

Purpose

Exploring My Self-Esteem draws out a child's feelings about himself or herself. By talking about personal experiences and their impact, a child can begin to reveal more about self-perception. Many children find it much less threatening to talk about such matters in the context of play than to answer direct questions. Often, too, a child may not understand or have the language to adequately describe his or her feelings. Game play offers a mechanism through which to discuss them.

Methods

When playing, the therapist should resist the urge to allow the child to win. After all, life doesn't work that way, losing is part of life, and the child will have most trust in a clinician who plays by the rules, honestly. The child should be comfortable and at ease in order to get the most benefit from the game.

There are several ways *Exploring My Self-Esteem* allows players to express themselves. "How I Feel" Cards allow the child to complete sentences related to both positive and negative events in everyday life. For instance, a player may have to complete the sentence "What worries me most is..." or "My mother is happy with me when...." In this way, the child can express a range of reactions and emotions related predominantly to self-esteem.

Similarly, when a child enters one of the eight worlds on the gameboard, he or she is asked to tell any story that comes to mind. When a player lands in "Play World," for example, he or she can tell any story that relates to playing. "Sad World" asks the child to tell a story about being sad. The child is free to talk about issues that are important to him or her within the confines of eight broad themes. Through their storytelling, players give professionals information that will be useful in their treatment.

How to Play *Exploring My Self-Esteem*

Contents: 1 die, 6 pawns, 50 chips, 59 "How I Feel" Cards,
1 Blank Card which can be customized by the therapist.

1. Each player rolls the die to determine who goes first. Then all players choose a pawn and place it in the start position.
2. With each turn, a player rolls the die and moves his or her pawn along the gameboard path the number of spaces designated by the die.
Note: Players will land on a question mark, a spinner symbol, or a square with instructions to move ahead or back. Each requires a different activity, described below.
3. When a player lands on a spinner symbol, he or she will use the spinner. If the spinner points to a number, the player moves his or her pawn to the "World" corresponding to that number. If the spinner points to a "take chips" option, the player collects the designated number of chips.
4. Once the player has arrived in one of the "Worlds," he or she tells a story that relates to the theme of the "World."
5. After telling the story, the player collects a chip and moves to the square occupied by the player furthest along the path, thus "joining the leader." If the player chooses not to tell a story, he or she may move forward but not collect a chip.
6. When a player lands on a question mark, he or she draws one of the purple "How I Feel" Cards. The player completes the sentence on the card and collects a chip. If the player chooses not to complete the sentence, he or she does not collect a chip.
7. When a player lands on a space with written instructions, he or she follows those instructions on how to proceed.
8. When a player lands on a square where a white arrow starts, he or she can slide to where the arrow ends. No chips are collected for this move.
9. When all players have reached the end, the game is over.

How to Win

The game has two goals: to finish first and to collect the most chips. The player who finishes first may or may not have the most chips; thus there can be two winners.

Good luck and have fun!

Exploring My Self-Esteem™

Ages 5-12

Arley Loeffler, LCSW

How to Use *Exploring My Self-Esteem*

Exploring My Self-Esteem is designed to assist clinicians, school psychologists, and school counselors in their work with children. Self-esteem is a prominent issue for many children, and *Exploring My Self-Esteem* provides a perfect framework for addressing self-esteem in a comfortable, collaborative manner. It is important to remember that *Exploring My Self-Esteem* is a helpful tool for clinicians but should not be considered therapy in and of itself.

Paraprofessionals who are trained in nondirective play approaches, and are under close supervision, can also use *Exploring My Self-Esteem*. They can respond to children's stories by listening and obtaining clarification but should not be asked to examine in depth the material a child presents.

Exploring My Self-Esteem can be used in a small group or one-on-one clinical situation. The therapist should draw on personal experiences, sharing stories about feelings and self-perception, while remembering that it is most helpful to couch stories in a context familiar to the child (e.g., "When I was about your age..." or "When I was in third grade I remember..."). Through sharing personal stories about self-esteem, the clinician models open expression of feelings. Hearing these stories helps the child to know that his or her feelings are normal and that impulses resulting from strong feelings can indeed be managed. Of course, adults should not relay stories that are too private or sensitive—the therapy is for the child after all.

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