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Sandplay -- A New Correctional Treatment for Criminal Psychology

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Abstract In recent years, Sandplay has been gradually known and applied to psychological consultation. Comparing with traditional psychological consultation, sandplay has its particular advantages for prisoners with inferiority feeling and introvert personality. It can create a more free and protective space for the prisoners, playing an important role in correcting individual psychology, establishing good relations among convicts, group counseling and encouragement and assistance from family members, etc. It has become a tool for psychological consultants of policemen to establish good counseling relations and draw prisoners to accept consultancy initiatively and it also has promoted the development of psychological consultation and treatment in prisons.

Keywords: Sandplay, Convict, Psychological correctional treatment.

Sandplay is a kind of self-expression therapy in which the visitor selects toys and places them in a box filled with silver sand to construct a scene in the companion of the consultant. It is based on such a hypothesis that an individual can heal the psychological trauma by oneself in a proper situation.^[1] In the treatment of prisoner psychological trauma, sandplay creates a free and protective space for the convicts. With the tolerance, acceptance and care of the psychological consultants of policemen, the prisoners' self-healing ability is developed, and their unconscious behaviors become conscious behaviors, which reflect many aspects of the individual and the society. In this way, the psychological problem of prisoners is settled.^[2]

Comparing with traditional linguistic consultation method, sandplay has its unique features and it adapts to the special environment—prison. Sandplay is carried out with non-verbal form: the convict visitor can design and construct the scene according to his own willing and doesn't have to care about the consultants of policemen present. This can reduce double resistance caused by verbal communication and identity consciousness,^[3] thus to last the consultation relation and promote follow-up consultation. With silver sand and toys as its materials, sandplay can remind the convict visitor of his childhood when he played with sand to arouse his passion for further exploration and devote himself to the sandplay making. The more detailed the scene is made by the visitor, the

more the consultants of policemen can discover his potential psychological problems, thus to find the breakout of the consultation.

In the field of prison psychological correctional treatment, sandplay is a kind of psychological treatment method for various psychological disease consultations and treatment, and a means to inspect and find out the prisoners' psychological diseases. It can also be regarded as a technique that can cultivate the prisoners' self-confidence and individuality and develop their imagination and creativity.

1 The application of sandplay in individual prisoner psychological treatment

Sandplay creates a free and



Fig. 1 The materials used in Sandplay therapy: sand, sand table and toys



Fig. 2 The sandplay therapy works^[1]



Fig. 3 The sandplay therapy works in group^[1]

protective space for the individual and emphasizes self-participation of the individual. The prisoners can place the toys and design the structure of the sand in according to their imagination and willing and their construction will not be disturbed. They are fully respected and cared in this “play” environment. During the process, the consultants of policemen will not give any evaluation for the scene and its content, but accept it wholly. Through the non-verbal form, the consultant demonstrates a kind of inclusive love for the prisoner, who would actively explore his potential under this encouragement and transfer the acquired support and potential to his life and self-transformation.

With little verbal communication in the process of sandplay, the prisoner has to sense this atmosphere with a peaceful mind and endow a real implication to the scene with his imagination. Sandplay is a visualized picture which makes the invisible world visible. Making the sandplay is to reveal one’s inner world with the sandplay and adjust his mind. Every of us the potential of self-realization, which is the motive power of individual development.^[1] By stimulating this motivation, sandplay provides the prisoner an opportunity to “grow up”. It can be regarded as a wonderful assumption, which carries the expectation for future. Through sandplay, the dream of the prisoner is demonstrated preliminarily, which provides them hope and encouragement.

2 The application of sandplay in the relations among prisoners and group counseling

The relation among prisoners is an important factor that affects the attitude of prisoners. A peaceful relation among prisoners, especially a good relation among the reformation of prisoners supervision group, can make the members respect, encourage and supervise each other and reduce the occurrence of rule and regulation violations. Being familiar with each other, the members will concern a lot to reveal

their inner world with everyone present, which would impact the efficiency of group counseling. Since sandplay is a non-verbal method, the members don't have to communicate with each other when "playing" and they only express their mind with the play symbolically, which can help release their uneasiness and avoid the damage of self-image on one hand; on the other hand, it is beneficial for mutual communication and acceptance among the members, thus to achieve the counseling goal.

Group sandplay imitates the social background and it is a simulation of real life. The group sandplay in prison imitates the life situation within the prison and it is a simulation of the reform life of the prisoners. With the method of sandplay, all the supervision members join the game. After a long time's conflict, they start to observe other members of the group and change themselves, and finally achieve universal adjustment and integration.^[1] The members of the supervision group can also feel the union power from the game and fit themselves into the group and obey its rules and restraints.

3 The application of sandplay in encouragement and assistance from family members

After being sentenced, the convicts not only lost their freedom, but also broke their families—damaging the relations among husband and wife, father and children, unable to take care of their families and teach their children. Part of the prisoners' spousal relationship came to an end and their children have the adolescent problems of being weary of study and poor academic marks for the lack of normal parents' education, which has

aroused the attention on the adolescent problems of prisoners' children from the society. Spousal relationship and parent-children relationship have become the common psychological problems for the prisoners. Survey shows that family and family members are the main support source for the prisoners and they also have the most profound influence on their mind. Legal receptions, family calls and letters can only tell the most important things for the restriction of time and space, and cannot realize profound exchanges as normal families. With the enrichment of encouragement and assistance from family members, the prisoners have the opportunity to communicate with their families face to face each year, which is a great improvement and assistance for the reform of the prisoners. As a method of psychological consultation, sandplay is also a means of enriching family affectionate education. By inviting the prisoners and their families into the counseling room together, the consultant can solve the prisoners' psychological problems and help them step on the normal reform road. Sandplay can also become an efficient communication and education means. When the family members making the sandplay together, their affective interaction can be strengthened and their communication and exchanges can be improved. This method provides a new method and measure for solving the prisoners' psychological problems.

Family is a network in which the members interact with each other. Study shows that sandplay can be a good evaluation tool for family relations and it is also a useful tool to improve spousal relations.^[4] With the help of sandplay, the relations among family members can be improved greatly,

which promotes mutual communication and the settlement of family problems.^[5]

As a newly developed psychological treatment method, sandplay is still on its primary application stage in prisoner psychological treatment work. For its unique features, it can become a tool for the consultants of policemen to establish good consultation relations, draw the prisoners to accept psychological counseling initiatively and help them solve psychological problems and construct healthy mentality. Meanwhile, sandplay can also expand the influence of psychological counseling and promote the development of psychological counseling and treatment in prisons.

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