



**CORE WELLNESS**  
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## **Wanna Come Out and Play? The Creative Use of Games, Stories and Art with Children and Teens: 3 CE**

**Presented by:**  
**Liana Lowenstein**  
**MSW, RSW, CPT-S**

**To maximize this training:** Please print out the last 3 pages of this handout (Flowers and Weeds and Lollipop Tree) and prepare 3 sheets of paper and colored markers



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## ABOUT CORE WELLNESS

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## ABOUT THE PRESENTER

**Liana Lowenstein, MSW, RSW, CPT-S** is a Registered Social Worker, Certified Play Therapist-Supervisor, and Certified TF-CBT Therapist who has been working with children and their families in Toronto since 1988. She presents trainings across North America and abroad.

Recent speaking engagements include China, South Africa, Israel, England, and Australia. She provides clinical supervision to mental health practitioners, and consults to mental health agencies. Liana's 12 books on child and family therapy are known internationally for their innovative and practical techniques. She is winner of the Monica Herbert award for outstanding contribution to play therapy in Canada.



# **Wanna Come Out and Play?**

## **The Creative Use of Games, Stories, and Art with Children and Teens**



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# Benefits of Playful Activities

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- **Increases motivation for therapy**
- **Builds therapeutic rapport**
- **Increases self-disclosure**
- **Strengthens skills**

# Selecting Activities

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- **Does the activity fit the therapeutic needs of the client?**
- **Does the activity fit the phase of therapy and the level of risk required?**
- **Is the activity appropriate to the skill level of the client?**
- **Is there an availability of resources?**
- **How will the activity be introduced, processed, and brought to closure?**

# Processing Skills

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- **Ask open-ended exploratory questions**
- **Normalize**
- **Reflect content**
- **Reflect feeling**
- **Reflect client's non-verbal communication**
- **Express empathy and support**



# Ask Open-Ended Exploratory Questions

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Open-ended exploratory questions invite the client to share more

## Example

Child states: My parents fight a lot

Closed ended, leading question: Does your dad hit your mom?

Open ended, exploratory: Describe what you see and hear when your parents are fighting

## Practice

Child states: My dad gets angry a lot

Write down an open ended exploratory question:

# Normalize

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**Label the client's thoughts, feelings, and reactions as normal and commonplace. This reassures, builds trust, openness, self-respect.**

## **Statements that normalize**

- **I have heard a lot of kids say that**
- **That's a pretty common reaction**
- **I would feel that way too**

# Reflect Content

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**Reflect content: Repeat in slightly different words something the client has said. Helps child know you hear and understand**

## **Example**

**Child states: My parents fight a lot**

**Response: It sounds like you see a lot of fighting going on at home**

# Reflect Feelings

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**State what you believe the client is *feeling*, based on behavioral or verbal cues. Communicates understanding and acceptance of child's feelings and needs, helps child label and communicate their feelings. Begin the reflection with "you" (e.g., You feel...You look... You seem...)**

## **Example:**

**Child states: The abuse is my fault because I didn't say no**

**Therapist states: You feel guilty about the abuse.**

# Reflect Non-Verbal Communication

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**Reflect client's non-verbal communication such as facial expressions, body language**

## **Example:**

**Child states in a sad tone: It's been one year since my mom died. I really miss her.**

**Therapist states: You have a sad look on your face as you're talking about how much you miss your mom.**

## **Practice**

**Child hears a loud ambulance siren outside, a scared look comes across her face.**

**Therapist Response:**

# Express Empathy and Support

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**Express empathy and support through verbal and non-verbal means**

## **Example:**

**Child is talking about mom's death and begins to cry**

**Therapist leans forward toward the child and states in a soft tone of voice, "It's really sad that you have to grow up without a mom"**

## **Practice**

**Child is talking about her parent's divorce, then gets quiet and appears sad.**

**Therapist Response:**

# Art

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**Art therapy is the therapeutic use of art making, within a professional relationship, by people who experience trauma, illness, or challenges in living, and by people who seek personal development. Children's artwork can be used in clinical sessions as tools for projective testing and creative expression. Through this expressive arts medium, children's thoughts, feelings, and experiences can be translated into concrete images. Art therapy facilitates cathartic release, helps children to externalize their trauma, facilitates the release of tension and anxiety, and offers the child a novel way to communicate. There are a great variety of media choices when using art materials, including markers, paints, clay, wood, and sand. (American Art Therapy Association)**

# Benefits of Art Therapy

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- **Promotes self-expression**
- **Facilitates insight**
- **Helps the client manage and work through difficult experiences**
- **Allows the client to verbally and nonverbally communicate emotions**
- **Increases one's awareness and orientation (i.e. persons, places, dates, and times)**
- **Encourages healthy coping and problem-solving**
- **Facilitates better hand-eye coordination, fine and gross motor skills, and finger dexterity and speed**



# Guidelines for Processing Artwork

(Source: Betty Bedard-Bidwell)

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- **Don't project your own interpretations to the client's artwork. Instead, ask the client to explain the meaning of their artwork from their perspective.**
- **Be curious, assume you know nothing. This will stimulate the client to tell you more and help you formulate the questions to support the process.**
- **Have client share their experience of the art activity , i.e. their process and feelings about completing the task**
- **Have client share the art work itself, i.e. describe the picture**
- **Facilitate self discovery by asking client to elaborate on parts of the artwork**

# Guidelines for Processing Artwork

(Source: Betty Bedard-Bidwell)

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- Ask client to describe the artwork as if it were the person (using the word “I”), i.e. I am this flower, I have purple buds, etc.
- Have the client dialogue between two parts of the artwork, i.e. what is the cloud saying to the flower
- Explore meaning of color choice, i.e. why did you choose red, what does red mean to you?
- Enable the client to identify with the artwork, i.e. do you ever feel that way? In what way does that fit with your life?
- Watch for missing parts, empty spaces, and explore possible meaning, i.e. I noticed that the hands are missing, can you tell me about that? There is a large space between..., what should be there?

# Art

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## **Activity: Me Tree**

**Source: Alyson Propes, in: *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume 3*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2011**

## **Goals:**

- 1. Gather information about the client**
- 2. Expand therapeutic dialogue about the issues that matter most to the client**
- 3. Increase self awareness**

# Me Tree

**Have the client draw a tree and add the questions below (Instruct the client to wait until the tree has been drawn in its entirety before answering the questions written on the tree.)**

**Draw the base/roots of a tree. At the base of the tree (roots) write, “What are my roots?”**

**Draw the tree trunk. Along the trunk write, “What helps me stand tall and strong?”**

**Draw a hole in the tree with a little animal peeking out, write, “What am I hiding inside?”**

**Draw the branches. Along the branches write, “What am I reaching for?”**

**Draw some falling leaves and write, “What can I let go of?”**

**Draw the top of the tree. Then write at the top of the tree, “What am I growing into?”**

# Art

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## **Activity: Themed Family Portraits**

**Source: Bonnie Thomas, in: *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume 3*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2011**

### **Goals:**

- 1. Increase awareness of family dynamics**
- 2. Identify positive and negative perceptions of family members**

## **Themed Family Portraits**

**Explain to the client or family that they will be creating a picture. The picture will be a metaphorical or symbolic picture of their family.**

**Refer to the list of Theme Ideas, have each person choose one theme and then draw a family portrait based on the theme.**

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# Themed Family Portraits

## Theme Ideas:

- ◆ My family as...fairy tale or superhero characters
- ◆ My family as...buildings in a town
- ◆ My family as...weather
- ◆ My family as...an article of clothing
- ◆ My family as...types of food or candy

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# Art

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**Activity: Feelings Mish Mosh**

**Source: Paper Dolls and Paper Airplanes:  
Therapeutic Activities for Sexually Traumatized  
Children, Crisci, Lay, & Lowenstein, 1997**

**Goals:**

- 1) Increase feelings vocabulary**
- 2) Verbally express a range of feelings**
- 3) Increase ability to talk openly about the trauma**



## Feelings Mish Mosh

Introduce the activity by stating, "Everyone has feelings-comfortable feelings like happy and excited, and uncomfortable feelings like sad and scared. It is normal and okay to have all kinds of feelings. Sometimes we feel mixed up because we have so many different feelings. Today, we are going to make a mish-mosh of mixed-up Feelings."

Fill a zip-lock bag with 1/2 cup of water, add several drops of yellow food coloring. As the yellow food coloring is dropped into the bag, say: "Let's pretend this yellow food coloring is for the happy feelings we have. What are some reasons children may feel happy?" Give the child an opportunity to respond. Proceed in the same manner with the other food coloring (for example, blue for sad, red for mad, green for scared). After several drops of each color have been added to the bag, zip the bag so it is tightly sealed. Be careful at this point not to shake the bag, so the mixture maintains its "rainbow" appearance.

## **Feelings Mish Mosh**

**Explain: "These colors show different feelings we have. If we shake the bag, the feelings get all mixed up and look kind of yucky. (The therapist shakes the bag.) When we have lots of different feelings, it can be very confusing and we might feel like we have a mish-mosh of mixed-up feelings. That's why it is important to talk about the mixed-up feelings so we can let the feelings out and start to feel better."**

**The therapist and child take turns talking about times when they felt happy, sad, mad, and scared. As the feelings are shared, the therapist opens the bag and slowly pours the liquid out into a sink or a cup, thus metaphorically letting out the feelings. At the end, exclaim, "We let out our feelings and now we don't feel filled with a mish-mosh of mixed-up feelings!"**

# Art

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## **Activity: Messages in Art**

**Source: Gil, in *Creative Family Therapy Techniques*,  
Edited by Lowenstein, 2010**

## **Goals:**

- 1. Increase open communication within the family**
- 2. Increase personal insight into thoughts and feelings**

## Messages In Art

Sometimes it can be difficult to verbally express thoughts and feelings. Expressions through art can be a helpful way to release and communicate feelings. Choose a family member with whom you would like to communicate or share a message.

Use the art supplies to create your message.

Once completed, explain your messages and the meaning of the materials you selected.

## Messages In Art: Process Questions

1. What was it like to communicate your message through art?

2. How did you feel during the message creation and message delivery part of this activity?

3. How did it feel to receive the message from your family member?

4. What did you learn through this activity about ways to communicate with your family about your thoughts and feelings?

# Art

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**Activity: Storm Cloud**

**Source: Nicole Batiste**

**Goals:**

- 1. Verbally express feelings of sadness and worry.**
- 2. Verbally identify key issues to address in therapy.**

## **Storm Cloud**

**Clients utilize various art materials to create a storm cloud. Process questions might include: What negative thoughts/messages are in your storm cloud? What sad/scary things are hanging over your life? What stressors or worries are in your storm cloud? Next, clients draw raindrops to specifically reflect what is inside their storm cloud. For example, the raindrops may say divorce, death of a loved one, or friendship problems.**

# Art

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**Activity: Coping Skills Sun**

**Source: Nicole Batiste**

**Goals:**

- 1. Verbally identify positive feelings.**
- 2. Identify and implement healthy coping skills.**



## **Coping Skills Sun**

**The client creates a sun filled with positive emotions, and adds stars to represent strengths, coping skills, or supports. Process questions include: When do you feel best? What makes you feel safe/calm? Who loves and supports you? What do you do to make yourself feel better?**

**The client can then make coping cards to use in times of stress.**

# Art

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**Activity: Our Good-Bye Hello Card**

**Source: *Techniques, Techniques, Techniques*  
Noziska, 2008**

**Goals:**

- 1. Identify progress made in therapy**
- 2. Verbally identify feelings about ending therapy**
- 3. Facilitate a positive ending to therapy**

## **Our Good-Bye, Hello Card**

**Prior to the last session, a photo of therapist and child is taken and developed. During the last session, therapist explains the end of therapy as a “good-bye” and a “hello” to a new part of life. To represent this, therapist and child work together to create a “good-bye, hello” card. Pictures, symbols, and words are drawn/written on the outside of the card to represent goals achieved in therapy. Child can add favorites memories from therapy. The inside of the card is decorated with pictures, symbols, and words to represent the child’s future plans, hopes, and goals. Therapist facilitates discussion regarding feelings about ending therapy.**

## **Our Good-Bye, Hello Card**

**Sentence completions can help the client such as:**

**When I think about ending therapy I feel...**

**Something I learned in therapy that has helped me is...**

**The skill I learned in therapy I use the most is...**

**My proudest moment in therapy is when...**

**My favorite memory from therapy is when...**

**A good decision I can make in the future is to...**

**When I am older I am hopeful that...**

# Art Therapy Directives

**Past present future**: This drawing should reflect where you have been, who you are today, and how see yourself in the future.

**Favorite quote**: Take the words of wisdom from someone else and turn them into something visually inspiring.

**Invention**: This invention should do something that can help make you happier– no matter what that is.

**Perfect day**: Think about what constitutes a perfect day to you and draw or collage it. What about this can you make happen today?

**Hurts and Safety**: Draw two pictures: 1) Ways you were hurt in the past; 2) Ways you are being well cared for now.

# Storytelling

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**Therapeutic storytelling can be very effective in addressing children's underlying issues and concerns. Children's stories can give the therapist rich and valuable information about their inner world. Bibliotherapy, or the reading and sharing of books that relate to issues the child may be dealing with, can be used to alter the child's values, beliefs, behaviors and feelings, and help the child to feel that he or she is not alone. Another powerful use of storytelling is to have the therapist tell stories to their child clients. Stories can be used in therapy to suggest new possibilities, to intersperse suggestions, and to establish hope and optimism by exposing the client to a positive ending. Metaphors can be integrated into stories to pass the conscious level and enter into the unconscious of the client. Children integrate the components of stories and develop healthier perceptions of their conflicts.**

# Steps to Writing Therapeutic Stories

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- **Decide ahead of time the theme or issue that will be addressed in the story (Stories for the beginning phase of therapy should depict a problem that's similar but not the same as the child's so the child can relate without it being overly threatening. Once the child is more engaged in therapy, the stories can more clearly reflect the client's challenges)**
- **Limit yourself to one or two themes.**
- **Create the characters for the story. Create one character to represent the child. This should be a character that the child can identify with, such as a child in a similar situation, or an animal. Create another character that the child will accept wisdom or authority from, such as a fairy godmother, a wise owl, an angel, or a coach.**

# Steps to Writing Therapeutic Stories

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- **Select a setting for the story using metaphors that fit the situation and descriptive detail that will captivate the interest of the child**
- **Determine the overt and covert feelings that will be integrated into the story (the story should mirror the feelings the client is experiencing)**
- **Determine the crisis or challenge in the story that is related to the themes or issues defined in step 1**
- **Incorporate an ending that provides a healthy resolution to the child's problem**
- **Highlight the message or moral that is learned from the story**



# Common Themes for Therapeutic Stories

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- **Anger**
- **Sadness**
- **Fear**
- **Guilt**
- **Belonging**
- **Loss**
- **Loyalty**
- **Change**
- **Safety**
- **Self-esteem**

# Types of Therapeutic Stories (Claman 1993)

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## Mirror Story

The therapist reflects back the story created by the child, with minor alterations. This technique is useful when the child has created a story that reflects satisfactory adaption, or the meaning of the story is unclear. Outcomes can be slightly altered. The primary purpose is to support the child's self-expression and competence.

# Types of Therapeutic Stories (Claman 1993)

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## Suggestive-Directive Story

**This type of story encourages the child to begin to think differently about themselves and their problems, and to develop a sense that they can master them. Claman identifies six major themes that can be covered in this type of story: Trust, assertiveness, persisting, peer-relationships, value of talking, and value of exploring.**

# Types of Therapeutic Stories (Claman 1993)

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## Indirect-Interpretive Story

**This type of story focuses on current problems. For example, a child with authority issues can be told a story about an animal in the jungle who learns to get along with the Lion, who is King of the jungle.**

# Types of Therapeutic Stories (Strayhorn 1988)

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## Modeling Stories

These stories identify a specific skill the child is working on. For example, if a child is working on “listening the first time” all the stories will be about that skill.

# Types of Therapeutic Stories (Strayhorn 1988)

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## Modeling Stories

These stories identify a specific skill the child is working on. For example, if a child is working on “listening the first time” all the stories will be about that skill.

# Strayhorn's Types of Skills

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## *Closeness, trusting, and relationship building*

Engaging in social conversation, listening and empathizing, being kind and helpful.

## *Handling separation and independence*

Handling rejection, tolerating separation from close others, dealing with disapproval or criticism.

# Strayhorn's Types of Skills

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## *Handling joint decisions and interpersonal conflicts*

Joint problem solving, conciliation and conceding, assertion and dominance, forgiving other people.

## *Dealing with frustration and unfavorable events*

Handling frustration, feeling appropriate fear, feeling appropriate guilt, tolerating thoughts and impulses that should not be acted upon.



# Strayhorn's Types of Skills

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## *Celebrating good things and feeling pleasure*

Handling approval and compliments, feeling pleasure from doing kind and loving acts, enjoying physical affection.

## *Working for delayed gratification*

Denying present gratification for future gain, obeying reasonable authority, developing competence that brings approval.

# Strayhorn's Types of Skills

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**Cognitive processing through words, symbols, and images** Using words to conceptualize the world, recognizing and being able to verbalize feelings, letting thoughts mediate between words and action.

**An adaptive sense of direction and purpose**

**Aiming to make circumstances better**

# Storytelling

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## Activity: Flowers and Weeds

Source: Greg Lubimiv, in *Creative Family Therapy Techniques* (Edited by Lowenstein, 2010)

## Goals:

1. Identify issues that are contributing to the problematic behavior
2. Identify strengths within the family
3. Set goals to be addressed in treatment

## **Flowers and the Weeds**

**1.Read “The Flowers and the Weeds” (See Lowenstein, p. 44)**

**2.Explain that our lives can be very much like Belle’s. We sometimes have weeds (problems) that grow and get in the way of our flowers (our healthy growth). However, weeds, or problems, can be very powerful and very difficult to get rid of, especially when we try to pull them all out (deal with them) at the same time.**

**3.Have the family members create flowers using construction paper and Popsicle sticks.**

**4.Ask family members to write on a flower something that is a strength for the family or something that is going well, i.e. motivated to get help, able to have fun together.**



## **Flowers and the Weeds**

**5. Have the family members cut out some weeds using the grey cardboard.**

**6. Have the family members identify the problems in the family and write each problem on one of the weeds.**

**7. Have the family members tape the weeds over the flowers so they are covered.**

**8. Ask the family if they think the flowers will grow strong and beautiful. The answer should be no. Ask why and relate this to the story.**

**9. Ask the family if they can deal with all of the problems at the same time, and why it might be difficult to do so. The correct response is that they need to deal with one weed/problem at a time.**

## **Flowers and the Weeds**

**10. Through discussion have the family identify which weed/problem they will work on first. It is often best to guide the family to a problem that is likely to succeed to provide them with a sense of hope and positive energy. Develop a plan to deal with that weed/problem.**

**11. It is helpful to identify the first three weeds/problems that will be addressed in later sessions so that after the first is “pulled out” everyone knows which will be dealt with next.**

**12. In later sessions, the metaphor of weeds and flowers can be referred to, with an emphasis on the family’s positive growth and change.**

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# Storytelling

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## Activity: Ali's Story

Source: Creative Interventions for Children of Divorce, Lowenstein, 2006

### Goals:

1. Normalize feelings associated with divorce
2. Verbally articulate a range of feelings related to the divorce.

# **Ali's Story:**

**Step 1) Go to: [www.lianalowenstein.com](http://www.lianalowenstein.com)**

**Step 2) Click on: Articles for Professionals**

**Step 3) Click on: Ali's Story**

**Step 4) Enter code: ali.divorce**



# **Mutual Storytelling Technique**

**Richard Gardner**

**The child first tells a story, the therapist analyzes the psychodynamic meaning of the story, and then tells one of his own. The therapist's story contains the same characters and a similar setting, but healthier adaptations and resolutions of conflicts.**

# Gameplay

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**Gameplay is a form of therapy that utilizes formal, organized games as psychotherapeutic tools. Games can be used in therapy as a vehicle to engage the client, obtain valuable diagnostic information, enable the client to verbalize and express thoughts and feelings, enhance ego-functioning, strengthen cognitive and social skills, and practice self-control and frustration tolerance.**

**-Schaefer and Reed, 2001**

# Therapeutic Value of Games

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- Pleasure
- Establish rapport
- Facilitate assessment and diagnosis
- Self-expression
- Ego enhancement
- Cognitive
- Socialization
- Insight
- Progression of therapy
- Tension reduction

# Criteria for Game Selection

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- **Familiar or easy to learn**
- **Appropriate for the individual or group in terms of age, interests, and abilities**
- **Appropriate to the stage of therapy**
- **Inherent properties which are related to the therapeutic outcomes desired**
- **Can be played several times within the session to allow for immediate application of what was learned from the previous play**

# Points of Departure

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**As children relax and involve themselves in the game, they often begin to talk about feelings and ideas that are important to them. An important concept in game play is “points of departure” in which players “leave” the game to discuss psychological issues expressed during the game. A key aspect of game play therapy is managing and guiding discussion back and forth between the safety of the game and the realistic discussion of issues through points of departure.**

**- Schaefer & Reid, 2001**

# Therapist Verbalizations During Game Play

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- **Validate:** “You feel frustrated when you move a stick”
- **Empathize:** “This is a difficult turn for you because the sticks are so close together”
- **Reflect child’s feelings:** “You feel proud of yourself for getting that stick”
- **Model open expression:** “I feel jealous that you’re winning”
- **Model skill:** “I’m going to go slow and really concentrate”
- **Compliment:** “Great job waiting patiently for your turn”
- **Cheerlead:** “Go Johnny, go Johnny, go Johnny!!”
- **Demonstrate playfulness:** “Woohoo!”

# Games: Therapist's Turn

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**Consider whether to play to win or allow client to win on purpose. To win every game can damage client's self-esteem. Allowing client to win every time will be obvious to the client and will negatively impact the therapeutic relationship. Consider what to disclose when answering questions. Be appropriate and only disclose if therapeutically beneficial to client.**

# Strategies to Deal with Cheating

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**Affirm client's need to win: "You're changing the rules because you really want to win"**

**Verbalize how it feels: "It's no fun playing with someone who cheats"**

**Mirror the cheating then invite the child to problem-solve**

**Acknowledge the desire to cheat but model pro-social behavior:  
"I really feel like cheating because I want to win, but I'm going to play by the rules so this game is fair for both of us"**



# Rapport-Building Games

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**Rapport-building games can be used in the first session to help therapist and client get acquainted, increase comfort in therapy, and encourage participation.**

# Rapport-Building Games

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## **Activity: Five Favorites**

**Source: Creative CBT Interventions for Children with Anxiety, Lowenstein, 2016**

### **Goals:**

- 1) Begin to establish the therapeutic relationship**
- 2) Gather information about the client**
- 3) Increase open communication**

# Rapport-Building Games

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**Activity: 21**

**Source: Lowenstein (Unpublished)**

**Goals:**

- 1) Begin to establish the therapeutic relationship**
- 2) Gather information about the client**
- 3) Increase open communication**

# 21

The aim of the 21 Card Game is to get 21 or as close to as possible. Number cards have their face value, jacks, kings and queens are worth 10. Ace can be either 1 or 11. Deal each player, including the dealer, two cards - both face down. Look at your two cards (make sure not to show your cards to other players). Add up your cards' total. When it is your turn and you wish to request another card from the dealer, say "hit me". Do this until you are satisfied with your card total or until you get over 21. "Staying" is keeping the hand you've been dealt. It can be done as soon as you are satisfied with your card count. Indicate your desire to stay by doing a single motion wave with the palm of your hand facing down. After all players have seen their cards, the dealer shows his/her first card. Based on this card, players decide to hit or stay their hands. The dealer then reveals their second card and hits or stays their hand appropriately. At this point, all other hands are revealed, and a winner is determined.

The winner of each round gets to ask the other player a "Getting to know you" question.

<b>What's one of your favorite snack or junk foods?</b>	<b>Who is one of your favorite celebrities?</b>	<b>What's one of your favorite TV shows?</b>
<b>What's one of your favorite songs?</b>	<b>What's one of your favorite places to hang out?</b>	<b>What's a food you really hate?</b>
<b>What's one of your favorite sports?</b>	<b>What's something that really bugs you?</b>	<b>What's one of your favorite movies?</b>

# Rapport-Building Games

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**Activity: How About You?**

**Source: Creative CBT Interventions for Children with Anxiety, Lowenstein, 2016**

**Goals:**

- 1) Begin to establish the therapeutic relationship**
- 2) Gather information about the client**
- 3) Increase open communication**

# Assessment and Communication Games

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**Games can be used to facilitate self-expression and communication. Communication between the therapist and the child is an essential element of psychotherapy. However, many children are reluctant, or have difficulty talking about their thoughts and feelings. Games can be used to help children disclose thoughts and feelings, and to communicate fantasy material. The diagnostic information gathered during game play can then be used to formulate the case and plan for ongoing treatment.**

# Assessment and Communication Games

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**Activity: Snack N Check-in**

**Source: Stefanie Sherbon, YouTube**

**Goals:**

- (1) Assess problem-specific issues**
- (2) Increase verbalization of feelings**



# Assessment and Communication Games

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**Activity: The Dice Game**

**Source: *Creative Interventions for Bereaved Children*, Lowenstein, 2006**

**Goals:**

- (1) Assess problem-specific issues**
- (2) Increase verbalization of feelings**

# My Special Person's Death: The Dice Game

The *Dice Game* will help you share your thoughts and feelings about your special person's death. To play the game, roll the dice, and if you roll an even number, answer a question below in order from 1 to 5. If you roll an odd number, you get a small prize! Play until all the questions below have been answered.

1. This is who told me my special person died, and what they said:
2. This is what I did and felt right after I found out my special person died:
3. This is how others in my family reacted to my special person's death:
4. This is what I know about when, where, and how my special person died:
5. These are the people I can talk to when I feel upset:

# Assessment and Communication Games

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**Activity: Red or Black Card Game**

**Source: Adapted from: Cory Helps Kids Cope with Sexual Abuse: Playful Activities for Traumatized Children, Lowenstein, 2014**

**Goals:**

- (1) Assess problem-specific issues**
- (2) Increase verbalization of feelings**

# **Red or Black Card Game**

**This activity will help me understand your feelings so I can help you. Since it can be hard to talk about feelings, let's play a game to make it easier. To play, pick the top card from the deck of cards. If you get a red card, get one point. If you get a black card, answer one of the questions below. You get two points when you answer the question. If you pick jack, queen or king, get three points!**

**At the end of the game, trade in points for prizes:**

**1-10 points = 1 prize**

**11 or more points = 2 prizes**

# **Red or Black Card Game: Domestic Violence**

- (1) Tell about a time you felt really happy or excited.**
- (2) Tell about a time you felt really worried or scared.**
- (3) How did you feel when the hurting happened in your family?**
- (4) Fill in the blank: I didn't tell anyone about the hurting in my family because I worried that ...**
- (5) Fill in the blank: I think the hurting in my family happened because...**
- (6) Fill in the blank: The hurting in my family wouldn't have happened if...**
- (7) How do you feel toward the person who did the hurting in your family? What do you think should happen to him/her?**
- (8) Where and with whom do you feel least / most safe?**

## **Red or Black Card Game: Check-In**

- 1. Two good things happening in my life right now.**
- 2. Two things that are making me feel sad, angry, or worried.**
- 3. Two strategies I learned in therapy that help me.**
- 4. One thing that Mom / Dad have done recently that made me feel upset and one thing that Mom / Dad have done recently that made me feel happy.**
- 5. Two things I want help with.**

# Assessment and Communication Games

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**Activity: Basketball**

**Source: Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth, Lowenstein, 1999**

**Goals:**

- 1) Normalize that everyone has happy and sad feelings**
- 2) Gather information about the client**
- 3) Increase open communication**

# Basketball

Throw the ball toward the basketball hoop. If you successfully throw the ball through the hoop, pick a card from the "happy face" pile. These questions relate to happy experiences in a person's life. If you miss the basket, pick a card from the "sad face" pile. These questions relate to unhappy experiences in a person's life. The game continues until all the questions have been answered. Get a point each time you answer a question. At the end of the game, trade in points for prizes:

**1-10 points = 1 prize**

**11 or more points = 2 prizes**



# Assessment and Communication Games

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**Activity: Feelings Hide and Seek**

**Source: Techniques, Techniques, Techniques,  
Kenney-Noziska**

**Goals:**

- 1) Increase feelings vocabulary**
- 2) Verbally express a range of feelings**
- 3) Increase ability to talk openly about salient issues**

## **Feelings Hide and Seek**

**Prior to the session, the therapist writes various feelings on index cards. If desired, the word “Prize” can be written on several cards. The index cards are hidden around the room at varying levels of difficulty. The therapist explains that people often hide their feelings instead of showing how they feel. Even though this may seem effective, “hidden” feelings still exist and continue to bother the person until the feelings are brought out into the open and addressed. In this game, feelings start out hidden and through the game of hide-and-seek, are found and discussed. Family members take turns (or work in teams) finding the hidden feeling cards and processing a time they experienced the feeling written on the card. If a player finds one of the prize cards, they select a prize from the prize box.**

# Assessment and Communication Games

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**Activity: Feelings Face Off**

**Source: Play-Based Interventions for Autism Spectrum Disorder and Other Developmental Disabilities, Grant, 2016**

**Goals:**

- 1) Increase feelings vocabulary**
- 2) Verbally express a range of feelings**
- 3) Increase ability to talk openly about salient issues**

## Feelings Face-Off

Set a timer for three minutes. Therapist and client take turns naming different emotions, and writing each emotion on a piece of paper. When a player repeats an emotion or cannot think of an emotion then the other player wins. Both players win if they are able to list different emotions until the timer goes off.

Next, the client circles any emotions he felt in the past week. Then the client picks 3 emotions he circled and describes what made him feel that way.

# Ego-Enhancing Games

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**Ego-enhancing games typically emphasize competition in order to observe and address the child's ego functioning such as self-esteem, impulse control, frustration tolerance, reality testing, and problem-solving. Therapeutic interventions aim to enhance specific ego skills and teach adaptive behaviors.**

# Ego-Enhancing Games

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**Activity: May I Thank You Card Game**

**Source: Leben, in: *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families*, Lowenstein (Ed.), 2008**

**Goals:**

- (1) Increase non-verbal communication skills**
- (2) Increase pro-social behavior such as eye contact, problem-solving, following rules, teamwork**

## **May I... Thank You Card Game**

**This game will help us practice good manners! It's called the "May I Thank You" Card Game. I'm going to begin by distributing the cards equally amongst the players. The object of the game is to collect 'four-of-a-kind' and each of the four-card set is worth one point. To ask for a card, a player will call the name of another player, followed by "May I ...". So, if I want a card from John, I'd say, "John, may I have the two of hearts please?" If John has the two of hearts, he will be honest, pick out that card and hand it to me. I MUST say "Thank You" before I touch the card he offers. If I forget to say "Thank You" and grab the card, John keeps that card, then he takes his turn to ask others for cards.**

## **May I... Thank You Card Game**

**If John does not have the two of hearts, he will reply, “Sorry, I do not have that card,” Then John takes his turn to ask others for cards. If I use good manners and obtain a card from another player, I can continue to ask others for cards until I'm turned down by another player. Once a player has collected 'four-of-a-kind,' he places the 4 cards on the table and earns a point. The game ends when all sets of 'four-of-a-kind' have been collected. At the end, all players must shake the hand of the winner and say, “good game.”**



# Ego-Enhancing Games

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**Activity: No Rules Pick Up Sticks**

**Source: Scott Riviere**

**Goals:**

- (1) Increase pro-social behavior, i.e. turn-taking, following rules, focusing**
- (2) Articulate the value and purpose of rules**

# Ego-Enhancing Games

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**Activity: Getting Along with Others Game**

**Source: *More Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth*, Lowenstein, 2002**

**Goals:**

- (1) Increase pro-social behavior, i.e. active listening skills, effective communication, assertive behavior**
- (2) Provide opportunity for skills rehearsal**

# Ego-Enhancing Games

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**Activity: The Perfection Game**

**Source: Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth, Lowenstein, 1999**

**Goals:**

- (1) Increase positive self-statements**
- (2) Identify positive traits about self**

# Termination Games

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**Termination is an important part of the therapeutic process. Games can be incorporated into the termination phase of therapy to facilitate important issues, such as highlighting the client's accomplishments in therapy, expressing feelings about ending therapy, and saying goodbye.**

# Termination Games

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**Activity: Minute to Win It**

**Source: Lowenstein (Unpublished)**

**Goals:**

- (1) Review therapeutic gains**
- (2) Provide a positive termination experience**

## **Minute to Win It**

**We're going to play a game to help you review some of the things you learned in therapy. Below is a list of tasks for you to complete. If you complete the task in under one minute, you get a point. At the end, trade in points for prizes: If you get 1-8 points you get 1 prize, if you get 9 or more points you get 2 prizes.**

# Minute to Win It

- 1. Write down 5 emotions in under 1 minute.**
- 2. Write down 3 things that make most kids upset. Do this in under 1 minute.**
- 3. Write down 3 healthy coping strategies you can use if you feel angry, anxious, or upset. Do this in under 1 minute.**
- 4. Pretend you are angry or anxious. Stomp your feet 5 times then do deep breathing properly 3 times. Do it in under 1 minute.**
- 5. Bonus point: Crumple a piece of paper to form a ball. Stand behind the designated line. Throw the crumpled paper toward the trash can. You have one minute to get it into the trash can.**
- 6. Draw a picture of yourself using a healthy coping strategy (in under 1 minute).**
- 7. Write down 3 things you learned in therapy in under 1 minute.**
- 8. Bonus point: Blow up a balloon and knot it. Keep it in the air without touching the ground for 1 minute.**

# Termination Games

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**Activity: Lollipop Tree**

**Source: *Paper Dolls and Paper Airplanes:  
Therapeutic Exercises for Sexually Traumatized  
Children*, Crisci, Lay, and Lowenstein, 1997**

**Goals:**

- (1) Review and celebrate therapeutic gains**
- (2) Provide a positive termination experience**



# Lollipop Tree

**This game will help us talk about what you learned in therapy. Answer a question then color in one of the lollipops on your worksheet. Repeat until you have answered all five questions and all the lollipops have been colored in. Once all the lollipops have been colored in, I have a surprise for you!**

- 1.You did many different activities in therapy. Which activity helped you the most?**
- 2.Children have different feelings about ending therapy. Some children feel happy to end therapy, some children feel upset about ending therapy. How do you feel about ending therapy?**
- 3.You did a great job talking about feelings. Tell about something that makes you feel sad. Tell about something that makes you feel happy.**
- 4.You have learned many ways to help yourself through tough times. What are some ways you can help yourself feel better when you are upset?**
- 5.What was your favorite moment in therapy?**

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**Wanna Come Out and Play? The  
Creative Use of Games, Stories and  
Art with Children and Teens: 3 CE**

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## The Flowers and the Weeds

Source: Greg Lubimiv in: *Creative Family Therapy Techniques*, Edited By Lowenstein, 2010

Once upon a time, there was a small flower named Belle, who lived in the corner of a large garden. As Belle grew up she did not notice that around her were some weed seeds that had blown from another garden. The weeds had already begun to sprout, but, still, they were not in the way, so Belle did not think about them.

One morning Belle woke up – it was still dark and she was cold and very thirsty. She thought it must be too early in the morning so she went back to sleep. She woke up a few hours later, but it was still dark and cold and dry. What had happened to the sun, she wondered. Suddenly she noticed a flicker of light above her. It was the sun...but something was in the way. She then noticed that all around her the little weeds had grown into huge weeds and now they were taking away her sunlight, her water, and her space to grow.

Belle asked the weeds to leave but they said they would not. Belle reached down and grabbed a bunch of them. She pulled and pulled but they were too strong. If only she had pulled them out when they were tiny and had no roots.

As the weeds grew bigger and stronger, Belle became weaker and less colorful. Belle felt there was no hope. Then one dark morning she heard a voice from below her. "Hi there," the voice said.

Belle looked down and saw a ground hog. Belle told the ground hog to go away, but it just sat there and looked at her. "Why don't you get rid of these weeds and enjoy the beautiful sun...it is a great day out," said the groundhog.

Belle cried and cried and then told the groundhog her story. The groundhog nodded his head in understanding. He said there was a way to solve the problem and asked the flower if she wanted to have some help. Belle nodded yes.

The groundhog said if they worked together he could help her pull out the weeds. They grabbed a bunch of weeds and started to pull together. They pulled and pulled and pulled, but the weeds did not budge. Belle was ready to give up. Suddenly, the groundhog started to laugh out loud and said, "I am so silly. I forgot the lesson my grandfather taught me about weeds. He told me if I ever faced strong weeds to pull them out one at a time, never in a bunch."

Belle nodded. That made sense. Belle chose one of the weeds and they pulled together. They pulled and pulled and slowly, but surely, the weed came out of the ground. She then picked another weed and together they pulled. Soon all the weeds were gone. Belle looked up at the beautiful sun and the warmth of the sunlight felt so good. She took a big drink of water from the earth. She started to grow again and soon she bloomed into a strong, beautifully colored flower.

Every morning from then on, Belle would wake up and take a big stretch. She would then look around her and pull out any small weeds that may have grown overnight, because when they were small they were easy to pull.

Groundhog would come by from time to time for a visit and both of them would lie out in the sun and talk.

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### **Questions: The Flowers and the Weeds**

1. What's the main theme or issue?
2. How might a client identify with Belle?
3. Who is the "wise" character and what does Belle learn from this character?
4. What is the message or moral that the client can learn from this story?

LOLLIPOP TREE WORKSHEET

