



Mental Health Professionals Applying the Therapeutic Power of Play!

2026 GAPT Conference Registration Brochure

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Georgia Association for Play Therapy's (GAPT) Annual Conference

2026 Registration Brochure

The Georgia Association for Play Therapy **2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

Presents: **ANA M. GOMEZ, MC, LPC**

*Protective Systems, Perpetrator Dynamics,
and Aggression in Children with Complex
Trauma - A Sandtray and Play Therapy
Clinical Approach*

Friday March 13th and Saturday March 14th 2026

Sonesta Gwinnett Place Atlanta -
1775 Pleasant Hill Road Duluth, GA 30096

Register at:

 www.GAPT.org



Register at www.gapt.org or use the QR code below (by scanning it with your phone's camera).





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We look forward to seeing you at the 2026 Georgia Association for Play Therapy Conference

This brochure will provide important information regarding conference, presentation and materials, registration, continuing education, hotel accommodations, and other agreements/policies. Please read this document in its entirety. For questions or needs regarding conference registration, email info@gapt.org

Host: The Georgia Association for Play Therapy (GAPT)

Date: Friday, March 13, 2023 – Saturday, March 14, 2025

Location (in-person conference): Sonesta Gwinnett Place, 1775 Pleasant Hill Road Duluth, GA 30096

Schedule (based on Eastern Standard Time; EST)

DAY 1 (Friday, March 13th 2026)

Systems of Self-Protection in Children with Complex Trauma

- 7:30 – 8:00 (Sign In)
- 8:00 – 8:30 (GAPT Annual Meeting (members vote only))
- 8:30 – 10:00 (1.5 hrs | Instruction) Foundations of Self-Protective Systems
- 10:00 – 11:00 (60 min | Instruction) State-Based Defensive Patterns in Sandtray Work
- 11:00 – 11:15 (15 min | Break)
- 11:15 – 12:15 (60 min | Instruction) Reading the Nervous System in the Tray
- 12:15 – 1:15 (60 min | Lunch Break)
- 1:15 – 2:15 (60 min | Instruction) Attunement-Led Engagement with Defenses
- 2:15 – 3:15 (60 min | Instruction) Stabilization Through Sandtray Based Interventions
- 3:15 – 4:15 (60 min | Instruction) Unblending, Psychoeducation, and Present-Moment Safety
- 4:15 – 4:30 (15 min | Q&A / Integration)

DAY 2 (Saturday, March 14th 2026)

Idealization of the Perpetrator and Aggression in Children Exposed to Abuse

- 7:45 - 8:30 (Sign In)
- 8:30 – 10:00 (1.5 hrs | Instruction) Foundations of Perpetrator Internalization
- 10:00 – 11:00 (60 min | Instruction) Internalized Roles, Ego States, and Defensive Identities
- 11:00 – 11:15 (15 min | Break)
- 11:15 – 12:15 (60 min | Instruction) Key Mechanisms of Perpetrator Internalization
- 12:15 – 1:15 (60 min | Lunch Break)
- 1:15 – 2:15 (60 min | Instruction) Symbolic and Relational Expression in Sandtray Work
- 2:15 – 3:15 (60 min | Instruction) Case Conceptualization Through Sandtray-Centered Clinical Lenses
- 3:15 – 4:15 (60 min | Instruction) Autonomic Tracking, Regulation, and Treatment Goals
- 4:15 – 4:30 (15 min | Q&A / Integration)



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Workshop Title: Protective Systems, Perpetrator Dynamics, and Aggression in Children with Complex Trauma
A Sandtray and Play Therapy Clinical Approach

Presenter Information



Ana M. Gómez is a leading expert in the field of complex trauma, dissociation, and intergenerational trauma, with a particular focus on children and adolescents. She is the founder and director of the AGATE Institute in Phoenix, AZ, a psychotherapist, author, and international speaker who has trained thousands of clinicians worldwide through her workshops, advanced trainings, and keynote presentations. With 30 years of clinical practice, Ana is a recognized authority in EMDR therapy and its application with children, adolescents, and families. She is a fellow of the International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation (ISSTD) and the author of *EMDR Therapy and Adjunct Approaches with Children: Complex Trauma, Attachment, and Dissociation*, as well as her most recent book, *EMDR-Sandtray-Based Therapy: Healing Complex Trauma and*

Dissociation Across the Lifespan. In addition, she is the co-editor of *The Handbook of Complex Trauma and Dissociation in Children: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications* and has contributed numerous book chapters on EMDR therapy, complex trauma, dissociation, and intergenerational trauma. Her work has been recognized with distinguished honors such as the Francine Shapiro Award (EMDRIA, 2023), the Hope Award from Sierra Tucson (2012), and the Distinguished Service Award from the Arizona Play Therapy Association (2011).

Workshop Description

This two-day training explores how children and adolescents exposed to early and chronic relational trauma develop systems of self-protection and internalized perpetrator dynamics that shape behavior, affect regulation, aggression, and therapeutic engagement. Using an integrated Sandtray and Play Therapy frameworks, participants will learn to recognize defensive adaptations, dissociative self-states, and victim-perpetrator dynamics as they emerge symbolically and relationally through sand worlds and play therapy interaction. The training emphasizes developmentally paced, attuned, and play therapy interventions that support stabilization, regulation, safety, and agency while preparing children and adolescents for gradual trauma integration and reprocessing.

APT Content Areas

The 13 APT CEs for this workshop will cover the following suggested APT content areas: Play Therapy Social and Cultural Diversity, Play Therapy Skills and Methods and Play Therapy Special Topics.



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Learning Objectives

At the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

1. Explain how early and chronic relational trauma shapes the development of child and adolescent self-protective systems using frameworks informed by Polyvagal Theory and Attachment Theory.
2. Identify state-based defense patterns — particularly avoidance, dissociation, control, and compliance — as they emerge symbolically and relationally in the tray and play therapy process.
3. Track behavior, pacing, proximity, posture, movement, and autonomic shifts in sand scenes to support clinical hypothesis-making and moment-to-moment treatment decisions in a play therapy session.
4. Apply attunement-led engagement strategies in play therapy that enter defenses safely without confrontation or destabilization, preserving safety and therapeutic agency.
5. Use integrated play therapy and sandtray interventions to scaffold emotion regulation, sensory rounding, and relational flexibility before trauma reprocessing begins.
6. Use psychoeducation in play therapy treatment to support the child and adolescent in unblending from defensive self-states and reorganizing their relationship with protective parts.
7. Ground the child and adolescent in present-moment safety using the sand and miniature collection in the playroom to foster sensory regulation, self-compassion, and self-protection that feels agency-led and resourced.
8. Describe how idealization of the perpetrator and internalized perpetrator dynamics develop in children and adolescents who have experienced chronic relational trauma and abuse and how they show up in sandtray and play therapy.
9. Identify ego states, dissociative parts, defensive identities, and relational roles in which children protect the abusive caregiver, silence vulnerability, or direct aggression toward self or others.
10. Explain key concepts involved in perpetrator internalization, including identification, introjection, trauma bonds, betrayal trauma, and attachment-based loyalty conflicts and how they show up in the sandtray and play therapy.
11. Recognize overt, subtle, and implicit expressions of victim–perpetrator dynamics as they emerge in sand worlds and play therapy interactions, including various forms of aggression toward others and toward the self.
12. Use a multimodal and transtheoretical clinical lens grounded in Sandtray Therapy and Play Therapy to organize case conceptualization and guide treatment planning.
13. Observe and track how patterns of aggression and internalized perpetrator dynamics relate to shifts in arousal, activation, withdrawal, and other autonomic patterns during sand and play therapy work.
14. Formulate play therapy treatment goals that support regulation, safety, and agency while promoting a gradual and developmentally appropriate path toward trauma integration and reprocessing.

Required Materials, Participation, and Activities

GAPT will provide each participant with workshop supplies. Participants have the option to bring their own note taking equipment (computer, paper/pen). Participants are encouraged to bring miniature figures they already have to support symbolic expression and scene-building. A diverse assortment is recommended (people, animals, structures, nature elements, objects).



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Who Should Attend

This conference is intended for play therapy, mental health, school counseling, marriage and family, social work, rehabilitation counseling, alcohol and drug abuse, psychiatric, psychology, pastoral care, nursing, art therapy, drama therapy, and child life specialist professionals and students. There is no prerequisite for this conference other than being a mental health professional with an advanced degree in a mental health-related field or a student working on such a degree.

Registration, Fees, and Deadline

Participants are required to complete the conference registration online along with paying the applicable fee(s) at www.gapt.org. The [conference registration](#) and continuing education payment deadline is **Saturday, February 28th, 2026 or when the workshop reaches maximum capacity.** Registration will not be available thereafter or at the door. Related links for payment(s) are embedded within the e-registration process. Completed forms and payments must both be submitted in order to confirm a seat and/or table space reservation. *Procrastinators beware:* Please understand that the fire marshal and local ordinances limit registration. There are no special exceptions. A waitlist will be started if capacity is maxed. (We are unable to predict when that will occur). We recommend that you register early.

Registration fees include the workshop, conference handouts, lunch for both days, and some of the required workshop materials. Registration fee is for both days. (Registration cannot be purchased for a single day for this event.) Notification that your conference registration and payment has been received and approved will be sent to the email address that you provide on your registration form along with an e-ticket for entry to the conference. Please note that we use *Zeffy* to process conference registrations, who request a platform donation. To avoid this added fee, scroll down to “order” -> “support the 100% free platform we use!” -> click the down arrow to press “other” and enter “\$0.00”.

\$350 – Professionals who are not GAPT members

\$325 – GAPT member rate (*verification required)

\$200 – Currently enrolled graduate student rate (**verification required)

* To qualify for the GAPT member rate, you must be a member of the Georgia APT chapter. Verification is required, and conference registration will be compared to GAPT’s most updated member list. If you are not a GAPT member, you will be responsible for the full amount. If you are unsure if you are a current member of GAPT, visit APT’s website at www.a4pt.org.

** To qualify for the student rate, you must be a currently enrolled graduate student in a mental health or related program. Additionally, you must complete the information necessary to verify your student status upon registering.



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Cancellation and Refund Policy

All correspondence regarding cancellations, credits, refunds, transfers, etc. must be made in writing to info@gapt.org. Written cancellation requests that are emailed **before Saturday, February 28, 2026** will be provided with a refund minus a \$75 processing fee or may be transferred to another person without penalty only if the original registrant notifies GAPT before the expressed deadline. After Saturday, February 28, 2026, no refunds, transfers, credits, or other compensation will be granted, as registrants generate a contractual and non-refundable guarantee between GAPT and other parties. It is recommended for attendees to make travel reservations that are one hundred percent refundable. GAPT reserves the right to cancel this conference in the event of unforeseen circumstances. If such occurs, GAPT will attempt to notify registrants at least ten calendar days prior to the conference and refund all registration fees. In all instances, the liability of GAPT is limited to refunding such fees, and GAPT is not responsible for any other lost monies, cancellation fees, deposits, etc. for travel expenses.

Continuing Education

This program is co-sponsored by the Georgia Association for Play Therapy and *The Institute for Continuing Education*. The Conference offers a total of 13.00 APT contact hours (6.50 hours per day). Continuing education is awarded on a daily basis with full attendance required for both days attended. Partial daily CE credit is not offered.

The continuing education processing fee is **\$30.00** per person. If desired, it must be paid with online registration (as no fees will be accepted on-site). CE application and evaluation form(s) will be available on site, and GAPT will cover the fee for mailing when pre-paid with online registration. CE verification is mailed to attendees following the Conference. If you have questions regarding the program, continuing education learning objectives, faculty, or other issues, contact *The Institute* at: 800-557-1950 / email: instconted@aol.com

NOTE: To receive continuing education credit, applicants must complete all CE materials, sign in/out at designated locations, and submit an evaluation form for the events attended.

NOTE: It is the responsibility of the attendee to determine if CE credit offered by *The Institute for Continuing Education* meets the regulations of their state licensing/certification board.

More information is forthcoming upon approval from various continuing education boards. Please see the separate handout with current CE information updates.

Hotel Accommodations

The Sonesta Gwinnett Place Atlanta offers a special room rate for GAPT conference registrants at **\$129** per night plus per night taxes and other fees. Hotel reservations are required **before Friday, February 13, 2026**. Reservations can be made directly via:

- Online group link: <https://be.synxis.com/?adult=1&arrive=2026-03-12&chain=5157&child=0¤cy=USD&depart=2026-03-14&group=03122026GEOR&hotel=58939&level=hotel&locale=en-US&productcurrency=USD&rooms=1>



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E-Marketing Opportunity

Participants have the option to market their practice, services, and products at the 2026 GAPT Conference via an e-file within a GAPT PowerPoint presentation or in the conference registration bags for a fee of \$30 per page. Each payment covers one printed or electronic marketing material (or the option for both for \$55).

Participants need to pay using the [marketing registration](#) prior to submission of materials.

- Email the one-page marketing material (PowerPoint size) to info@gapt.org after confirmation of payment. (It is encouraged to make the marketing material information/verbiage big enough to be viewed on a presentation screen and to not crowd the information. Acceptable formats include .jpg, .tiff, and .pdf files.)
- Mail printed marketing materials to GAPT, 1350 Wooten Lake Rd NW #207, Kennesaw, GA 30144
- All materials must be received before **Friday, February 13, 2026** with confirmation of payment. Any marketing materials over one page (without payment) or emailed after the deadline will not be included and all fees paid will be forfeited.

Becoming a GAPT Gold Sponsor

Would you like to become a GAPT Gold sponsor?! If so, make payment via this [sponsorship registration](#) and email info@gapt.org with your marketing materials by February 28, 2026. Benefits include the following:

- 1) Three conference registration seats (not including CEs)
- 2) One vendor table with two representative seats
- 3) GAPT conference PowerPoint branding on both days of the conference
- 4) Printed marketing materials in the GAPT conference bag and the inclusion of branded materials to conference participants
- 5) GAPT website branding (before the conference and for at least one year after the conference);
- 6) Verbal acknowledgment during the conference with an option to share about services/products with conference participants
- 7) Personalized contact with a GAPT representative to assist with all needs. Email info@gapt.org to get the process started.

ADA Accommodations

GAPT is glad to make reasonable efforts to accommodate participants with different abilities, which will be made in accordance with the law. If the participant needs ADA accommodations, the participant needs to discuss their specific needs at least two weeks prior to the conference date via email at info@gapt.org.

Photos/Videos

GAPT reserves the right to take pictures and/or videotape during the conference. Your presence at the conference constitutes your consent to our use of your voice, image, and likeness for any purpose for no additional consideration, and you waive any rights to review or approve any such use. You release us from any claim or liability arising out of our use of your voice, image, and likeness.

Grievance

If a participant has a concern regarding any aspect of the conference, it is expected that the participant will address it with the training committee coordinators, **Gloria Juliao or Melissa Brown** via written documentation (info@gapt.org) aimed at achieving a satisfactory resolution for the participant. To assure fair treatment for all participants and attempts to anticipate problems, the board of directors may be included in the process.



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Thanks for reading this important GAPT Conference information.

We look forward to meeting you at the GAPT annual conference. If you have any questions or challenges, please contact info@gapt.org.