

NEWS



LETTER



MINIATURE FEATURE

Anxiety Bookshelf

In the world of sandtray therapy, even the smallest item can hold immense symbolic power. This month, we are highlighting a miniature version of a bookshelf with mini books. While we know to allow the client to name the miniature, when shopping, it is known as an Anxiety Bookshelf or Fidget Bookshelf. (Continued on Page 2)

TOPICS

CONFERENCE

Our conference will be held on **Friday, September 12th**, at UT's Thompson Center in Austin, TX! Learn more on pg. 10

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

The member we're highlighting this season is **Melissa Flemming**, LPC-S, RPT-S, CCST-T. Learn more about Melissa on pg 3.

ARTICLE

"Inviting Both Implicit and Explicit Processing with Clinical Sandtray Therapy"

Written by KAREN R. BURKE, LPC-S, RPT-S, CCST-AC-T
Read more on pg 5.

UPCOMING TRAININGS

Information about upcoming Trainings led by some of TSTA's members are listed on pg. 11.

Miniature Feature: Anxiety Bookshelf

While the original design at 4"x8" is used as a stress-relief tool, this design at 2"x3" has made its way into the sandtray. A small, detailed shelf lined with tiny books, each bearing real covers like "Harry Potter" and "Happy Place". The power of the bookshelf can be found in the themes in the titles themselves, the conversations and stories the books evoke, and even in placement of the books, books removed or books added. You can customize your Bookshelf by printing your own book covers based on client needs. Thank you for the heart work you do, one tray at a time.

PRESIDENT'S NOTE

TAYLOR VEST COLEMAN, NCC, LPC, CCST-T



Hello sandtray friends!

If you're reading this, it means you're part of something really special—our passionate, creative, ever-growing TSTA community. Whether you're brand new to sandtray or a seasoned veteran, your presence here matters. Every time I hear about a breakthrough tray, a powerful training moment, or a member reconnecting with their "why"—I'm reminded just how much magic lives in this work.

In this newsletter, you'll find snapshots of that magic — from community spotlights and upcoming events to a fabulous article about implicit and explicit memory processing in sandtray work. My hope is that it leaves you feeling a little more seen, supported, and inspired.

Here's to open hearts, grounded presence, and trays that speak louder than words

*Warmly,
Taylor Vest Coleman, MA, NCC, LPC, CCST-T
President, Texas SandTray Association*

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

MELISSA FLEMMING, LPC-S, RPT-S, CCST-T

Each season, we're excited to feature a member of the Texas SandTray Association community who brings passion, creativity, and depth to the world of sandtray therapy. Our members come from all across Texas and represent a beautiful range of approaches, experiences, and insights. In this spotlight, we ask just a few questions to learn more about their work, their journey, and the miniatures that inspire them.

This season we're shining the spotlight on Melissa Flemming, LPC-S, RPT-S, CCST-T! Read more below to learn about Melissa, her practice, and why she loves sandtray.



Tell us a little about yourself and your practice.

I'm a child-centered and person-centered therapist who believes deeply in the healing power of relationship and creativity. My practice is rooted in play therapy, expressive arts, and sandtray therapy. I specialize in working with children, teens, and neurodivergent individuals. I also supervise and mentor developing therapists, which is one of my greatest joys. My goal is always to create a space where others feel seen, safe, accepted, and empowered to grow.

I live and work in Buda, Texas with my husband, our two daughters, and our three dogs. I love learning and teaching—whether that's through supervision, trainings, or sharing the magic of sandtray therapy with others. It's incredibly rewarding to witness how the tray can shift something inside a person, helping them move through stuck thoughts or feelings with new understanding.

Going through leveled sandtray trainings and experiencing it for myself brought even more clarity. The way miniatures, symbols, and stories gave shape to emotions I couldn't name—or that my logical mind wanted to avoid—was profound. That experience cracked something open in me, both personally and professionally. I've been using sandtray therapy ever since, for over a decade now, and it still continues to surprise and move me.

How did you find your way to sandtray, and how long have you been practicing it?

I found sandtray therapy through Karen Burke, LPC-S. She came to do a training and shared a powerful story about how sandtray helped a child process a traumatic event. I was a school counselor at the time and honestly didn't see myself ever going into private practice—until that day. Witnessing the depth of healing possible through sandtray changed everything. I knew then that this was the work I wanted to do.

What's one thing you love about sandtray therapy?

I love how it allows people to bypass the pressure of verbal expression. The tray becomes a sacred space where the unspoken can emerge without judgment. It invites people of all ages to explore identity, pain, hope, and possibility in a way that's both grounding and freeing.

What's a lesson the sandtray has taught you—either as a therapist or as a person?

Sandtray has taught me to trust the process—not just in therapy, but in life. It's shown me how healing often doesn't follow a straight line. Sometimes we have to get messy, move things around, knock things down, and rebuild. The tray reminds me that even the most chaotic scenes hold meaning and potential.

What's your favorite miniature and why?

Oh gosh—do I have to pick just one? After doing this for over a decade, I've built a collection that could probably fill four offices, so choosing a single favorite feels nearly impossible. I truly love all of my miniatures because each one holds a unique story, purpose, or memory.

I especially appreciate the rocks with words etched into them—simple yet powerful reminders that often bring deep meaning into a tray. I also love the shells I’ve collected from beaches over the years, which clients often gravitate toward. But the ones that mean the most to me are the miniatures my daughter McKinley has made out of clay during her art classes over the years. I proudly display them on my shelves, and watching clients interact with those pieces adds a deeply personal layer to the work.

I’ve also picked up miniatures from my travels, and each one carries memories of where I was and what I was feeling when I found it. So while I can’t choose just one favorite, I can say that my shelves are filled with stories—of healing, connection, and love.

ARTICLE

“INVITING BOTH IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT PROCESSING WITH CLINICAL SANDTRAY THERAPY”

KAREN R. BURKE, LPC-S, RPT-S, CCST-AC-T
Reviewed by Amy E. Bryan, PhD, LCSW-S, RPT-S

Did you know that one of the most powerful aspects of sandtray therapy is the opportunity to work with both the implicit and explicit parts of memory? Clinical Sandtray Therapy honors this piece of the modality by incorporating what Dora Kalff (1966, 2020, p.16) identified in her work as creating a “free and protected space”. This includes protecting the work from physical intrusion, but also keeping ourselves, as therapists, out of the way by identifying and managing our own biases, expectations, and assumptions. The sandtray therapist keeps personal, implicit parts from interfering by not using directives, praising “beautiful work”, or



Author: Karen Burke, LPC-S, RPT-S,
CCST-AC-T

asking the builder to alter their world after they have indicated that they are finished. This frees up the space for both implicit and explicit parts of the builder to emerge and be seen.

Daniel Siegel (2015) defines explicit memory as:

The layer of memory that during recall is coupled with an internal sensation of remembering. There are two forms: semantic memory (factual) and episodic memory (with repeated episodes being “autobiographical”). The encoding or deposition of explicit memory requires focal, conscious attention. Without focal attention, or with excessive stress hormone (cortisol) release, items are not encoded explicitly but are encoded in the implicit form. (p. 393).

When a client is engaged in sandtray work, explicit recall is often what is communicated initially during verbal processing. Something like, “This truck reminds me of my brother, Tom. I wanted him to be in here because he and I were always together when there was conflict with my mother”, represents an autobiographical explicit memory of remembering that the builder’s brother was around during these types of conflicts. Future projections by a builder, although not a memory, may include explicit information, such as, “This is me and these are all of the things I plan to do when I retire. Here is my garden. My husband is standing here. My kids are way over here because they live far away. And, all of these books are just waiting for me to read.” These examples of explicit expressions in sandtray are important and can provide enough distance for the builder to see the situation outside of themselves in a different way. The builder may feel distanced enough to be able to problem-solve or to see a challenge in a brand-new light.

Some therapists may be tempted to conclude processing after the explicit information has been presented, or worse, to try and manipulate it by asking the builder to find themselves in the world, to add something to what has been expressed, or to introduce a completely different modality into the work. A therapist who has not been thoroughly trained or has not engaged in their own work, may be unaware of the powerful implicit representations that are present in the tray and may miss the rich, implicit layer of this work. Let’s look at how implicit memory is defined by Seigel (2015).

Implicit memory involves parts of the brain that do not require conscious, focal attention during the encoding or retrieval. Perceptions, emotions, bodily sensations, and behavioral response patterns are all examples of implicit layers of processing. Implicit memory in its unintegrated form lacks a sense that something is being recalled from the past. (p. 393)

Memories are not able to be stored as long-term explicit memory and are coded only implicit memory until around the age of two years, (Siegel, 2015, p. 56). And as stated earlier, memories are stored in the implicit form if they are accompanied by an overabundance of the stress hormone, cortisol. If someone has experienced trauma or a neurosequential gap before age two or during high stress, it is likely they do not have words to go along with that event or experience. Using symbols and metaphors as part of the sandtray process, opens up space for those non-verbal experiences to be seen and integrated as they are witnessed by the attuned therapist. Bruce Perry (2022, p.33) states, “we tend to be a very verbal society—written and spoken words are important—but the majority of communication is actually nonverbal.” This includes the processing of both implicit and explicit experiences.

Clinical Sandtray Therapy is a perfect avenue for processing the whole person as it invites both implicit and explicit expression. We follow the client as they process what they remember explicitly and reflect when emotion and/or somatic information arises implicitly. We are respectfully curious and hold

space for implicit feelings to show up and be seen. Attunement, slowing the process, and limiting our words and narratives, signal to the client’s neurosystem that it is safe and that there is enough space for implicit information to be expressed. The therapist’s comfort with the non-verbal, however, may be the greatest influence on the level of processing. The therapist must self-assess as they continue to do their own work in the tray. Continuing to gain sandtray training experiences where they can practice and receive feedback from fellow therapists can be quite helpful in building up the skill of attuning to the implicit parts of a client. What a gift it is to the builder when their work is honored as complete and perfect by a well-trained and attuned sandtray therapist.

REFERENCES

“INVITING BOTH IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT PROCESSING WITH CLINICAL SANDTRAY THERAPY”

References

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Kalff, D.M. (2020). Sandplay: A psychotherapeutic approach to the psyche (B. Matthews, Trans.). Analytical Press. (original work published in 1966).

Seigel, D.J. (2015) The Developing Mind: Second Edition. The Guildford Press.

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Citation Information

Burke, K. R. (2025) Inviting Both Implicit and Explicit Processing with Clinical Sandtray Therapy, Texas Sand Tray Association, volume 1, (issue# 1), <http://txsandtray.org/newsletter>

THE THERAPIST'S TRAY

A GENTLE INVITATION TO CHECK-IN WITH YOURSELF

When was the last time you built a tray just for you? As sandtray therapists, we spend so much time witnessing the stories of others—it's easy to forget our own inner world needs space, too. This section is a quiet reminder that your tray can be a place for reflection, curiosity, and care (or even journaled if you're short on time).

This season, you might find yourself exploring ideas like:

"How am I, really?"

"What's showing up in my world right now?"

"Where is energy flowing—and where is it stuck?"

There's no right way to approach this. You might sit with a few miniatures, build something spontaneous, or simply notice what pulls your attention. Afterward, let yourself wonder: What do I see here? What stands out? What might need tending?



UPCOMING EVENTS & TRAININGS



TSTA CONFERENCE

ALIGNED & ETHICAL:
BECOMING YOUR BEST
SANDTRAY SELF IN PLAY
THERAPY

THOMPSON CENTER, UT CAMPUS, AUSTIN TX

**Sept 12
2025**

Sign up today at
www.txsandtray.org



UPCOMING EVENTS & TRAININGS

Presenter: Serena Watts-Kumar, MA, LPC, CCST-T

- Level One: Basic Tools & Methods for Experiencing Sandtray: July 18-19, 2025 (San Antonio)

For more information about Serena Watts-Kumar's training or to register, please email her directly at creeksidecounselingtx@gmail.com.

Presenter: Melissa Fleming, LPC-S, RPT-S, CCST-T

- Level Four: Advanced Clinical Skills in Sandtray Play Therapy: (Buda)

For more information about Melissa Fleming's training or to register, please email her directly at budafulsandtray@gmail.com.

Presenter: Karen Burke, LPC-S, RPT-S, CCST-AC-T

- Level Four: Advanced Clinical Skills in Sandtray Play Therapy: (Austin)
- Level Four: Advanced Clinical Skills in Sandtray Play Therapy: (Austin)
- Level Five: Sandtray Play Therapy in Groups: (Austin)
- Level Five: Sandtray Play Therapy in Groups: (Austin)
- Level Five: Sandtray Play Therapy in Groups: (Austin)
- Level Six: Working with Children & Adolescents in Sandtray and Play Therapy: July 14-15, 2025 (Austin)
- Level Seven: Exploring the Adult Experience in Sandtray Play Therapy: Aug 28-29, 2025 (Austin)
- Level Eight: Utilizing Sandtray Play Therapy with Families & Couples: Sept 25-26, 2025 (Austin)
- Level Nine: The Use of Sandtray Play Therapy in Trauma: Oct 23-24, 2025 (Austin)
- Level Ten: The Use of Sandtray Play Therapy in Identifying and Processing Trauma: Nov 13-14, 2025 (Austin)
- Train the Trainer: How to Train Clinical Sandtray Play Therapy: July 21, 2025 (via Zoom)

For more information about Karen's training or to register, please click her name and you'll be taken to her website at austinsandtray.com.

UPCOMING EVENTS & TRAININGS

Presenter: Ashley Silvas, M.Ed, LPC, RPT, CCST-T

- Level One: Basic Tools & Methods for Experiencing Sandtray: August 22-23, 2025 (Sugar Land)
- Level Two: Clinical Skills of Witnessing Sandtray Work in Play Therapy: (Sugar Land)
- Level Three: Symbolic Integration of Sandtray and Play Therapy: (Sugar Land)
- Level Three: Symbolic Integration of Sandtray and Play Therapy: August 22-23, 2025 (Sugar Land)
- Level Four: Advanced Clinical Skills in Sandtray Play Therapy: July 11-12, 2025 (Sugar Land)
- Level Four: Advanced Clinical Skills in Sandtray Play Therapy: September 12-13, 2025 (Sugar Land)

For more information about Ashley Silvas's training or to register, please email her directly at info@smallstepstherapy.org or visit her [website](#).

Presenter: Sheri Shulenberger, MEd, LPC-S, RPT-S, CCST-AC-T

- Level One: Basic Clinical Skills of Witnessing Sandtray Work in Play Therapy: August 14-15, 2025 (McKinney)
- Level Two: Symbolic Integration of Sandtray and Play Therapy: September 18-19, 2025 (McKinney)
- Level Three: Symbolic Integration of Sandtray and Play Therapy: October 9-10, 2025 (McKinney)
- Level Four: Advanced Clinical Skills in Sandtray Play Therapy: November 13-14, 2025 (McKinney)

For more information about Sheri Shulenberger's training or to register, please email her directly at slshulenberger@gmail.com or call 972-529-7716.

Presenter: Vicki Williams-Patterson, LPC-AT, CCST-AC-T

- Level One: Basic Tools and Methods for Experiencing Sandtray: August 9-10 & 16-17, 2025 (San Antonio)

UPCOMING EVENTS & TRAININGS

- Level Two: Clinical Skills of Witnessing Sandtray Work in Play Therapy: September 13-14 & 20-21, 2025 (San Antonio)
- Level Three: Symbolic Integration of Sandtray and Play Therapy: October 11-12 & 18-19, 2025 (San Antonio)
- Level Four: Advanced Clinical Skills in Sandtray Play Therapy: April 12-13 & 26-27, 2025 (San Antonio)
- Level Four: Advanced Clinical Skills in Sandtray Play Therapy: November 8-9 & 14-15, 2025 (San Antonio)
- Level Six: Working with Children & Adolescents in Sandtray and Play Therapy: (San Antonio)
- Level Nine: The Use of Sandtray Play Therapy in Trauma: (San Antonio)
- Level Ten: The Use of Sandtray Play Therapy in Identifying and Processing Trauma: July 12-13, 2025 (San Antonio)

For more information about Vicki's training or to register, please email her directly at sasandtray@gmail.com.

