. The increase in supervisee self-acceptance with awareness of strengths and weaknesses provides the ability to be open to increased integration of clinical work. (Hartwig & Bennett, 2017, p. 231)

The "Seven Eyed Model" of supervision (Hawkins & Shohet, 2012) is so named because it offers seven areas of focus for exploration in supervision:

- Mode 1 – The content of therapy session brought to supervision.
- Mode 2 – Exploration of the supervisee's use of self, strategies, and interventions.
- Mode 3 – The relationship between the supervisee & client.
- Mode 4 – The focus on the supervisee's processes (e.g., countertransference or subjective experience).
- Mode 5 - Focus on the supervisory relationship (e.g., parallel processes).
- Mode 6 - The supervisor's own responsive processes.
- Mode 7 – Focus on the wider context in which the work happens.

This theoretical model provides a multi-layered structural approach supporting a supervisee's awareness and understanding development. Bilski's (2015) research applies this structural framework to exploring the use of sandtray in the supervision of counsellors.

Application of the Creative Attachment Interview in Clinical Supervision

The author introduces the Creative Attachment Interview as a discrete activity in her creative supervision practice when deeper reflection on the therapeutic use of self and attachment



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dynamics is deemed useful. The author was trained in Humanistic and integrative creative psychotherapy and play therapy and uses a developmental, attachment, and trauma-informed lens in creative clinical supervision. She has been trained in creative supervision (Lahad, 2000), and she uses the "Seven Eyed Model" (Hawkins & Shohet, 2012) for planning and reflecting on her supervisory practice. She has also attended continuing professional development training in the spectrogram (Lahad, 2000), sandtray (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2022), and sandplay (Kalff, 2003). She has over ten years of experience in clinical practice and supervision.

The Creative Attachment Interview is appropriate for clinical supervision in which the supervisory relationship is established, and the supervisee feels safe enough to trust their supervisor in a playful exploratory relationship that enables access to the creative unconscious mind. It can stimulate reflective practice in individual or group clinical supervision, particularly when exploring attachment dynamics between a supervisee and their young clients or their caregivers (Seven Eyed Model: Mode 3) or between supervisor and supervisee (Seven Eyed Model: Mode 5). The insights gained from the Creative Attachment Interview process can highlight generational patterns of caregiving and care-seeking dynamics, which can play out in the unconscious dyad of the supervisee/client and supervisor/supervisee relationship (McCluskey, 2010). Transference and countertransference may occur, and blind spots caused by unacknowledged projection and introjection may confound the supervisory relationship, "(w)hen two adults come together for supervision, each brings their relational history to the encounter in the form of working models developed over many years of interpersonal interactions" (Soliman, 2023, p. 9).

It is of the utmost importance that a supervisor who facilitates the Creative Attachment Interview must have experienced the process themselves, preferably with an experienced therapist/facilitator. This will support them in feeling familiar and comfortable with the process, gaining insight into their own attachment dynamics, and being able to provide a calm regulatory role in facilitating the Creative Attachment Interview under supervision.

Accessing creative right brain processing may elicit feelings and thoughts that are subliminal to a supervisee's awareness yet manifest in observable responses and behaviours (Seven Eyed Model: Mode 4). Supervisors must be sensitive to this and prepared to process the difficult feelings and thoughts that may emerge and also notice parallel processes that manifest between the supervisee/client dynamic and supervisee/supervisor relationship (Seven Eyed Model Mode 5). It is necessary to be aware that the supervisor's own attachment history may influence their felt senses in response to their client's story (Seven Eyed Model: Mode 6).

At the same time, supervisors must be mindful to remain in an ethical supervisory relationship with a supervisee, by focusing on how personal issues that arise are impacting a supervisee's work as a therapist, and to know when to refer the supervisee and/or themselves to personal therapy when clinically indicated. Although the ethical imperative is undeniable, the boundary between supervision and personal therapy cannot be firmly drawn in the sand, but



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must be constantly held in mind, and the supervisory relationship contracted accordingly (Mullen et al. 2007).

Exploring the evolution of relational history through symbolic expression within the imaginative space offered by the sand tray reaches past defences and moves deeply towards shifts in perception. The supervisor and the supervisee are equally vulnerable in this immersion in quintessentially human experience: "The true healer cannot stand outside of the healing experience as a disinterested observer but must be ready to have his or her own wounds activated and reactivated but contained within and not projected" (Knight, 1985, p. 91). Ignoring or denying one's own woundedness heightens the risk of becoming exhausted and unavailable. However, when supervisors consciously attend to their own vulnerability while holding a supervisee's or their supervisee's client's hard story, there is a constant flow of energy.

Since expressive and play therapists spend intentional, nonverbal time "out of reason's reach" and immersed in clients' inner worlds, there is a responsibility for being about to offer dual attention to our own inner worlds inevitably touched by clients' right hemispheric deep dives. (Homeyer & Lyles, 2022, p. 91)

The author argues that as the supervisory relationship deepens and supervisees feel safe enough to begin to explore their use of self in therapeutic relationships, using sandtray in clinical supervision places multiple responsibilities on supervisors for attention on the supervisee/client process, as well as interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics. Becoming familiar with the Seven Eyed Model (Hawkins & Shoet, 2012) can be very helpful in keeping track of these complex dynamics whilst staying safely and ethically within a supervisory role.

The Creative Attachment Interview has 25 'prompts' that provide a simple repetitive framework for reflecting on the unconscious drivers for navigating relationships across the lifespan, as infant, child, adolescent, young adult, and partner/parent. The majority of supervisees will not have experienced an optimum balance of secure base and safe haven in their own childhoods. They may have developed adaptive coping strategies to survive suboptimal relational experiences during sensitive developmental stages. Although effective at the time, these strategies may have outgrown their usefulness and, unacknowledged, may hold the supervisee in an unconscious grip of fear and anxiety about certain kinds of relationships.

The Creative Attachment Interview provides a protocol for bringing these patterns into consciousness using the therapeutic powers of symbolic play in the sand tray. The supervisee is given the opportunity to explore their unique experiences, and to reflect on the dynamics informing their current world view, relationality and life choices. The power of the chosen symbols allows for safe distancing and the representation of their experiences to remain within their creative control, and their story can be told through the symbols and metaphors of their sandtray, bringing it into the light without compromising confidentiality. This enables a process that safely supports gradual understanding and insight into the impact of past experiences on their ability to understand their responses and navigate relationships in real-time.



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The Creative Attachment Interview Described

The interview takes up to 20 minutes, and up to 10 minutes for each supervisee to reflect. It is suitable for one-on-one or small group supervision. The overall length of time is dependent on the size of the supervision group and the depth of processing.

Step One. The supervisor prepares the room in advance by providing one sand tray for each supervisee on a cleared flat surface and a selection of 20-25 sandtray miniatures and/or a range of small items, such as buttons/gemstones/pebbles/natural objects. The supervisor ensures that the session will not be interrupted and that it is a confidential space.

Step Two. Supervisor prepares supervisee: *"The creative attachment interview explores your personal attachment history from infancy to adulthood through symbol and metaphor. This is your story, and at all times, you are the one in control. My role is to suggest the idea and guide you in the exploration, and together, we can take it in whatever direction you wish to follow."*

The supervisor addresses safety, reminding the supervisees that it is their own responsibility to know their own limits for participation, safety, and confidentiality. Although the supervisor will guide the process, the supervisee is always in control of the process. The supervisee can ask questions and is free to ask for a break or step out of the process at any time.

The supervisor explains the session's structure (20 minutes plus up to 10 minutes of reflection per supervisee). The supervisor is responsible for keeping to time but is careful not to rush the supervisee. The suggested timing is based on experience conducting many Creative Attachment Interviews, and most participants complete the whole process easily within 30 minutes.

Step Three. The supervisor then begins preparing the supervisee by settling into the here and now: perhaps by sharing a grounding exercise through the breath and tuning into gravity, whatever feels comfortable, e.g., *"Feeling your feet on the floor, the weight of your body on the chair, notice any feelings of tension and move gently, breathing into that place in your body. Notice your breath."* After a few moments, bring attention back to the room, and if the supervisee has closed their eyes, invite gentle opening by cupping hands over their eyes and letting light in gradually.

Step Four. The supervisor then asks supervisee to *"Visualise the space in front of you and decide where the boundaries are and create your frame. If you want your frame to be*



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outside of the sand tray, that is fine. When prompted, you will place your chosen figures inside the frame." This opens up the possibility of placing symbols within the frame but outside of, or on the edge of, the sandtray expanding the metaphoric possibilities for representation.

Step Five. The supervisor leads the session with the prompts (Table 1.)

Step Six. The supervisor invites the supervisee to step away from the tray and take a moment for peaceful reflection.

Step Seven. The supervisor dismantles the tray, taking the moment for ritual clearing and reflection.

Case Example

This case example is based on a creative supervision session using the Creative Attachment Interview. To protect the confidentiality of the supervisee, this author recreated the sandtray, and any identifying information is excluded from this account.

Rationale for Introducing The Creative Attachment Interview in this Case

Supervisee (play therapist) was highly reactive to a child client's (Child X) presentation and was curious about this in supervision. She described fleeting feelings of irritation and confusion during play therapy session, interspersed with moments of connection and she was puzzled by the sense of huge relief when the session ended. The child struggled with ending the sessions and often left a big mess behind.

Supervisor was curious about the possibility of attachment dynamics playing out in the therapeutic relationship (Seven Eyed Model: Mode 3). She was also aware of possible parallel process occurring in the supervisor/supervisee relationship (Mode 6), because she had noted her own irritation during previous supervision sessions and a sense of relief when the session had ended, which felt uncomfortable at the time.

Figure 1 is the supervisee's view and position during creation. Supervisor remains in role of facilitator and witness. The following (Table 1) tracks the prompts and supervisee responses. [Square brackets indicate supervisor's reflective notes].



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Figure 1
Supervise Sandtray





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Table 1

Creative Attachment Interview Prompts	Case Example: Supervisee's responses [Supervisor's notes]
Prompt 1: "Select a symbol for yourself as an infant. Take your time."	Supervisee selects item A [ammonite fossil - spiral]
Prompt 2: "Place the symbol within the frame. Take time to reflect."	Supervisee places it in the centre of the tray.
Prompt 3: "How do you feel seeing (your infant-self) in that space?"	She reflects non-verbally. [Her affect conveys perhaps loneliness and uncertainty?]
Prompt 4 "Who or what does your infant-self need to feel safe?"	Supervisee hesitates, then selects item B. [shell like a hood, protective]
Prompt 5 "Place it in relation to your infant-self."	Supervisee places it carefully and protectively, cupping item A. [Supervisor notes 'relief'].
Prompt 6 "Take time to reflect. How does that feel? Is there anything else you would like to add to your infant-self world?"	Supervisee lightly touches item B. Supervisee places item C to the left of item A. She then spontaneously draws her right fingertip in a wave through the sand between C and A, partially covering item A with sand. She then places item E, apart and further towards the lower right section of the tray.
Prompt 7 "Now we are moving on in time to your early childhood (aged approximately 3-6 years).	



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<p>Prompt 8 "Select a symbol for yourself as a young child. Take your time".</p>	<p>Supervisee selects items F [fossil shell and starfish]</p>
<p>Prompt 9 "Place the symbol within the frame. You may rearrange if you wish. Take time to reflect."</p>	<p>She places them together, the starfish "standing" on two of its limbs.</p>
<p>Prompt 10 "Your young child-self is heading out into the world. Who or what does your child-self turn to for comfort? Choose a symbol for this figure (s) and place in the frame."</p>	<p>Supervisee selects item G, placing it very close to the starfish. [Supervisor notes cub, playful]</p>
<p>Prompt 11 "How does that feel? Take time to reflect. Is there anything else you would like to add to your young child self's world?"</p>	<p>Supervisee shakes her head.</p>
<p>Prompt 12 "Now we are moving on in time to your later childhood (aged approximately 7-11 years). Prompt 13 "Select a symbol for yourself as an older child. You may rearrange. Take your time."</p>	<p>Supervisee selects item H [fairy], placing it in the lower part of the tray facing towards left hand side of the tray. [Supervisor notes: facing away from younger child-self].</p>
<p>Prompt 14 "Who or what does your older child-self turn to for comfort? Choose a symbol for this figure and place it."</p>	<p>Supervisee considers this for some time, then selects item I, (wood block & coloured bird looking up) placing it adjacent to item H. [Supervisor notes: is this someone/something that can see further than older child-self?]</p>
<p>Prompt 15 "How does that feel? Take time to reflect ... is there anything else you would like to add to your older child-self's world?"</p>	<p>Supervisee selects item J (tree) and places it near the centre of the tray.</p>



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<p>Prompt 16 "Now we are moving on in time to your adolescent/teenage years." (approximately 12 -18 years).</p> <p>Prompt 17 "Select a symbol for yourself as an adolescent/ teenager (You may rearrange). Take your time."</p>	<p>Supervisee selects item K (lizard) and sits holding it for some time.</p> <p>She then says 'This doesn't belong' and places it beyond the group of symbols on the edge of the tray, facing away.</p> <p>[Supervisor notes that from where the supervisee is sitting there is a continuous line from group F to G (shell, starfish, cub), through D connecting to item K. This feels significant.]</p>
<p>Prompt 18 "Who or what does your adolescent/teenage-self turn to for comfort?" Choose symbol(s) and place in the frame."</p>	<p>Supervisee selects item L.</p> <p>[Supervisor notes: placing it directly in the tray in line with item K and I.]</p>
<p>Prompt 19 "How does that feel? Take time to reflect ... is there anything else you would like to add to your teenage-self's world?"</p>	<p>Supervisee selects items M [conker & hazelnut?]</p>
<p>Prompt 20 "Now select a symbol for yourself as a young adult" (19-25 years). Take your time and place in the frame."</p>	<p>Supervisee selects item N (seal)</p> <p>[Supervisor notes: she smiles as she places it].</p>
<p>Prompt 21 "How does that feel? Take time to reflect ... is there anything else you would like to add to your young adult's world?"</p> <p>Prompt 22 "Who or what does your young adult-self turn to for comfort? Choose a symbol for this figure and place it."</p>	<p>Supervisee selects item O (leaf) and places near item N.</p> <p>[nourishment?]</p> <p>Supervisee selects item P (dragonfly) and carefully places it on the leaves.</p> <p>[Supervisor notes: facing down the tray towards item H]</p>
<p>Prompt 23 "How does that feel? Take time to reflect ... is there anything else you would like to add to your young adult world?"</p>	<p>Supervisee shakes her head.</p>
<p>Prompt 24 "We are moving on in time again: choose a symbol for yourself right here, right now and place it within the frame in relation to everything that has gone before."</p>	<p>Supervisee considers this choice for a while then selects item Q (turtle). She places it in what feels like a protective stance watching over item A.</p>



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	[Supervisor notes similar wave pattern and shape in items B, D, and Q.]
Prompt 25: Invite supervisee to reflect on their work from the perspective of 'right here, right now': " <i>We will be exploring your experience for about 10 minutes. Where would you like to begin?</i> " Invite them to notice any feelings that may arise for them in the telling, and to name them. It can be helpful to invite supervisee to look at the tray from different angles.	

There follows a summary of the reflective dialogue between supervisor and supervisee in case example, recalled from supervisor's notes:

Supervisee: "I am surprised by my choice of symbols for my early childhood! Fossils and shells – they feel defended somehow. And do you know what? They remind me so much of (child X). I felt very sad when I placed my infant self in the tray and it was a relief to add that protection ... and a double relief when I placed my here and now self, looking over her." (Supervisee touches item Q – the Turtle.) A moment of silence. Supervisor remains still and attentive, then says "I noticed the relief too, both times."

Supervisee: "I like that I chose the fossil shell and the starfish for my young child self. There's a softening there, a possibility of movement. And I *love* this figure." (Supervisee touches G and smiles).

Supervisor: "It feels playful."

Supervisee: "Yes, playful, that's it." A moment of silence.

Supervisee: "I chose the fairy figure. I think that's because I was 'away with the fairies' as a child!" (Supervisee looks directly at supervisor and laughs).

Supervisor: "You are remembering something about your childhood."

Supervisee: "I wanted to be older. To get grown up I suppose. My teenage self is all the way over there ... lonely, isolated. Quite sad really!" (Tears well up.) Supervisor co-regulates, noticing what is going on in her own body, and takes a deep breath: "Take your time, stay with that feeling." Supervisee pauses to regulate herself, breathing in sync with supervisor.

Supervisee: "That's a brain (item L) I discovered quite late that I had a brain, and nature – was *really* important – I like the tree seeds - full of amazing potential. I chose this (the



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seal) for my adult self. I love myths and legends about creatures and it's a good fit for me back then." Pauses. Supervisor keeps still and pays careful attention.

Supervisee: "The Turtle too – such a beautiful creature, taking care of little me." Thoughtful. Supervisor sits quietly, paying careful attention to supervisee. Supervisor checks the time.

Supervisor: "We are coming to the end of our 10 minutes, is there anything else you notice before we finish?"

Supervisee: "No, it's fine. Lots to think about." Supervisor brings session to a close. Invites supervisee to take a photo of the tray and to take a moment walking outside in the garden. Supervisor dismantles the tray taking the moment for ritual clearing and reflection.

Discussion

This case example was chosen for its demonstration of the Creative Attachment Interview in practice, particularly staying with the supervisee's agenda and pace, as well as noting the supervisor's rationale for the intervention, thoughts during the creation of the tray and use of self during the supervisee's reflection on her experience. The author looks at these one by one in more detail.

The Supervisor's Considerations

The supervisor decides to introduce the Creative Attachment Interview based on the issues raised in supervision by the supervisee, and for this, she utilizes the Seven Eyed Supervision model, which provides a basis for enquiry from different perspectives that may be active in the issues raised by the supervisee.

When making the decision, other considerations included the established supervisory relationship, the professional development stage, the level of expertise of the supervisee, and the supervisee's reflective capacity.

Supervisor's Reflective Stance During the Creation of the Sand Tray

It is good practice for the supervisor to notice thoughts and embodied responses as they arise and record them as soon as possible after the session through active recall of the entire session. See notes in square brackets in Table 1. The supervisor may not share all the thoughts



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that arise with the supervisee in the discussion or future discussions. In this case example, there were several opportunities during the supervisee's 10-minute reflection for the supervisor to interject her own thoughts and responses appropriately. She did so on the following occasions, and an explanation for each response is provided:

1. "I noticed the relief, too, both times." This was by way of affirmation and a self-prompt for the supervisor to stay present. The supervisee had touched on the supervisor's hypothesis about the supervision issue brought by the supervisee, and the supervisor found herself distracted by the feeling/thought processes this triggered for her. She was able to resist the temptation to hijack the reflective session and brought herself back on track.
2. "It feels playful." This was a spontaneous empathic response engendered by the supervisee's affect: her response was confirmation that this landed: "Yes, playful, that's it."
3. "You are remembering something about your childhood." This was a neutral response that avoided collusion with the supervisee's self-denigration but conveys the message, "I am still here; I am paying attention; I care about you".
4. The supervisor co-regulates noticing what is happening in her body and takes a deep breath: "Take your time, stay with that feeling." The supervisee was momentarily overwhelmed, and the supervisor's response modelled empathic responding and co-regulation.

Staying with the Supervisee's Agenda and Pace and Supervisor's Use of Self

This applies to both the interview process and the 10-minute reflection. The supervisor has the opportunity to model person-centred practice, adhering to the core conditions of a Humanistic approach: empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence. The supervisor must feel comfortable sitting with silence, bracketing intrusive thoughts, noticing embodied responses, and able to provide a secure base as the supervisee navigates the process. Although the supervisor times this activity, the supervisee should not feel rushed or pressured.

Complex issues arise for the supervisor regarding their rationale for introducing any form of creative reflection. It is tempting to become focused on problem-solving and to promote a particular perspective, over and above the process of encouraging a supervisee to explore at their own pace and in their own way. This temptation must be resisted if the supervisee is to benefit from insight and develop self-awareness from within, with the accompanying personal growth.



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The Creative Attachment Interview is an effective vehicle for encouraging supervisee insight into their own process. It is offered in clinical supervision as one element of an ongoing dialogic exchange between supervisor and supervisee, exploring creatively in response to issues brought to supervision by the supervisee. It is good practice to leave the supervisee to process and integrate their experience of the Creative Attachment Interview over the intervening period between supervision sessions and to provide opportunities for continuing reflection in future sessions.

Further Analysis

For those who may wish to make a cognitive analysis of the issues of attachment dynamics raised in the process, Soliman (2023) provides a useful matrix derived from the four patterns of attachment (Ainsworth et al., 1978) that may be helpful in recognising the dynamics acting out in supervision through different pairing of attachment styles. Soliman suggests that supervisors and supervisees might first complete the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) questionnaire (George et al., 1985) in order to classify their own attachment type. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore this further, Soliman's approach provides a promising evidence-based resource for analysing further the unconscious attachment dynamics that come to light in the Creative Attachment Interview process. However, although the AAI is a well-respected assessment of attachment dynamics, Soliman cites Mesman et al. (2018), who caution that current research suggests that although some aspects of attachment identification are universal, others are determined by cultural and other contexts and therefore cultural humility is advised when using this tool. Soliman also admits that very few supervisors and supervisees choose to complete the AAI, and therefore, it may be impractical in the working context.

The author agrees wholeheartedly with Soliman, who says we should be wary of labelling human relationships and "(s)upervisory relationships, much like any other relationship, are best approached from a place of curiosity, wonder, and respect" (Soliman, 2023, p. 18).

Conclusion

This paper presents the Creative Attachment Interview, a symbolic exploration in sandtray that encourages a deepening reflection on the therapeutic use of self in clinical practice and supervision. The author proposes that the Creative Attachment Interview can provide an inviting, safe and playful entry point to engender deepening self-reflection and self-awareness for both supervisor and supervisee. The containment of the supervisor/supervisee relationship and the safety of symbolic expression during the Creative Attachment Interview provides a medium through which the individual supervisee can reflect



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on their own relational history through the lens of attachment dynamics, often gaining insight into their own blind spots, as well as their resourcefulness and coping strategies. This process supports the supervisee to reflect on their own attachment history from the safe distance of creative expression, helping them to become more conscious of the attachment dynamics that may be playing out in therapeutic relationships with their clients and secondary clients and in the supervisory relationship.

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