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Sand Play Themes: By Rie Rodgers Mitchell, PhD

Themes That *Suggest* Wounding

- **Chaotic:** Haphazard, fragmented, or formless arrangement; e.g., objects' flung into the tray; boundaries of outer reality disregarded; items carefully placed but overall appearance is jumbled or disconnected.
- **Empty:** Reluctance to use figures or lifeless feeling with lack of energy and curiosity; e.g., a nearly empty tray with only a dead tree placed in a corner.
- **Split:** Parts of tray appear separated or detached; e.g., river, fence, or elephants placed from bottom to top of tray seem to divide tray
- **Confined:** Figure or groups normally free are entrapped or caged; e.g. a sand wall is built around a figure; bound by rope
- **Neglected:** Figure is isolated from potential support; e.g., baby in a high chair while mother is sleeping in next room.
- **Hidden:** Figures buried or hidden from view.
- **Prone:** Figures normally upright are intentionally placed in a reclining, fallen position; e.g., a standing pregnant woman placed face down in the sand.
- **Injured:** Figures with injuries or in the process of being injured; e.g., a bandaged man lying on a stretcher; a cowboy placed in the mouth of a dinosaur.
- **Threatened:** Menacing or frightening events and the inability of the endangered figure(s) to escape the experience; e.g., aggressive animals surrounding small child.
- **Hindered:** Possibility of new growth and development is impeded or hindered; e.g. a boat moving into new waters, while under siege by an army.

Themes That *Suggest* Movement Towards Healing, Wholeness, & Transformation

- **Bridging:** Connection between elements, joining of opposites; e.g., a ladder joins earth and tall trees; a bridge links an angel and devil.
- **Journeying:** Movement along a path or around a center; e.g., a knight follows a trail, someone paddles a canoe down a stream.
- **Energy:** Alive, vital, intense energy is visible; e.g., organic growth present, construction machines work on a task, airplanes take off from a runway.
- **Going Deeper:** Discovery of a deeper dimension; e.g. a clearing is made, a treasure unearthed, a well dug, a lake explored.
- **Birthing:** Emergence of new development; e.g., a baby is born, a flower opens, a bird lays eggs.
- **Nurturing:** Nourishment or help are provided to support growth and development; e.g. a mother feeding babies, supportive family groups, nurse helps a patient, presence of food.
- **Changed:** Sand and/or objects are creatively changed or used; e.g., sand is contoured to build a land bridge; sand is moved/stacked as an essential part of a lunar compound; a house is built from twigs picked up on walk to school.
- **Spiritual:** Religious & spiritual symbols present, such as supernatural beings, worshiping figures or numinous items; e.g., Buddha overlooking a couple.
- **Centered:** Elements are aesthetically balanced in the center of tray; or a union of opposites occurs; e.g., a man and woman married; mandala centered in the tray.
- **Integrated:** Congruent, organized idea encompasses entire tray; unity of expression; e.g., day at the zoo, baseball game, abstract construction unifying whole tray.

