



# WORLD JOURNAL FOR SAND THERAPY PRACTICE

PROMOTING THE ETHICAL PRACTICE OF SAND THERAPY

## **Focus on Miniatures: Knights on Horseback**

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In popular culture, a knight in shining armour is meant to describe a person who is joining the partnership to do some saving. They can be a problem-solver or battle a giant or demon. They may not be invited to the conflict but recognize that their noble and gallant skills are required, which makes them all the more appealing to some. This icon knows that the damsel or more vulnerable person is in need of support and jumps in. For some, however, this concept may be in conflict with feminist theory, where we want to limit the stories that our children are told about a gallant saviour, instead supporting them to develop skills and attributes that promote resiliency and self-efficacy.

Knights have been documented in history since medieval times. They served religious heads or royalty in both military endeavors and presentation or representation. There would be games



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known as jousts or tournaments (still used today in sporting events). Members of the kingdom would watch and cheer on the knight whom their king favoured.

The patron saint of all knights is Saint George. He was not a knight but was instead martyred in 303 CE in modern Israel for his Christian beliefs and practices. He, therefore, "stood up" in the face of danger for what he felt was true. Hence, he was a noble example to all. He also was known for riding a white horse. Perhaps the first "knight" to do so (Cartwright, 2018).

303 CE was an important time in history. It is known as the Diocletianic or Great Persecution. It is noted as being the last and most severe persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire because "the emperors Diocletian, Maximian, Galerius, and Constantius issued a series of edicts rescinding Christians' legal rights and demanding that they comply with traditional religious practices" (Juillion, 2018). Therefore, those fighting for Christian rights needed to have a hero or patron saint.

In sand therapy supervision, many therapists report that they are worried that the builder is just rebuilding the same world repeatedly when using knights who are in battle. However, when we review photos closely, there are shifts in these battles and when we discuss experiences happening outside of the playroom. Often, these builders are experiencing internal battles or ongoing conflicts in day-to-day life.

Two therapists (one an LPC-S, RPT-S ) from the US and another (an LPC-S, RPT-s, Psychologist) from Australia shared their thoughts on using knights on horseback. Both indicated that they work with builders under 10 to 65 years of age. One therapist uses the sand tray with families and the other with adults over 65. Their theoretical orientation was Adlerian and holistic (integrative from various theoretical traditions).

The knight on horseback was sometimes utilized to support the issues of loneliness, conflict (a need to defend/protect self, struggle, internal aggression/ the expression of anger). But also, protection and even attachment. They indicated that builders can utilize these symbols to communicate caretaking, justice, and protection.

Two specific masked case examples were shared:

*I had a client who always did a sandtray with a medieval theme (castle, king, queen, princesses, knights, dragons...). The dark and biggest knight, he was the bravest,*



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*strongest, most daring protector and defender of the realm. There was no dragon or monster he couldn't defeat. He would get tired, fall off the horse, faint for a minute...but always got back up and kept fighting. Week after week, similar trays and the same story came to the surface. Towards the end of our work together, the client asked, "Ms. \_\_\_ am I the dark knight? I think I AM the dark knight!"*

*A client (who could be described as a selective mute) would enter the room, sometimes without making eye contact, and immediately approached the sand tray to create his scene. Initially, he used only the soldiers on opposite ends of the tray and proceed to do battle, where most would die. The scene appeared the same in each session. He later introduced the knights on horseback, who were more powerful than the soldiers, and he started to make occasional eye contact. After a few months, he started to offer brief verbal responses; however, he still offered no reflection or mentioned concerns. After about 4 months, his response and eye contact became longer, and he gave the occasional smile and laugh. In the most recent session, he spoke about his sibling hitting him and hurting him all the time.*

The first example shared the builder's insight into internal development, and the second was conflict outside the playroom. The metaphor of the knights communicated these struggles.

The new therapist might choose to purchase knights on horseback in small sizes before obtaining larger ones. Undoubtedly, once you obtain a few, you will need to expand your collection as these miniatures are often used by builders of all ages and gender orientations.

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Claudia Ocampo, U.S.A.

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## References

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