What is it?

Sand Tray-World Play is a method I use in therapy with both children and adults. It is an effective way to gain access to the contents of the psyche. As the name suggests, it consists of playing in a specially proportioned tray filled with sand. Clients have at their disposal a number of small figures which they arrange in the sand tray to create a “world”. Immersed in play, the client succeeds in making an inner picture visible. Internal material becomes manifest in the external world, and thus becomes available for processing and change.

How does it work?

The physical act of creating images in the sand tray appears to significantly increase the player's personal awareness. The variety of figures and the sensory experience of sand and water stimulate the unconscious. Sand play's efficacy comes from creating the sand picture, as a form of active imagination, not in focusing on cognitive processing or on the completed production. Through a mirroring process, this activity tends to encourage the individual to acknowledge the realities of his or her own inner world.

The “world” which is created in the sand tray is visibly accessible to both the creator and therapist. The creator is encouraged to explore the creation in order to deepen self-awareness. Sand Tray-World Play offers the possibility of transformational experiences which can lead to re-visioning and a new approach to life. Sand play is usually done along with talk therapy which provides the interpretive aspects of the psychotherapeutic work.
**History of Sand Tray Therapy**

In the early 1900's H.G. Wells wrote about observing his two sons playing on the floor with miniature figures and realizing that they were working out their problems with each other and with other members of the family. Twenty years later, Margaret Lowenfeld, a child psychiatrist in London, was looking for a method to help children express the “inexpressible”. She recalled reading about Wells’ experience with his two sons and so she added miniatures to the shelves of the playroom of her clinic. The first child to see them took them to the sandbox in the room and started to play with them in the sand. And thus it was a child who “invented” what Lowenfeld came to identify as the World Technique. When Dora Kalff, a Jungian Analyst in Zurich, heard about the work, she went to study with Lowenfeld. She soon recognized that the technique not only allowed for the expression of the fears and angers of children, but also encouraged and provided for the processes of transcendence and individuation. As she developed the method further, she gave it the name “sandplay”.

In the 1980's, Gisela DeDomenico, PhD did extensive research with normal pre-school aged children and developed her own method of Sand Tray-World Play and Dynamic Expressive Play Therapy for use with children, adolescents, adults, couples, families and groups. Rita Grayson studied the Sand Tray-World Play technique with Dr. DeDomenico beginning in 2005. She completed the six level intensive training program in 2010. She also received individual supervision of her Sand Tray World Play work from Dr. DeDomenico.