

ASK VIOLET



Question: How do you ground children after they have been having a really good time, or perhaps a particularly emotional time?

This is very important. I feel that children must make closure since have they to go out and be in the world after a session. Here are several methods that have worked for me:

Ask specific, present centered questions, such as

“What do you hope you’ll have for dinner?”

“Are those new sneakers?”

“Where are you going from here? Or I might suggest that we both take some deep breaths. Or I might say, “Wow! Look at the way the leaves are moving. It must be windy.” “Oh, wait. Before you go I want to show you this new sand tray figure I got.”

Generally bring the child back to the present moment, using as many senses as possible.

Question: What is your position on cleaning up after a session?

For me cleaning up is part of the session. I try to leave time for this. Children help me clean up unless we are totally out of time. Cleaning up is one of the ways I help children make closure after a session. This does not mean that the work we have been doing is resolved. I trust that it will emerge again, perhaps in a different way, in a subsequent session.

Example: a 14 year-old girl discovered a toy cash register on the shelf. She decided that we should play store and set up various toys and items from my office on our art table. She made little notes of prices for each. I was instructed to be various customers. I did so, enjoying the opportunity to play different kinds of characters. (I must say this was a lot of fun for both of us.) As we cleaned up she said, “Don’t tell anybody we did this!” At the next session she wanted to play store again. I could see that her heart wasn’t in it. I said, “I have a feeling that you didn’t have much chance to play when you were a little girl. This opened up many feelings about her childhood. (She had already been in seven foster homes when I saw her.)

Often the clean-up is therapeutic in itself. An 11 year-old boy insisted on washing all the clay tools even though I usually don’t. As I watched him using the basin, pitcher of water, and sponge I realized he may have never had this kind of experience when he was small. Playing with water is an important part of development for young children. He reminded me of my daughter when she was three years old, standing on a stool, singing as she “washed” her toy dishes. I realized then that he was humming!

Some children are resistant to putting things away at first. But since this must be done before they leave, I begin to do this myself while instructing them to put this or that in the basket or on the shelf. They may ignore me at first, but soon they are helping, perhaps not in this session, but in subsequent ones. These children, who never put anything away at home, become my best “cleaner uppers.”

NOTE: We don’t clean up sand tray scenes. I tell the child I need to look at it for awhile, and then I will put the miniatures away myself. Of course, I take a photo of the scene. They appear very grateful not to have to destroy what they have so carefully constructed. (This is totally a projection. I certainly feel that way.)