

## **Aquatic Play-Based Therapy for Traumatized Infants and Young Children - A Sensorimotor Psychotherapeutic Approach**

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### **Abstract**

Water is both the giver and taker of life. Some of the most therapeutic and spiritual practices involve water, as do some of the most severe methods of human torture and interrogation.

We are hardwired to be drawn to water and at the same time there exists within us the primal fear of death by drowning. This fear is deeply rooted in the primitive brain and necessary for the survival of the human species.

It is this fear that is exploited in laboratory studies with rodents in order to enhance our understanding of the mammalian stress response system.

On the healing side of this polarisation, aquatic programs such as aquatic yoga, surf and kayak programs, and float tanks are being increasingly used to treat PTSD, anxiety and panic disorder in adults. The neuroscientific evidence base for such interventions is building.

This session introduces the pioneering area of aquatic play-based therapy as an effective sensorimotor psychotherapeutic intervention for infants and young children impacted by trauma.

Water provides a unique and exaggerated environment within which to restore the child's capacity to trust; develop healthy attachment bonds; connect with body, breath, self, others; develop cognitive, language and emotion regulation skills; move, play, imagine, relax.

These factors will be explored in more detail through the case study of a 4-year child impacted by betrayal and underwater trauma.

We will also examine the therapeutic approach and skills required of the therapist as well as the ideal aquatic environmental in order to optimise the healing potential.