Hello! We are trying out a new format for the newsletter. I’m always in search of having things “just right”. It’s a process, right? I’ll keep working on it!

We hope you enjoy this edition. It has some really great information and a lot of food for thought. We are thankful for the submissions from others.

It is a busy time of year for certain. Please don’t forget to ask for iTunes gift cards as gifts - you can use them towards your VSA purchases! Also, many places have sales going for your new iPad purchase. We do not receive any compensation from Apple for your hardware purchase. Since it’s tax deduction time and grant money usage time, you might as well get the most out of your purchase.

As always, we are thankful for your interest and support. Please enjoy this newsletter, along with our FaceBook page entitled Virtual Sandtray App, and our website www.sandtrayplay.com as resources. Feel free to contact us at any time.

Happy Holidays!

Jessica and Chris

“For me, if one disregards the use of the Virtual Sandtray App without thinking about the people who cannot access the traditional for a variety of reasons, then they are closing the door for millions to reap the benefits of sandtray use. I don’t know how much more I can emphasize the importance of accessibility.”

Jessica Stone, Ph.D., RPT-S
CREATION. ACCESSIBILITY. FLEXIBILITY.

What really makes sandtray a useful tool?

A really common question we get when discussing the use of the Virtual Sandtray App is: “What about the tactile?”

What about the tactile?

Why yes, what about the tactile? A concern many have is the reduction in the tactile sensation of the traditional sandtray when using the VSA. I agree that the tactile is important, and there are other important factors to discuss. It isn’t a finished exploration just based on the issue of the tactile.

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1) Creation: There are so many other important factors of sandtray work, whether traditional or digital, other than the tactile. These factors certainly vary drastically depending on the clinician’s theoretical approach, however, one primary component is the CREATION of the tray. The creativity (or lack thereof for constricted clients) within both methods is extremely important. I would assert that the bounds of creativity are much wider with the VSA, allowing for a phenomenally creative experience which includes expansive features such as painting the sand, changing the liquid layer, changing the sky, including fire, etc. etc.

Much thought has been put into this issue. Frequently we are asked why the app can’t be used on a computer. The use of the touchscreen on the iPad is one large step from the traditional tactile experience, however, it still has a familiar tactile component. The use of a mouse to create the tray would be another giant leap away. Therefore it is not available for use on a laptop. There are some people who have touchscreen laptops, but very few. In addition, do you really want your laptop in session?

2) Access: When most of us think about a traditional sandtray setup we envision some type of tray on some type of platform with shelves or bins of miniatures available for choice, placement, and use. Let’s think, though, for a bit about clients who are differently abled. What about the client in a wheelchair or who uses crutches? Is the process not altered if they are unable to peruse your items and choose and place them themselves? Is it not possible that their choices for items and placement could be altered based on the necessity of the clinician having to be part of the process? For instance, if the item needs to be retrieved by the clinician? How about the need for the clinician to place and/or move the item? How about the lack of sense of mastery for the client who requires all this assistance?

3) Allergies: For some there is a real concern of contact allergies. Some children have such severe allergies that merely touching items that were touched by another child who happened to have contact with their allergen (such as peanuts) even hours before can result in a trip to the
emergency room. Let’s think that through. So client A comes in at 10 and had a snack of peanut butter and crackers at school prior to the appointment. She has some residue on her hands and she utilizes items in the office, including the traditional tray. Client G comes in at 4 pm. Client G has a severe contact allergy to peanuts. If this is known then let’s assume plans are in place to keep this client from having a reaction. Most likely this includes having all clients wash well before sessions, using items which can be cleaned, etc. How would one clean their sandtray prior to this 4:00 appointment? With the VSA only the iPad needs to be cleaned and the client can benefit from the amazing powers of sandtray.

4) Location: Many clinicians work in off-site type settings. This includes schools, in home sessions, lock down facilities, crisis work, on site work (such as with a homeless population), hospitals, and so much more. Portable trays are not easily portable and they are certainly not complete. My personal traditional sandtray collection has thousands of miniatures. Choosing which to bring with me any given day - or even to create a “standard” portable collection will inevitably be incomplete. Yes, imagination comes into play here and substation, however, with the VSA you can carry with you over 5,000 3D models everywhere you go. All you need is the iPad. No wi-fi is needed beyond downloading the app and any expansion packs you desire. So you can be anywhere with your iPad and as long as you have battery power you can use it.
Change is frightening. Why interrupt something that is comfortable, predictable, reliable, and effective? When a disturbance occurs with the status quo, people often feel a host of complex reactions. Feelings may include anger, confusion, fear, wonderment, excitement, and/or indifference. There is not a correct or expected way to experience change. As mental health professionals, we know this concept all too well. We continuously encourage expression and reflection of all thoughts, feelings, and experiences that accompany change for our clients. We often facilitate therapeutic environments that encourage and embrace all stages of growth and change within our clients’ lives. So, how come it is so hard for us to digest our own personal and professional transformation?

Technology is an ever-evolving field. It has grown tremendously over the past few decades. Individuals who grew up in this technological age likely have more awareness and comfort with many forms of technology. But, what about the seasoned individuals who did not grow up with technology and who are further removed? It is a multifaceted phenomenon and can bring about a lot of uncertainty and anxiety. Technology can also be quite dangerous and unpredictable at times. So, what is the point in learning about technology for treatment? If we are comfortable with what has worked for so many years, why should we deviate from that method? Many child clients are immersed in technology every single day at home and school. It is important for us to understand more about what they engage with outside sessions, so we can connect with our clients and understand more about their world inside sessions. Change is not always about altering our methods; sometimes change is as simple as modifying our perspective.

Mental health professionals should only incorporate tools in sessions that they are comfortable using. If a client can sense discomfort or apprehension, it could be detrimental to the therapeutic relationship or process. See below for tips on how to embrace change and develop comfort with technology in the playroom:

1. Explore technology on your own. Before adapting technological interventions in the playroom, it is important to develop a sense of comfort with manipulating technology. Take the time to explore technology. Investigate tablet and smartphone applications, the Internet (you can type “list of popular websites” into a search engine to discover which sites are most active), video and computer games, popular music, and any area of technology that sparks curiosity. Become familiar with what technology is available to and commonly used among your clients.

2. Research the use of technology in therapy. Search for recent research about the use of technology in both general psychotherapy and play therapy. Information regarding ethical practices, technological interventions, and efficacy of these interventions within therapy are essential for
establishing a sound theoretical basis for your work. It is our responsibility to provide clinically competent and ethically sound treatment. The Association for Play Therapy Best Practices has information outlining ethics surrounding technology in play therapy.

3. Establish ground rules, limits, and boundaries regarding technology in sessions. It is essential to set clear boundaries regarding technology in therapy sessions. Will you allow your clients to bring in their own technology, or will you solely provide the technology? Will you deliver the particular technological interventions, or will you encourage your clients to bring in their own intervention ideas? What technology is acceptable and unacceptable to use in your sessions? How long will you spend on technological interventions? How will you monitor the safety of technology use within the session? How will you deliver these rules, limits, and boundaries to your clients? Consider all of your options.

4. Gradually expose yourself and your clients to technology. Steadily introduce technology in your sessions. It is suggested to start with a simple technological intervention. Only incorporate what you are familiar and comfortable with using in session. For example, instead of playing a tangible, traditional board game, play a virtual version of the board game on a tablet. Or, prepare a therapeutic YouTube video for the session, then discuss the video with your client. The more comfortable you become with technology in session, the more you might be willing to make available for your clients.

5. Continue to self reflect on your feelings surrounding technology in general and in treatment. Just because you feel open to, exhilarated about, or uncertain about using technology in sessions for a period of time does not mean that you will always experience these thoughts and feelings. After gradually incorporating technological interventions into sessions, continue to reflect on your thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Additionally, notice benefits and detriments to incorporating these interventions in your sessions. Make note of all these insights and adjust your technological interventions accordingly.

Bio: Rachel Altvater is a doctoral candidate at The Chicago School of Professional Psychology – DC Campus who is working on her Doctor of Psychology (Psy.D.) degree in Clinical Psychology. She is presently completing her internship at The Children’s Assessment Center in Houston, Texas. Mrs. Altvater currently provides treatment and assessment for child survivors of sexual abuse and for their siblings and non-offending caregivers. Mrs. Altvater is licensed in Maryland as a clinical professional counselor, nationally registered as a play therapist through the Association for Play Therapy, and nationally certified as a clinical trauma professional through the International Association of Trauma Professionals. Mrs. Altvater occasionally incorporates technological interventions in treatment, primarily with adolescent clients. She is open to and comfortable with utilizing more technological interventions with children as there are developments in training and research in this area. For further questions, Mrs. Altvater can be reached at raw4919@ego.thechicagoschool.edu.
Guest Product

MEEBIE™ IPAD APP
by Ginny Campbell, creator of Meebie™

Based on the cuddly emotional expression and learning toy, Meebie, the Meebie iPad App is a therapeutic tool in itself. The app allows kids and adults to intuitively and/or selectively express, create, and/or teach emotions.

From a scroll bar, users select facial features and accompanying “pieces” to express feelings, thoughts, ideas, and events.

The pieces can be shrunken, enlarged, rotated, layered and erased. Kids get very inventive!

Upon saving, the user names and attaches a feeling to the image using a list of 40 feeling words, or by typing in a word of one’s own. The user can then write their name or an invented name. All of the text fields are optional, so users can pick and choose what they want to enter.
The Meebie™ iPad App is:

- A convenient traveling therapy tool.
- A preferred sensory choice for some kids.
- An engaging and playful way to express, identify and/or teach emotions.
- Globally appealing to kids of any gender, race, culture, or language.

Extendable uses on and off the App:

- From “Photos” on your iPad, you can send feelings pictures to your computer to file by feeling or client.

- Collect several feelings, print pictures; make a feelings poster, or a set of a clients personal feelings images to facilitate communication.

- Albums can be made within “Photos” to sort pictures right on your iPad.

- Make personalized games:
  - Feelings Match Card Game: Shrink finished pictures on your computer, print out two of each, adhere to card stock or laminate, trim to size.
  - Puzzle: Print out picture, adhere to card stock, lightly draw puzzle pattern onto image, cut out puzzle pieces with a craft knife.
Comments on the Meebie App:

“...I can tell you that this deceptively simple app has numerous complex uses.” Tatyana Ellesseff MA CCC-SLP, Smart Speech Therapy LLC.

“I decided to try the Meebie app – with great success. Not only was she able to show me how she was feeling by finding one of her worried Meebies, it also distracted her and stopped the meltdown.” Teriann Morgan, AppAbled

“...user-friendly interface allows for a child to be “in the driver's seat” and easily label/express what’s in his/her inner landscape re: feelings/ memories.” Penina Rybak MA/CCC-SLP, TSHH


The Meebie™ iPad App is currently .99 cents on iTunes. Website: www.orkidtoys.com

Call for submissions:

We welcome submissions! The current topics of interest are:

• Use of appropriate technology in therapeutic settings.

• Research regarding the use of technology in therapeutic settings.

• Book reviews.

• Case studies using appropriate technology in therapeutic settings.

Due by the 24th of each month. Please contact us for details! support@sandtrayplay.com
Upcoming Events:

VIRTUAL SANDTRAY APP TRAINING


June 24, 2017: British Association for Play Therapy, BAPT. United Kingdom. http://www.bapt.info/


October 22, 2017: Chesapeake Beach Professional Seminars, Chesapeake Beach, MD. http://www.cbpseminars.org/training/
Our newest ad!

Please find it on the back cover of the Association for Play Therapy Magazine in December 2016!

The Virtual Sandtray App is a new and exciting way to create, save, load, and share sandtrays with your clients, patients, students, supervisors, and during trainings - wherever you may be. With the Virtual Sandtray App you can go above and beyond what is possible in a traditional tray. This app is not a game, rather it is a professional tool designed to enhance and expand the traditional method to new heights and possibilities. The possibilities are virtually endless!

www.sandtrayplay.com