

Sandplay in the Schools: Helping Students Deal with Trauma

Kathleen (KatySue) Tillman, M.A., Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Psychology and Counseling
State University of New York at New Paltz

Kristene Wellings, M.A.
Middle School Counselor
Shenandoah County Public Schools

Workshop Goals:

At the end of this workshop, you will be able to:

1. Define Complex Trauma and discuss how Complex Trauma impacts social, emotional, behavioral, and academic functioning of students.
2. Describe how to implement Sandplay with students who are experiencing symptoms of Complex Trauma.
3. Identify and effectively respond to challenges that may arise when using Sandplay in the schools.

Complex Trauma

Complex Trauma Domains

- I. Attachment
- II. Biology
- III. Affect Regulation
- IV. Dissociation
- V. Behavioral Control
- VI. Cognition
- VII. Self-Concept

Emotional Functioning

- Difficulty identifying feelings
- Emotional regulation problems
- Lack of empathy
- Problems communicating wants and needs
- Low self-esteem
- Internalized guilt and shame
- Dissociation

Behavioral Functioning

- Impulse control problems
- Aggression
- Oppositional behaviors OR Excessive compliance
- Self-destructive behaviors
- Sleep disturbances
- Somatic Complaints
- Reenactment of traumatic past

Social Functioning

- Interpersonal problems
- Issues with boundaries
- Bullying Issues
- Social Isolation
- Distrust of others

Academic Functioning

- Poor academic performance
- Learning difficulties
- Problems with language development
- Attentional problems
- Lack of sustained curiosity

- The problem with generalizing student problems

The School Counselor's Role



School Counselor's Roles

- Provide responsive crisis counseling for students.
- Support parents, teachers and staff as they provide for the students.
- Stabilize the school environment and help students return to normalcy.
- Identify students who need more intense counseling for grief/loss.

Adapted from <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?contentid=533>

Sandplay & Complex Trauma

The Basics

- What is sandplay?
- Why should we use sandplay with complex trauma?
- How do you set up a basic sand tray collection?

8 Stages of Sandplay Therapy

1. Preparing yourself to be with the student
2. Introducing the sand tray and sand tray work to the student
3. Having the student create a world in the sand
4. Having the student give the world a title
5. Touring the student's created world
6. Intervening with student permission
7. Facilitating closure and finalizing the sand tray
8. Documenting your time together

Roleplay

Preparing yourself to be with the student

Introducing the sand tray and sand tray work to the student

**Having the student create a
world in the sand
(Directive and Non Directive)**

**Having the student give
the world a title**

Touring the student's created world

Intervening with student permission

Facilitating closure and finalizing the sand tray

Documenting your time together

Common Challenges in the Schools

Challenges

- Teachers
- Administration
- Feeling Isolated

Review

With a relative degree of confidence, you should be able to to:

1. Define Complex Trauma and discuss how Complex Trauma impacts social, emotional, behavioral, and academic functioning of students.
2. Describe how to implement Sandplay with students who are experiencing symptoms of Complex Trauma.
3. Identify and effectively respond to challenges that may arise when using Sandplay in the schools.

Discussion and Questions