

Advanced Topics in the Sand Tray: Chronic Complex Shame

Summary

This advanced topic seminar is an in-person training that explores chronic complex shame across the lifespan through a biopsychosocial, developmental, attachment informed lens. Using Sand Tray Therapy as a primary experiential modality, participants will deepen their ability to assess, conceptualize, and treat shame-based presentations in children, adolescents, adults, and families.

Grounded in trauma-informed practice, the course integrates neuroscience, polyvagal theory, and right-brain relational development. Learning is supported through case studies, experiential practice, and role play, with a strong emphasis on therapist stance, somatic attending, treatment planning, and integration into clinical practice.

The training focus specifically addresses one common (not all) shame-based presentation of anxiety: people-pleasing, overachieving, pervasive lack of worth, and relational difficulties.

For those seeking a deeper theoretical foundation, we recommend Patricia DeYoung's foundational text, *Understanding and Treating Chronic Shame: Healing Right Brain Relational Trauma*.

Goals

- **Reveal and Transform Shame-Based Organization:** Use metaphor and somatic awareness in the Sand Tray to access and soften deeply embedded shame defenses rooted in developmental and relational trauma.
- **Learn Attachment Safety and Regulation:** Support bottom-up nervous system stabilization through co-regulation, attunement, and right-brain relational repair.
- **Build Understanding to Strengthen Sense of Self and Relational Capacity:** Facilitate integration, congruence, and core Self by working directly with shame-based internal working models with a focus on the presentation of anxiety.

- **Create Meaningful Treatment Pathways:** Use Sand Tray processes to inform assessment, treatment planning, and intervention across modalities and populations.

2) Specific Learning Outcomes

Participants will be able to:

- Define and differentiate chronic complex shame, shame vs., guilt, and unhealthy guilt.
- Assess and recognize symptoms of chronic complex shame in children and adults.
- Understand relational and developmental trauma and its intersection with attachment, nervous system development, neurodevelopment, and chronic complex shame.
- Explain the etiology of chronic complex shame, including generational attachment patterns and family systems influences.
- Apply polyvagal-informed, right-brain, somatic, energetic, and prosodic awareness to shame-based dysregulation through trauma informed practice.
- Use Sand Tray Therapy for assessment, check-ins, and treatment, including metaphor as a diagnostic and relational treatment tool for individuals or parent/child dyads.
- Integrate parental involvement thoughtfully when working with children and families.
- Apply the PACE therapist stance (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy) within Sand Tray and relational work.
- Understand when to name shame as an explicit goal vs. treating it as a meta implicit goal.

Course Objectives

- **Practice and Experience:**
Engage in experiential Sand Tray Therapy practice to deepen understanding of

the client's lived experience of chronic complex shame, as applied to children, adults, and parents.

- **Etiology and Theoretical Knowledge:**

Explore the roots of chronic complex shame within developmental trauma, attachment disruption, and family systems.

- **Neuroscience Insights:**

Examine right-brain developmental relational trauma, nervous system destabilization, and how chronic shame clinically presents.

- **Interventions and Tools:**

Learn and apply Sand Tray-based interventions for assessment, treatment planning, and implementation, including pathways that extend beyond the Sand Tray into broader clinical practice.

- **Recognize Clinical Presentations:** Learn and explore how chronic complex shame presents, including when or how to name shame.