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R E V I E W

WORKING WITH CHILDREN
TO HEAL INTERPERSONAL TRAUMA:
THE POWER OF PLAY

EDITED BY ELIANA GIL
The Guilford Press, 2010

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This latest volume edited by the well respected child therapist Eliana Gil once again focuses on the theoretical and clinical issues inherent in the identification and treatment of children who have experienced interpersonal trauma. Presenting her experience and expertise along with that of thirteen additional clinicians, Gil's work repeatedly highlights the critical role children themselves play in both setting the pace for their therapy and in effecting the needed resolution and healing. A strong case is made throughout the various chapters of this book for the personal and idiosyncratic nature of that healing process and the subsequent need for multiple paths and modalities in achieving the desired reparation. Such a recognition echoes the thesis of her previous volume (Gil, 2006) which championed the need for an integrated treatment model comprised of various expressive therapies available to the child therapist.

Divided into two parts, this book first summarizes the current scope and effects of complex interpersonal trauma on childhood development and functioning. Part I identifies how such key findings as those involving attachment and trauma are often overlooked, if not simply ignored at times, by the very modalities and therapeutic systems identified for the treatment and promotion of the welfare of traumatized children. Gil's own chapter helps to make the transition from the earlier discussion of theoretical considerations to the specific role that self-initi-

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ated posttraumatic play serves in providing many children with “a natural and comfortable way to communicate, express, and arrive at an understanding of what they have endured” (p.60).

The remainder of the book in Part II provides multiple case studies illustrating how child therapists might provide a safe and protected environment wherein that inherent tendency of the child to engage in such play can be facilitated. Reflective of Gil’s integrative approach, numerous clinical examples are given from a wide variety of therapists’ experience for engaging in such work. The contribution of an edited volume such as this one is indeed the rich variety of perspectives and clinical strategies offered for the reader’s consideration. Recognizing a corresponding potential for unevenness of tone and lack of clear focus with such a multi-authored approach, the majority of the clinical responses are presented using a common narrative structure. However well-intentioned, this strategy is not uniformly successful in its results.

Of special interest to the readers of this publication will be those chapters which present significant use of sand in the treatment of three different children experiencing trauma. Two of those chapters are written by certified sandplay therapists utilizing a Kalfian approach, while the third provides a sharp contrast in the use of sand in what is identified by its author as non-directive, client-centered play therapy. Viewed together, these chapters are a striking lesson in the differences between these distinct approaches in utilizing sand as part of posttraumatic play.

Both Pastore and Heiko demonstrate considerable knowledge, self-awareness and clinical acumen in their respective case presentations. The former’s work with a sexually reactive and aggressive eight-year-old boy highlights the unfolding archetypal movement and dimensions of masculine initiation previously forestalled by the client’s trauma. Pastore’s thoughtful analysis of each sand picture considers the possible significance and contribution of its contents to the overall reparative play in which the boy is engaged.

Especially moving is the description of the client inviting the therapist’s hesitant collaboration in jointly constructing a sand picture expressive of both a happy and a sad time in each participant’s life using a single, shared tray. One could not find a more clear and personally engaging representation of the co-transference dimension experienced in sandplay. Due to external circumstances, this client’s work was prematurely terminated resulting unfortunately in an incomplete sandplay process. Sufficient work had been done in the child’s therapy however to significantly move him forward in the containment of his personal aggression and to achieve a considerable level of self-respect and control.

Heiko’s chapter is a substantial reworking of an earlier article published in this journal (Heiko, 2008). A significant addition to this expanded version is the inclusion of a detailed map of the stages of the sandplay journey the

author personally developed. With appropriate attribution, this map would be an invaluable reference for sandplay trainings. Here the map provides a significant rubric for following the sandplay journey of her six-year-old female client who is expressing signs of depression and some school-related behavioral issues.

Heiko meticulously processes the content and context for each of the client's sand pictures reflecting the child's fears of mother-loss and sibling displacement. The gradual movement from the client's initial stance of judgment and suspicion to arrive at a deeper sense of interpersonal communication and self-acceptance beautifully unfolds in the therapeutic space created by this master sandplay clinician and storyteller.

Interestingly, both therapists poignantly acknowledge minor missteps which occurred during their time with their charges. Such refreshing honesty and self-reflection only serve to reaffirm that no one intervention by the clinician is necessarily in and of itself responsible for the ultimate outcome of the sandplay therapy process itself. In point of fact it perhaps serves best to reemphasize Gil's assertion (and Kalff's as well) that the primary reparative capacity lies within the traumatized child's own inner directedness and drive for self-healing.

Overall this volume is worthy of consideration by both the established clinician and recent graduate just entering this challenging line of practice. Future editions of this publication would be enhanced by providing clear photographs of all sand pictures described in the text of those chapters devoted to sandplay. Nonetheless the predominant impression left the reader is of a diverse group of skilled and committed professionals devoted to this indispensable work. In providing this specialized population with the requisite supportive environment, the child's own inner capacity to guide their own healing process through posttraumatic play is assured.

REFERENCES

- Gil, E. (2006). *Helping abused and traumatized children*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Heiko, R. (2008). Finding the treasure within: The sandplay journey of Stella. *Journal of Sandplay Therapy*, 17(2).

