



# WORLD JOURNAL FOR SAND THERAPY PRACTICE

PROMOTING THE ETHICAL PRACTICE OF SAND THERAPY

## Focus on Miniatures Spiritual & Religious Figures

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Creating a welcoming space for clients includes space location as well as what and whom is in the space. Both service providers and users of services can feel more comfortable when there are familiar items present, particularly if these items assist them in meaning making in relation to their own intersectionality of identity. Spirituality and religion may be important components of identity for some clients (Aten & Hernandez, 2004). In fact, Duggal and Sriram published a study in 2022, where they engaged sixteen practicing psychotherapists in India. They determined that the spiritual beliefs and religious practices of these therapists were connected to their theoretical orientation. This orientation informed the therapeutic techniques that the therapists employed. The religious and spiritual aspect of their identity ultimately assisted the therapists in making meaning of their role and subsequent growth as a therapist and human being.

Religious holidays would be considered examples of religious practices. Pargament and Cummings (2010) share that being religious may assist in being resilient to life stressors and may also assist people in being in relationship with the sacred. As developing humans, we make meaning of our experiences in various ways and in keeping with our stages of development. Therefore, incorporating symbols consistent with religious holidays allows for opportunities for



the sand therapy therapist to create a welcoming, if not developmentally supportive, space for all.

Some may not identify as being religious but rather spiritual. According to Abrams (2023), spirituality is the process of seeking out what is sacred, and religion often involves the shared beliefs and practices of the religious community. This aspect of social location (Crenshaw, 2017) can have representation in the play therapy healing space, as well as sand therapy, though the symbols could vary based on identity and culture. This means that it is incumbent on the therapist to research the cultures of those that visit their therapy spaces so meaningful symbols can be present in the healing space.

Two therapists, one from Poland (Jungian) who works with children up to the age of eighteen and the other from the United States (Adlerian) who works with individuals across the lifespan, shared in a WASTP member survey that they have symbols in their spaces including a Bible, yoga hand, the Three Fates, Jesus, the devil, Dia de Los Muertos image, and even Santa Claus. Other images include angels and skulls which also by some could also be considered images of death (Painter, 2021).

One therapist noted that preschool children often choose figurines that are associated with ancient Egypt such as a sarcophagus. Other deities such as Anubis who is the Egyptian God known to both care for the dead and oversee funerary practices. Anubis has the body of a human and the head of a jackal (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia, 2023).

Another image, the oil lamp, was identified as a symbol often utilized by latency aged children. The therapist noted that the core function of this lamp is to contain “quantum cosmic light.” It can also be viewed as a symbol of hope given it embodies the ability to “create a spark and keep it burning.” This spark illuminates in the darkness and the lamp are associated with consciousness and its ability to “keep alive the flame of life, hope, freedom, creativity and the sacred and divine.” Eternally lit lamps can be viewed as a sign of divine presence in sacred spaces such as a temple, mosque, synagogue, or church. Another example of such life was provided with the examples that when we visit graves “eternal flames on graves suggest the continuity of life, death and rebirth.” This therapist went on to share that:

“in the Berber culture of North Africa, when a baby was born, women lit a lamp and placed it near the baby's head. The clay of the lamp represented the physical body, the oil - the element of life that animates the body, and the flame - the divine spirit that shines within.”

One therapist noted that a butterfly symbol often emerges during the therapeutic processing phase of therapy with children and teens. This symbol of self may continue to show up until therapy end. This suggests that perhaps this spiritual symbol may not show up at the beginning of therapy until the builder grows in self awareness of “self and soul.”

By engaging in the therapeutic process, the therapist noted that their belief is that children can believe that they are “part of the cosmic mystery that is the existence of nature and all things.” Additionally, that clients can grow and feel that there is a power outside of themselves that may be guiding growth and consciousness. Sand therapy practitioners who continue to create spaces where spirituality is not only acknowledged but also ‘played with’

are providing builders of all ages with the necessary tools to create worlds of inner and outer discovery.

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