

“Steve is everywhere”: Supporting children’s grief journeys through sandtray therapy paper presentation

Grief is a non-linear journey that children in particular can find challenging to navigate. Through the creative, expressive, non-verbal therapeutic intervention of sandtray, children are supported with a tactile, sensory way of expressing their grief and making meaning by creating stories and worlds in the sand.

This presentation uses a client case study to explore how sandtray therapy can support children in processing grief, reframing personal narratives and claiming agency and control.

Sandtray therapy was used as the key therapeutic intervention for the child client over a period of eight months (not including school holidays), delivered in weekly one-hour sessions. The child’s sandworlds were discussed by the child and sandtray therapist during the session. Each sandworld was photographed and collated into a booklet which depicted the progression of stages and themes in the child’s grief journey.

The findings indicate that sandtray therapy is a highly effective way for children to process grief and journey through its stages in a sensitive and non-confrontational way that relies on creative meaning-making as a vehicle for healing.

Presenter: Emma Sandford



Emma is a school social worker, early childhood teacher and certified sandtray therapist living and working on Taungurung and Djaara countries in Central Victoria. She uses her lived and living experience of neurodivergence to support children and families in a variety of settings and is particularly passionate about the way in which sandtray therapy supports meaning-making in creative, expressive and non-verbal ways.

Presenters Professional Affiliations

School Social Worker