

3 Meta-Processing SandTray (Framework) Techniques:

I.) Encourage and allow the client to make connections between different parts of the tray, **highlighting** polarities and probing into the parts of the tray that seem to be “different”.



Pretend you are the detective - your framework is to spot what is different. Use this as a way to conceptualize the client's work.

No specific words, but use this framework to think through what they are saying vs not saying.



II.) Know that the tray is an outer representation of the inner world. Allow for clients to give voice to that, which may be too painful to call into the world through words alone.



We know trauma is often nonverbal - ESPECIALLY the most powerful. Your framework for processing can be that you don't have to know. Use this framework to really hone in on your reflection - nodding, leaning forward, and all those meta-communications that make up connecting with people.

Examples:



1.) Seat Posture

- Open Posture - Sitting in a relaxed, open manner (uncrossed arms and legs) signals receptivity and warmth.
- Leaning (Slightly) Forward: Shows engagement and interest in what the client is saying.

2.) Eye Contact 🗨️🗨️

- Maintaining Gentle, Consistent Eye Contact - Communicates attentiveness and connection.
- Mirroring the Client's Comfort Level - If a client struggles with eye contact, a therapist may adjust to make them feel at ease.

3.) Facial Expressions

- Soft Smiling (When Appropriate) - Creates warmth and reassurance.
- Nodding Occasionally - Encourages the client to continue talking.
- Expressive (But Not Overbearing) Reactions - Subtle expressions of concern, understanding, or encouragement help validate emotions.



4.) Mirroring

- Subtly Reflecting the Client's Posture and Energy - Helps build rapport and show understanding.
- Matching the Client's Tone and Mannerisms (in a Natural Way) - Creates a sense of being in sync without mimicking.



5.) Use Of Silence

- Comfortable Pauses - Allows clients to reflect and process emotions without rushing.
- Not Interrupting - Shows respect for the client's pace and thoughts.
- Being Present in Silence - Instead of filling the space, a therapist remains engaged and supportive.



6.) Minimal Encouragers

- Small Gestures or Sounds (e.g., nodding, “mm-hmmm”) - Encourages clients to keep talking.

7.) Tone of Voice

- Warm and Steady Tone - Creates a safe and calming atmosphere.
- Softening or Slowing Down Speech When Needed - Can help regulate a client's emotions during distressing topics.



8.) Physical Presence

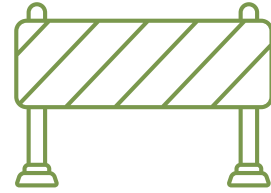
- Being Still and Grounded - Avoids fidgeting or checking the time, which can indicate disinterest.
- Being Mindful to Use of Space
- Avoiding Distracting Movements

9.) Gestures of Empathy and Support

- Hand on Heart or Gentle Chest Touch (Self-Touching) - Occasionally used to show shared emotional experience.
- Leaning in Slightly During Emotional Moments - Expresses care and engagement.



- Holding Space with Composure - Staying relaxed even when a client is emotionally intense, showing a stable presence.



10.) Managing Physical Boundaries

- Respecting the Client's Comfort Zone - Not sitting too close or too far.
- Being Mindful of Touch - Many therapists avoid physical touch (e.g., pats on the back, handshakes) unless they are sure it aligns with the client's comfort level and therapeutic boundaries.

Now..What does this sound like??



Nondirective Play Therapy!!

KEY POINT = When we track and reflect with our littles, it's the same for them as it is when we use these positive nonverbal communications with adults. IT'S HOW THEY FEEL SEEN AND HEARD

III.) Allow space for the not-knowing. Much like a good book, you are left with more questions than answers. Know that much of the processing and growth takes place AFTER the sandtray session. The brain keeps on the growing edge until a resolution occurs.

In other words, use these frameworks to not overthink all the things. Allow the client's brain to make connections and leave room for wide open space. That's often where the magic happens;)



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THE
PROCESS

~ Amy H. 

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