



**Program Title (Topic, In-Person)**

**Sandtray Play Therapy: Mandalas and Sacred Circles – Ethical and Cross-Cultural Considerations for Healing (In-Person)**

**Presenters: Wendy Thunderchief, MA & Theresa Kestly, PhD**

**Description**

This in-person retreat is four days of personal and professional growth through exploration of sand, play, ceremony, cultural and ethical issues. Befriending paradox, drawing from principles of neuroscience, setting intentions, and integrating hands-on experiences will characterize the play and creative flow of this workshop. Participants will use simple art materials and sand tray play therapy to build bridges to the wisdom and guidance that is within each of us. This retreat is limited to 12 participants (Interview Required). No previous knowledge or artistic skills are required.

**Retreat Dates:** September 17-20, 2026

**Prerequisites:** Levels 1-4; Graduate degree in mental health or enrolled in a graduate degree program in mental health. Interview is required prior to registration. Please contact Theresa Kestly: [sandtraynm@gmail.com](mailto:sandtraynm@gmail.com)

**Continuing Education (CE):** 20 contact hours/4 full days.

**Fees**

\$1650 Includes breakfast, lunch<sup>1</sup>, all art materials, and a certificate of training<sup>2</sup>.

\$250 Nonrefundable deposit required by May 1, 2026<sup>3</sup>; Balance due August 1, 2026

<sup>1</sup>Note: We are asking all participants to stay onsite for the 1.5 hour lunch break. We are asking that 30 minutes of the lunch break be spent resting, observing silence, and turning off all digital devices. We will be focusing on mindfulness practices throughout the retreat. We will provide blankets for our rest time, but you may want to bring your own blankets, yoga mat, and pillow for our midday rest.

<sup>2</sup>Note: Although tuition fees include a certificate of training, there is a fee for replacement certificates.

<sup>3</sup>Note: The nonrefundable deposit will be returned in the unlikely event that we have to cancel the workshop for reasons beyond our control.



## Educational Goals

This training will help participants to:

1. Describe the sand tray play therapy process from a science-informed perspective.
2. Utilize awareness of Native American philosophy for working with Native American clients in the sand tray play therapy process.
3. Apply concepts of sand tray play therapy to the ceremonial aspects of community building.
4. Use drumming and patterns of rhythm to create connection among group members through play therapy.
5. Explain how play helps to build a resilient nervous system during sand tray play therapy.
6. Compare and contrast several indigenous healing traditions with sandtray play therapy.
7. Describe ways to use sand, play, rhythm, and ritual for healing purposes across cultures.
8. Discuss the importance of setting intentions in working with ethical and cultural issues in sandtray play therapy.
9. Utilize a journaling process to deepen personal experience and understanding of using intention in setting ethical and cross-cultural goals for play therapy.
10. Identify ethical issues of misappropriating traditional practices of indigenous people during playing therapy activities.
11. Describe ways to create ritual and ceremony in sandtray play with cross-cultural and ethical issues in mind.
12. Identify ways to apply the concepts learned in this workshop for creating daily rituals that are personally and professionally meaningful.

**Presenters:** Wendy Thunderchief, MA, LPCC; Theresa Kestly, PhD, RPT-S

**Wendy Thunderchief, M. A., LPCC** was a therapist for 24 years serving Native Americans, primarily children, adolescents, and women. Her specialties included trauma, grief and loss, and disenfranchised clients. She used sandtray and her extensive knowledge of Native American cultural ways to help clients navigate the healing process, working in schools, mental health agencies, and an established private practice. She retired in 2017 to devote time to research and writing. Wendy is recognized as an expert in several healing modalities including the Medicine Wheel. She is an activist/warrior who advocates for proper cultural representation. She is a Sundancer and a Pipecarrier. Wendy and her husband Clinton provide healing ceremonies including Sweatlodge, naming ceremonies, Talking Stick sessions, blessings and other ceremonies.

**Theresa Kestly, PhD, RPT-S** is a psychologist, educator, consultant, and a registered play therapist/supervisor with the Association for Play Therapy. She is an international presenter, and she maintains a private practice with specialties in play therapy and sandtray therapy in Corrales, New Mexico for children, adults, families, couples, and small groups. Theresa served



## Sand Tray Training Institute of New Mexico

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as a senior staff psychologist at the Albuquerque Family and Child Guidance Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico where she specialized in child, adolescent and family therapy, consultations with the Indian Health Service, and consultations with the Albuquerque Public Schools. She supervised psychology, counseling, and psychiatry trainees as an adjunct faculty member at the University of New Mexico. Theresa served as the first president of the New Mexico Association for Play Therapy. She is the founder and director of the Sand Tray Training Institute of New Mexico in Corrales, New Mexico where she provides large-group seminars and small-group intensive training for psychotherapists in child and adult sandtray therapy. Theresa is author of *The Interpersonal Neurobiology of Play: Brain-Building Interventions for Emotional Well-Being* (Norton Interpersonal Neurobiology series).

[APT Provider Approved Provider #99-052](#)

### Location

Sand Tray Training Institute  
294 Mission Valley Road  
Corrales, NM 87048

### Daily Schedule\*

Days 1 - 4 (5 contact hours each day)

9:00 - 9:25	Meditation in Sandtray Room (Optional)
9:30 - 10:00	Gathering Time with Continental Breakfast in Corrales (Optional)
10:00 - 10:30	Check-In and Overview
10:30 - 11:15	Topic Presentation & Discussion
11:15 - 11:30	<b>BREAK</b>
11:30 - 12:15	Topic Presentation & Hands On Experience
12:15 - 12:45	Training Demonstration
12:45 - 1:45	<b>LUNCH BREAK - ONSITE (included in retreat)</b>
1:45 - 2:15	<b>RESTING TOGETHER: 30 minutes of silent resting - no digital devices. Any practice of physical rest or mindfulness: napping, meditating, practicing yoga, mindful walking outside without digital input, or any practice of silent self-care.</b>
2:15 - 2:45	Topic Presentation & Demonstration
2:45 - 3:30	Partner Practice
3:30 - 3:45	<b>BREAK</b>
3:45 - 4:30	Training Demonstration, Discussion, Clinical Applications, & Questions
4:30 - 5:00	Review & Closure



\*Schedule may vary at the discretion of the presenters due to curriculum updates and participant processing.

## Continuing Education Credits

In this 4-day training participants will earn 20 CE contact hours (includes 6 for ethics and 6 for cross-cultural) verified with a Certificate of Training. Following is a list of organizations that have approved our training for continuing education requirements.

The Sand Tray Training Institute of New Mexico is approved by the **National Board for Certified Counselors, NBCC** as an Approved Continuing Education Provider, ACEP No. 5972. Programs that do not qualify for NBCC credit are clearly identified. The Sand Tray Training Institute is solely responsible for all aspects of the program. The **New Mexico Board of Social Work** Examiners accepts all continuing education credits that are approved by NBCC. In addition, the Institute is approved by the **Association for Play Therapy, APT** Approved Provider #99-052, to offer continuing education specific to play therapy. The Sand Tray Training Institute of New Mexico follows all CE guidelines and maintains responsibility for the program. This course meets the qualifications for 5 contact hours of continuing education credit per 1 full day of training.

## Checking Your Personal CE Requirements

It is always a good idea to check with your own credentialing agencies (state boards, affiliated agencies, etc.) to ensure that the CE credits you receive from us are applicable to your specific situation. You need to attend the entire training sessions to receive credit. Partial credits cannot be given. In cases of family or other unavoidable emergencies that interrupt your attendance for a short time, makeup possibilities for time missed may incur a fee based on our hourly consultation rate.

## Cancellation and Refund Policy

Registration fees for this Sand Tray Intensive Retreat are nonrefundable because of time commitments made by the presenters and because of the small class size. In the event of a medical emergency, we will attempt to fill a participant space if another participant on the waiting list is able to register with a late notice. There is a \$100 transfer fee, but we cannot guarantee filling a space. Registrants may transfer/sell their enrollment to another qualified person at any time (pre-approved registration with required interview). The Sand Tray Training Institute reserves the right to cancel a workshop due to insufficient enrollment, inclement weather, instructor illness, instructor family emergency, or some other unforeseen event. Notice will be provided at the earliest possible date via email with the option to reschedule for a future training date or to receive a full refund of paid workshop fees.

**Makeup Policy:** Certificates can be awarded only when the training is attended in full. In case of medical or family issues, makeup work may be arranged on an individual basis at an hourly consultation rate. The requirement for full attendance is a policy issued by the CE organizations that approve our trainings for continuing education credits.