PLAY THERAPY TO SUPPORT SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION IN BLACK BOYS

Dr. April Duncan, DSW, LCSW, RPT-S
Founder & CEO, BMH Connect

drapril@bmhconnect.com

www.bmhconnect.com

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Discuss play-based interventions to build rapport with Black boys
- Analyze play therapy interventions to encourage social-emotional development in Black boys
- List prompts to use in sand tray play therapy with Black boys to encourage social-emotional expression
- Explain the application of game play therapy with Black boys to encourage social-emotional expression

BLACK BOYS & RACIAL TRAUMA

- Black males may be more susceptible to mental health effects of discriminiation
- Perceived racial discrimination during adolescence has harmful effects on the mental health of Black men decades later
- Can lead to a development of unhealthy coping skills
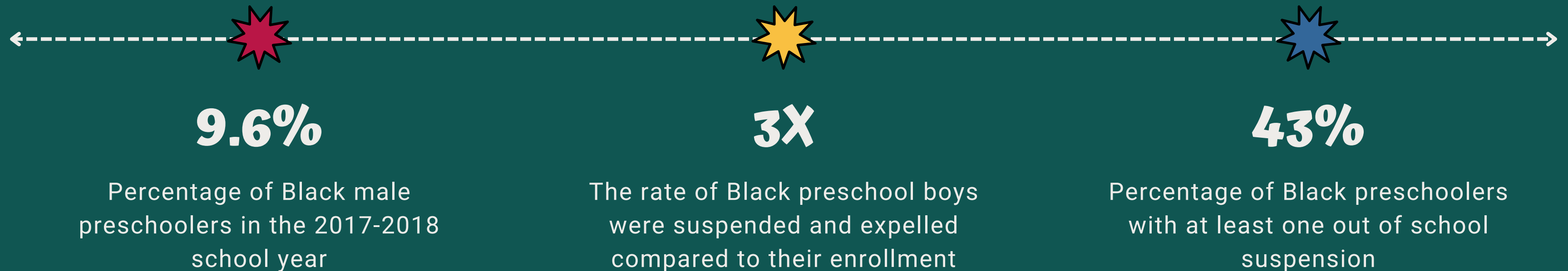
(Assari et. al, 2017)

BLACK BOYS IN SCHOOLS

- Middle & high school Black males at a higher risk from experiencing racial discrimination from peers & teachers
- Often experience low expectations, negative feedback and scapegoating from school staff
- Often punished for not behaving according to White standards
- Teachers tend to fear young Black boys
- Tend to be discipline for subjective reasons

(Barbarin, 2019; McNeil Smith & Fincham, 2016; Perception.org, n.d.)

Black Male Students ----→

20%

Percentage of Black boys with
one or more in-school
suspension

25%

Percentage of Black boys with
one or more out of school
suspension

30%

Percentage of Black males
arrested in schools

(Civil Rights Data Collection, 2017-2018)

BLACK BOYS & POLICE

- Black youth have contact with police as early as 8 years old
- By age 24, Black youth have 9x the amount of police encounters than White youth
- Black youth are 4x more likely to be detained or committed In juvenile facilities
- 41% of youths in placement are Black

(Jindal et. al, 2022; The Sentencing Project, 2021)
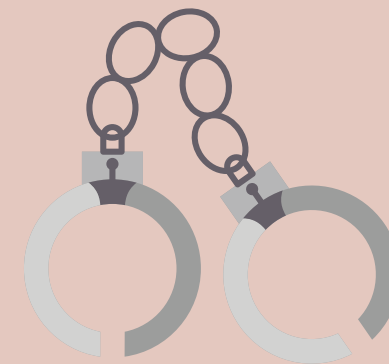
ADVERSE POLICE CONTACT

A source of emotional and physical harm that results from a young person's interaction with police or having an incarcerated loved one

(St. John et. al, 2022)

NEGATIVE OUTCOMES

Negative interactions with law enforcement linked to poor emotional well-being, physical health & social outcomes

ARREST DISPARITIES

Black youth make up 15% of the U.S population but 34% of arrests in 2019

BLACK BOYS & BIAS

- Black children are seen as less innocent than other children after the age of 10
- Black boys can be misperceived as legal adults at around 13 1/2 years old

(McWayne et. al, 2020; Goff et. al, 2014)

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS- TED TALKS LIVE SHORT

BIAS CONSEQUENCES FOR BLACK BOYS

- Male students of color who are suspended are 3x more likely to drop out of school by 10th grade
  - Also 3x more likely to end up incarcerated
- A study found a correlation between Blacks being seen as apes and excessive force against young Black males

(Perception.org, n.d.)

PARENTING BLACK BOYS

- Black parents will often attempt to prepare their children for racial bias while unaware of the negative outcomes
- Black boys are told more about racial barriers, egalitarianism and negative stereotypes/social messages
- Studies have shown that low-income mothers are more likely to show nurturance to girls than boys

(Arshanapally et. al, 2018; McWayne et. al, 2020)

Black boys & Toxic Masculinity

- Socialization for boys in America encourages independence, status, toughness & restrictive emotionality
- Intersection of race & gender for Black boys serves an an additional barrier for emotional expression

(Hewitt, 2017)

(BNC NEWS, 2021)

BLACK BOYS & MENTAL HEALTH

- Black boys are more likely to be diagnosed with conduct disorder than boys of other racial backgrounds
- Black boys report higher levels of depression in elementary & middle school
- Black adolescents are less likely to receive care for depression

(Barbarin et. al, 2019: Joe et al, 2019)

SELF-ESTEEM

IN BLACK BOYS -----------------------

- Stereotypes of Black boys in media contributes to poor self-image
- Can lead to:
  - Feelings of invisibility
  - Feeling that their identity is not validated
  - Fatalistic behaviors

(DeGruy, 2017; Hewitt, 2017)

SUICIDAL THOUGHTS & BEHAVIORS

IN BLACK BOYS

- From 1991-2017, injuries from a suicide attempted increased by 122% for Black boys
- Black boys ages 5-11 years old have an increase in suicide deaths
- Self-reported suicide attempts have increased 73% for both Black males and females over the last 25 years
- Regulation issues for Black boys In middle schools may be correlated

(Congressional Black Caucus, 2019; Barbarin et. al, 2019)

BUILDING RAPPORT WITH PLAY

WHAT IS PLAY THERAPY?

- Based on the premise that play is the natural way children communicate
- A form of therapy that allows children to "play out" their feelings & problems
- Can be directive or non-directive
  - Directive: play therapist assumes responsibility for activities/direction of the session
  - Non-directive: the child takes responsibility for the activities/direction of the sessionn

(Association for Play Therapy, 2022)

WHY PLAY?

(KING, 2011)

Play Themes

The toys and activities selected by Black boys that may signal mental health distress

Themes develop over several sessions or when the same theme is shown multiple times In one session

SUGGESTED TOYS

SUGGESTED TOYS

DIVERSITY IN PLAYROOM

DIVERSITY IN PLAYROOM

CHILD-CENTERED GROUP PLAY THERAPY

WITH BLACK BOYS

- The use of non-directive play therapy with children in a group setting
- Culturally sensitive
- Honor the four components of the African worldview by:
  - Creating a free, safe environment
  - Providing diverse and therapeutic toys
  - Reflections
- Play therapist should facilitate the five components of self-confidence
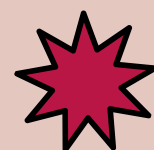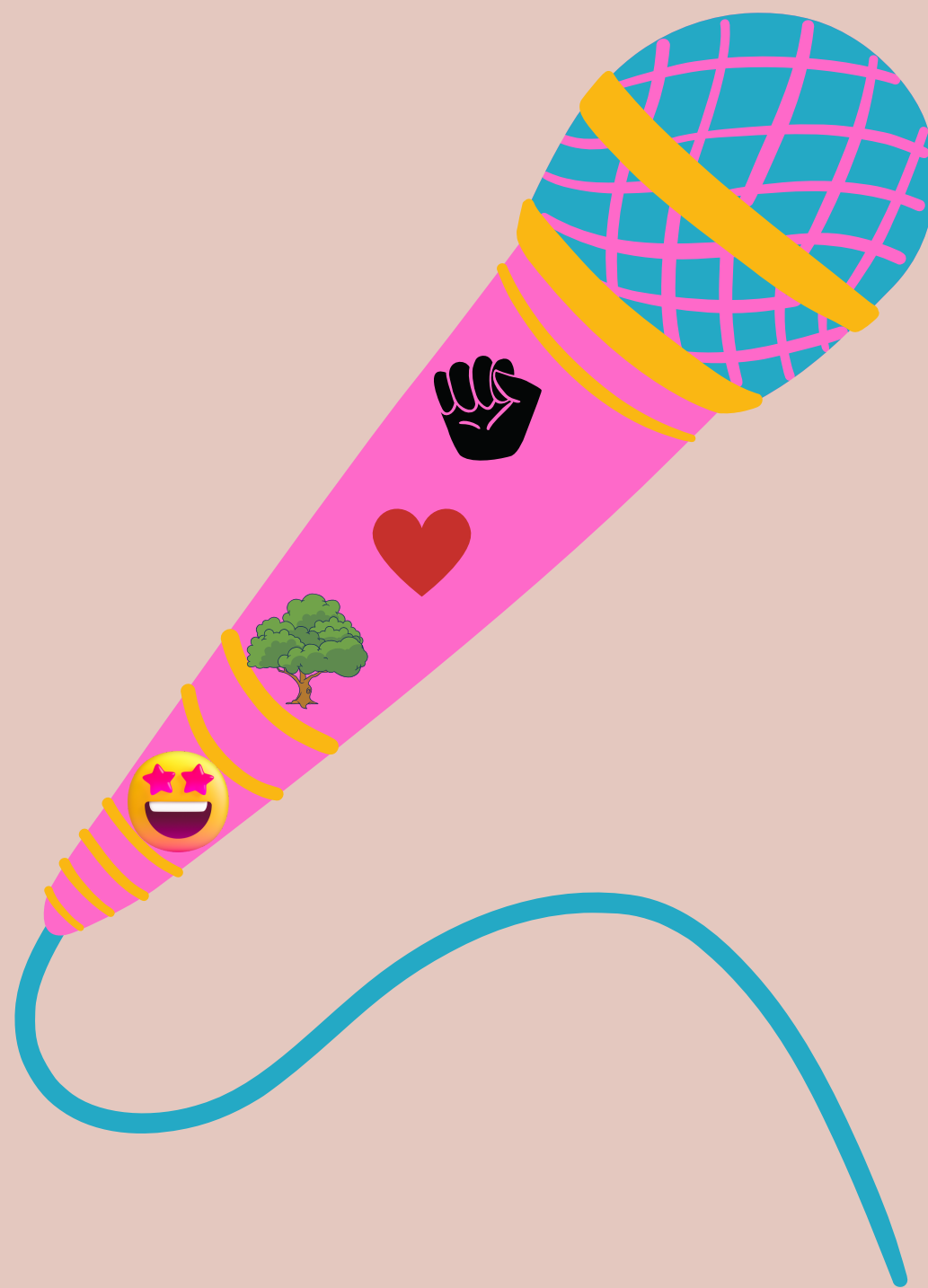
(Baggerly & Parker, 2005)

IN MY FEELINGS

ONE MIC

MY MAGNIFICENT CROWN

COPING PLAYLIST

GAME PLAY THERAPY WITH BLACK BOYS

GAME PLAY THERAPY

- A play therapy method that uses a variety of board games, game forms, video games or card games to help apply the therapeutic powers of play.
- There are now over 1000 games available for treating the psychological and social problems of youth.
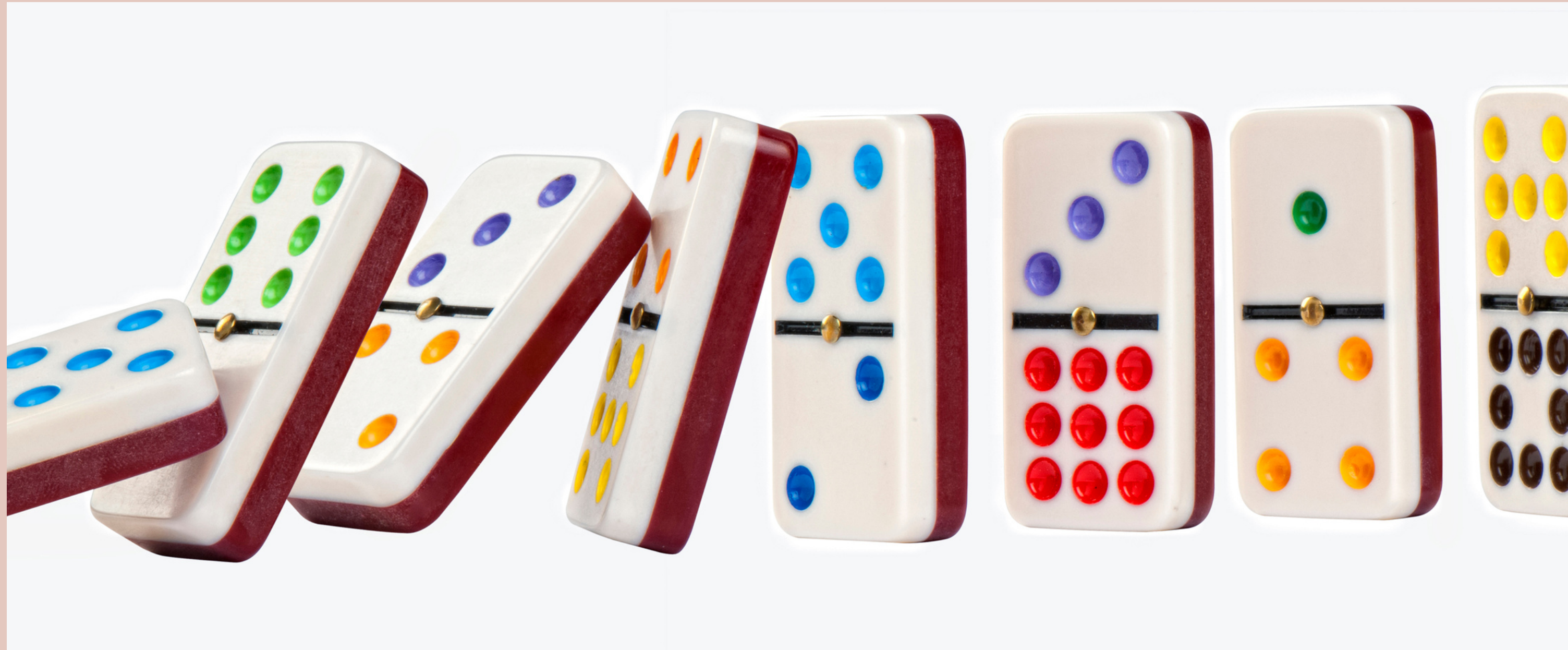
BENEFITS OF GAME PLAY THERAPY

- Therapeutic alliance
- Self-control
- Moral development
- Self-expression
- Executive functioning skills
- Mood elevation
- Self-esteem
- Stress release
- Attachment formation
- Social skills

FEELINGS DOMINOS

FEELINGS UNO

FEELINGS JENGA

JACKED UP FEELINGS

EMOJIS CONNECTION

SAND TRAY THERAPY WITH BLACK BOYS

SAND TRAY PLAY THERAPY ----------------------

- Developed by Margaret Lowenfield in 1939 who developed the "Lowenfield World Technique"
- Developed around the same time as play therapy
- Adaptations along the way
- Promotes safety and control for the client
- Appropriate for all populations
- Flexible sizes in sand trays
- Discovered the sand tray can bring forth the conscious and unconscious psyche
- She felt that the "World" and not the "Therapist" was the one to confront the "maker"
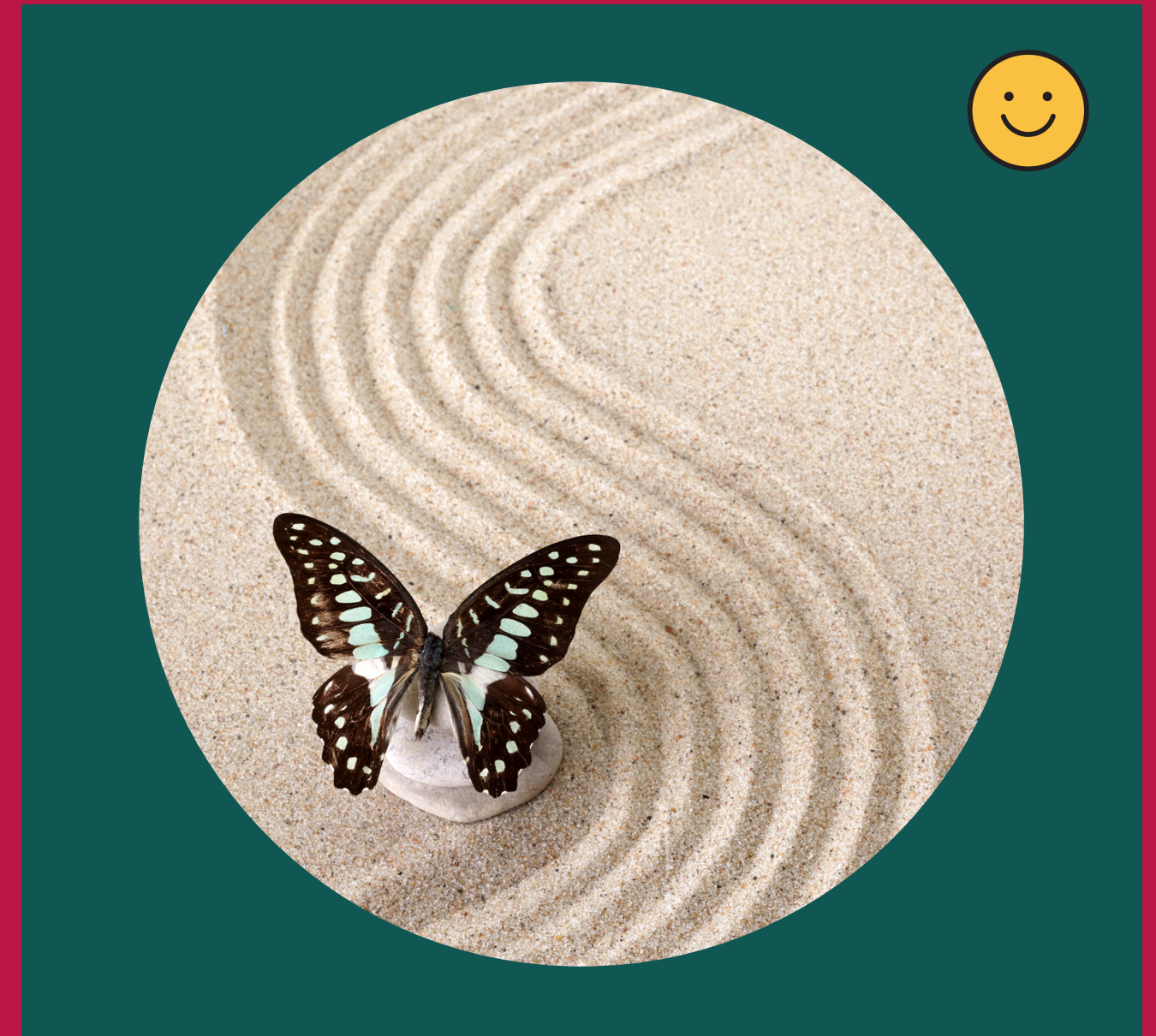
SAND TRAY PLAY THERAPY ---------------------

- Gives expression to non-verbalized emotions
- Forum of self-expression and self-exploration
- Kinesthetic experience
- Creates a necessary therapeutic distance
- Effective for traumatized clients
- Provides natural boundaries and limits
- Effective in overcoming client resistance
- Good for those clients with poor verbal skills
- Cuts through verbalization as a defense
- Place for clients to experience control
- Solution for transference
- Deeper intrapsychic issues can be accessed
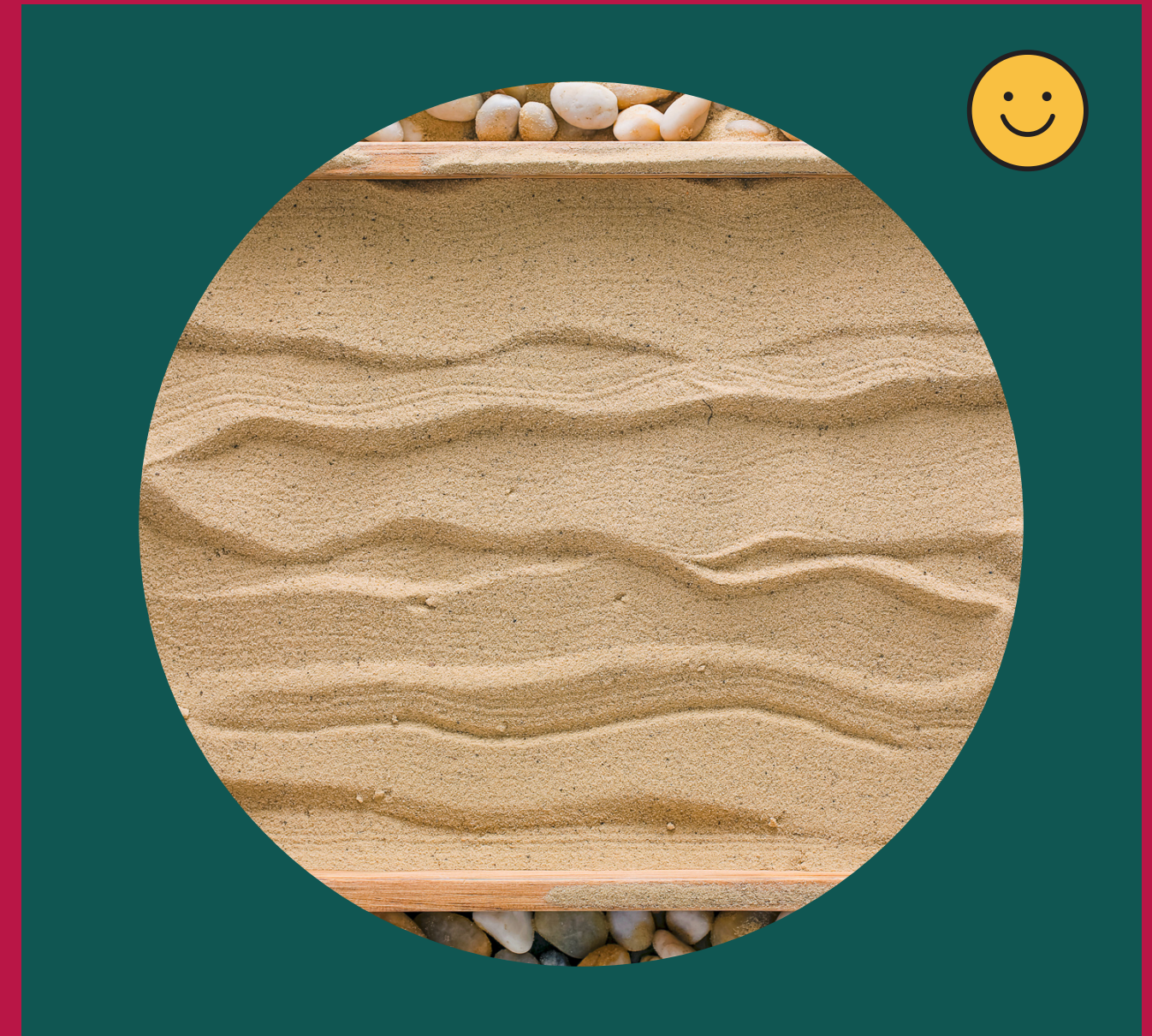
SAND TRAY PLAY THERAPY ----------------------------

- The play therapist should:
  - Create a "free and protected space"
  - Receive training in sand tray therapy
  - Experience being a sand tray therapy client
  - Be deliberate and intentional when selecting miniatures
  - Act as a facilitator

SAND TRAY PLAY THERAPY

WITH BLACK BOYS   ------------------------

- Pick five emotions, then pick five miniatures to show how you communicate those emotions
- Create a sand tray showing your biggest fears
- Create a sand tray showing the happiest time in your life
- Pick a miniature to represent each person you feel comfortable sharing your emotions with
- Create a sand tray showing the things you are sad about
- Create a scene that shows what you think you need to feel happy
- Create a scene that shows the triggers to your anger
- Create a scene that shows the healthy ways you can express your feelings
- Create a scene showing a time you felt embarrassed
- Create a scene that shows a time you were jealous of someone or jealous about something someone had/owned

Sand Tray Play Therapy

RESOURCES -------------------------

- Homeyer, L.E. & Sweeney, D.S. (2017). Sandtray Therapy: A Practical Manual (3rd Ed.) Routledge: New York

- World Association of Sand Therapy Professionals- https://worldsandtherapy.com/

- Southern Sand Tray Institute- https://southernsandtray.com/

- Sandtray Therapy Institute- https://www.sandtraytherapyinstitute.com/

- Sand Therapy Training Institute- https://www.sandtherapytraining.com/onlinecourses

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Family Play Therapy with Black Boys

ENGAGING BLACK CAREGIVERS

- Rapport is key
- Case management may be required
- Be mindful of racial mistrust
- Parent consultations are helpful
- Non-judgemental space for parents too

SPECIAL TIME

GREATNESS STICKS

RESOURCES FOR BLACK BOYS

S.M.I.L.E-ing Boys Project-
http://universoulartist.com/smiling-boys-project/

List of social-emotional programs for Black boys-
https://www.lessonsforsel.com/post/top-7-social-
emotional-learning-programs-for-youth-of-color

www.blackboysincrisis.com

National Youth Alliance for Boys & Men of Color-
https://fcyo.org/programs/national-youth-alliance-for-
boys-and-men-of-color

THANK YOU!

Email- drapril@bmhconnect.com

Website- www.bmhconnect.com

REFERENCES

Arshanapally, S., Werner, K., Sartor, C., & Bucholz, K. (2018). The association between racial discrimination and suicidality among African-American adolescents and young adults. Archives of Suicide Research, 22(4), 584–595. https://doi-org.libproxy1.usc.edu/10.1080/13811118.2017.1387207

Assari, S., Moazen-Zadeh, E., Caldwell, C., & Zimmerman, M. (2017). Racial discrimination during adolescence predicts mental health deterioration in adulthood: Gender differences among Blacks. Frontiers in Public Health, 5, 104–104. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2017.00104

Baggerly, J., & Parker, M. (2005). Child-centered group play therapy with African American boys at the elementary school level. Journal of Counseling & Development, 83(4), 387–396. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2005.tb00360.x

Barbarin, O.A., Hitti, A. & Copeland-Linder, N. (2019). Behavioral and emotional development of African American boys growing up in risky environments. *Child Development Perspectives, 13*(4), 215-220. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12341

BNC News. (2021). Boys playing with kitchen sets spark social media debate. [YouTube]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5m68UzfW1A

Degruy. J. (2017). Post traumatic slave syndrome: America's legacy of enduring injury & healing. Uptown Press.

Goff, P. A., Jackson, M. C., Di Leone, B. A., Culotta, C. M., & DiTomasso, N. A. (2014). The essence of innocence: consequences of dehumanizing Black children. Journal of personality and social psychology, 106(4), 526–545. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035663

Hewitt, A.A. (2017). Giving voice to the feelings of Black boys. Psychology Today. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/you-empowered/201705/giving-voice-the-feelings-black-boys

Homeyer, L.E. & Sweeney, D.S. (2017). Sandtray Therapy: A Practical Manual (3rd Ed.) Routledge: New York

REFERENCES

Jindal, M., Mistry, K.B., Trent, M., McRae, A. & Thornton, R.L.J. (2022). Police exposures and the health and well-being of Black youth in the US: A Systematic Review. JAMA Pediatrics ;176(1):78–88. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2021.2929

King, W. (2011). Stolen childhood. Slave youth in nineteenth-century America (2nd ed.) Indiana University Press

Lindsey, M., Sheftall, A., Xiao, Y., & Joe, S. (2019). Trends of suicidal behaviors among high school students in the United States: 1991-2017. Pediatrics, 144(5), Article e20191912. https://doi-org.libproxy1.usc.edu/10.1542/peds.2019-1912

McNeil Smith, S., & Fincham, F. (2016). Racial discrimination experiences among Black youth: A person-centered approach. Journal of Black Psychology, 42(4), 300–319. doi.org/10.1177/0095798415573315

McWayne, C., Mattis, J., & Li, L. (2020). Parenting together: Understanding the shared context of positive parenting among low-income Black families. Journal of Black Psychology, Article e9579842093165. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798420931653

Perception.org. (n.d.). Transforming perception: Black men and boys. [Executive summary]. https://equity.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Transforming-Perception.pdf

St. John, V.J., Headley, A.M. &. Harper, K. (2022). Reducing adverse police contact would heal wounds for children and their communities. ChildTrends. https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Policingtraumabrief_ChildTrends_June2022.pdf

The Sentencing Project. (2021). Black disparities in youth incarceration. https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Black-Disparities-in-Youth-Incarceration.pdf

U.S. Education Department, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2017-18 State and National Estimations, released June 2021, available at https://ocrdata.ed.gov/estimations/2017-2018.