

INTRODUCTION

Teaching, learning, growing and changing by playing games? Is this possible? If you play the games and do the activities that are found in this book, you will find the answer to this question and at the same time you will find yourself having lots of fun!

Games are powerful tools that can be used in therapy, and of course games are fun. People use different tools to build a house, fix a car, cultivate a garden or to make something old look new. In therapy tools are needed to build a team out of a group of people who are working together, to help individuals who feel stuck in their old ways renew life, and to help a person grow emotionally into a better person. Games in therapy can also help people look at the problems they are dealing with through a different perspective (the activity) so they can heal and live a healthy, full life.

Games have therapeutic value in themselves – the reason people who are depressed are encouraged to engage in activities and why people at a fair or carnival are smiling and having a good time. Families are encouraged to build better relationships with each other by playing together and by participating in games that are enjoyable and fun for all. Think about your own life and the things that you do that are fun and enjoyable. How do these activities make you feel and how do they help you in your daily life? The answer to this question should be that the fun games you play and activities that you enjoy help you feel better, both emotionally and physically (otherwise you would chose to do something else during your

free time). Games get you involved with other people, build relationships among individuals, make everyone equal and most of all promote laughter to help people have a good time. If you don't have any activities in your own life that bring you this kind of feeling, perhaps you need to incorporate more time into your life where you are engaged in pleasurable, healthy, fun activities. Since you bought this book, the likelihood is that you already know that games have a natural therapeutic value and you want to learn more about how to enhance that value when using these games with the group/s or individual people you wish to help.

When a game is used as a therapeutic tool, it should focus on specific goals or objectives, plus do all of the things mentioned above. When a game has a goal of improving teamwork, self-esteem, coping skills, etc. the game can be focused in a new therapeutic direction and thereby enhance the learning for all those involved. One game can focus on many different goals at a time or a single game can be altered so that the goal for the game is different each time it is played.

The discussion that takes place during a game or afterwards is the most important element in a therapeutic game. The discussion can turn an ordinary game into a therapeutic learning experience by focusing on goals, behavior and observations from the game. THE BIG WIND BLOWS (page 208) is a game in the self-discovery section that is a good example of a simple game that can be changed into a therapeutic learning experience by simply discussing the things that occurred during the game. This game is also a good example of a game that can be altered many times to create a goal centered activity that can help people focus on the treatment issues that they are working on.

In the game THE BIG WIND BLOWS everyone stands on a separate piece of paper in a circle. One person stands in the middle of the circle and says something that is true about him/herself. Everyone else must listen to what is said; and if this statement applies to them and they are standing in the circle, then each person it is true for must find a different spot to stand on that has been vacated by someone else. The person left in the middle must then say the next thing (see game instructions for further details). This is a popular game that isn't usually thought of as having therapeutic goals. By watching what goes on during the game, the leader and/or the participants can make different observations, and

give people the opportunity to learn about themselves and about others in the group. Some examples of issues that arise out of this simple game are: how differences and similarities are found in the group, who likes to be the center of attention and who shies away from it, appropriate social skills and comments, cheating issues, self-esteem (not putting down others or not being afraid to say what you like), taking risk, listening skills, and physical exercise. This game also makes people laugh and feel more comfortable around one another, and it breaks up groups and gets people away from their comfort zone. All of these things can be focused on during a group discussion that takes place after the game (or sometimes during). Without a discussion these important moments of discovery would be overlooked and the chance for people to learn more from this game would be lost.

By simply changing the directions to the game **THE BIG WIND BLOWS**, the goals, objectives and therapeutic focus can change from game to game (see game directions for examples of how to change it). One variation can be a self-esteem activity, another an anger management game and the next time a risk taking activity to build trust among group members.

The games in this book are written in a such a way that each game is designed to focus on specific goals and objectives and are designed to be therapeutic tools when used with the discussion prompts or with a learning based discussion during or after each game. Some activities have the discussion built into the game itself and no further discussion is needed.

Every game is designed to be therapeutic and to give individuals the chance to share their thoughts and feelings in a non-threatening way. Each activity also gives people the chance to practice improving their behavior during the course of the game and to learn new skills that can be taken and applied to the real world. Each person will respond to the games differently; by using a wide variety of games that address different issues, there will be more of a chance for each unique individual to learn and to discover new things about him/herself.

SELECTING THE GAME

Choosing which game will meet the needs of a specific group or individual is the first step when preparing a therapeutic game session. Start by focusing on the obvious issues faced by the group members and set your group goals accordingly. If after assessing a group, you find there is a strong need for anger management, then your goal may be to find games that focus on that topic. Just because you find that a group has a strong need to work on some very specific issues, don't overlook the other areas such as self-esteem, communication skills, etc. By learning various life skills and by working on a variety of goals, each of the group member's needs can be addressed. Often a game will reveal a need that was not originally seen as a priority when an original thorough assessment was completed.

Besides knowing the issues your group needs to work on, you should have a wide variety of resources available to you when selecting a game. Books, other people, and your past experiences are the best resources you have, so use them all! There are some really great activities out there but be aware, some activities have been used so often that it is almost impossible to find a person who hasn't done the activity before, especially when you work with people who have been through a variety of treatment type programs. If you try new things, the therapeutic value will be stronger because it is more likely that nobody has played the game before. Hopefully this book will give you some good ideas that you can use and if you like the games in this book, you will also find *The wRECKing Yard of Games and Activities* helpful as well. When thinking of games, think of what you played as a child or even games you like now, and often times these games can be adapted to create a new therapeutic game by changing the game slightly or adding a discussion, and before you know it you will have a new game that focuses on specific goals, objectives, and issues.

LEADING THE GAME

Once you have selected a game and developed your goals for the group, it is time to play and have fun! When leading a game you may either participate yourself or you may simply lead and allow the group to play by themselves while you observe. If one of your goals is to build rapport between yourself and the group members, whenever possible you should be involved in the game. By being a part of the group you can build relationships and trust as well as have a good time. For some people the games involve taking a personal risk by stepping out of one's comfort zone and being willing to participate, share feelings, or accept feedback from others. The more willing the leader is to take a risk the more willing group members are to step out of their individual comfort zones and join in the activity. "Challenging" people to participate rather than stating they "have to" is a good way to create a non-threatening atmosphere and to empower people with the power of choice. Remind people that therapy is about growing and stretching emotionally so that they can overcome obstacles, and that stepping out of one's comfort zone and trying new things is the best way for them to grow and to change their lives for the better.

There are times when it is best to get the game started and then to step back and act as an observer while the group members participate in the activity. This is especially true for teamwork activities. When a group of people are given a challenging task and the leader is participating, they will often look to the leader for guidance and suddenly the group is unable to work to its full potential. By allowing a group to work on its own in this type of situation, the leader empowers the group members, and individuals are able to step forward and have a bigger role in the group than they would if the leader were involved in the activity.

THE THERAPEUTIC DISCUSSION

As mentioned before, the discussion is a key element in any therapeutic game or activity. Getting people to think about what they have just done during a game is a powerful way for them to learn about themselves. One of most effective ways to use games in therapy is to point out behaviors as they occur rather than waiting for a later discussion or group time to talk about past behaviors. When a person is given the opportunity to work on his/her behaviors as they are occurring, there is more opportunity for change, growth and improvement in existing behaviors. A discussion can help people understand better what it is that they are doing and what it is that needs to change. It can also be a chance for other group members and leaders to point out improvements that have been made so individuals can see progress in their own treatment.

A discussion can take on many different forms and should be adapted to the level of the group. A higher functioning group may sit in a circle where everyone gives input and answers any questions posed to them after the activity. A lower functioning group may simply raise their hands in response to yes and no questions. The discussion should debrief what just happened and then be made applicable to the group members' lives. For example, when working on teamwork you may discuss what happened, the roles different people took on in the activity and compare this with how the participants respond when in other groups where they must work as a team member such as in the family, when on a sports team, at work, or in a variety of relationships.

The discussion prompts at the end of each game are meant to be a guide and to give you focus for the goals of the activity. These questions are a helpful guide but the reality of a therapeutic session is that you address what comes up and sometimes the topics cannot be predicted ahead of time. If you start the discussion by simply asking the group members if they had any observations during the game, the discussion will then take on a life of its own and address behaviors that you may not have observed. Encourage participants to focus on their own behaviors and issues and on how their actions can be improved or how they affect others. Sometimes the discussion won't be about what actually happened

during a game but about how the game is like life. In an anger management game you may discuss how people deal with things that are “unfair” after playing a game with unfair rules and relate this to their actions of anger when they are in an unfair situation. This is just another way that games can be a powerful tool in therapy!

This book is meant to give you ideas, plans for therapeutic groups and to spark your imagination so you can create more therapeutic games. It can also be useful for camp, church groups, scouts or whatever other group with which you may work. Don't forget to have fun, laugh and enjoy yourself while in the process of helping others learn more about themselves and the world around them.

TEAMWORK

Teamwork activities are fun to lead, exciting to participate in, challenging, and almost always the favorite type of therapeutic games to play. One teamwork activity can cover a wide variety of issues and address a large number of goals - all at the same time. A simple game can tackle social skills, communication and anger management while building self-esteem, group cohesiveness, rapport, and validating each person in the group. Even though all the things mentioned above (plus many more) can be seen in a teamwork activity, it is often not apparent until a group gathers for discussion what all the different issues were that arose during the course of the activity.

As the leader of countless teamwork activities, I have learned to sit back and be very observant while a group is engaged in the challenge I have set before them. During the discussion I ask the group to tell me what it is that they observed about themselves and about the group as a whole during the activity and then I will fill in the gaps with my observations about what occurred.

Without even knowing a group of people, I can put a teamwork challenge before them and by watching learn who is a dominant leader, who is passive, shy, or who has a low self-esteem. Also I can see who is afraid of rejection, who tries to assert power over others, who is a good leader, etc. by observing the group skills of people found in a diverse group. All this can come from one simple game, and when the group dynamics are

brought up in a discussion, a fun game quickly becomes a powerful tool for people to learn about themselves and to learn about how they relate to others. These lessons can then be applied to the lives of the people in the group by asking the group, “What skills do you need if you are to be successful in a teamwork situation?” and “When in life will you need to use these skills?”. There are so many areas in life in which teamwork skills are important such as working, playing sports, doing school projects, getting along with others - a friend, spouse, parent, child or any other family member.

Teamwork activities not only cover a wide variety of topics but also come in many different forms. The most popular form of teamwork activities are outdoor adventure programs, which are powerful and effective. The reality is that not every therapist, counselor or teacher has the means or the budget to offer this type of therapeutic program, so that’s where the games in this book can be useful. Many of the games can be done with very limited resources, time and space if needed. Hopefully you will find that a wide variety of these games can be useful, adaptable, or be helpful for the population with which you work.

TEAMWORK
GAMES AND
ACTIVITIES

CREATE A COUNTRY

When the founding fathers of the United States of America first got together to form a government, they had many issues to agree on and many decisions to make. I'm sure discussion, compromise, problem solving and teamwork were a large part of the process when they tackled the tough task of forming a government. Creating a country wouldn't be an easy task, but in this activity it can be fun when the group pulls together and uses teamwork to solve the problems they face.

Objective

For people to get together as a group and participate in a group decision making process.

Who

People who need to learn to work with others as a member of a group when the group must make decisions together.

Group Size

2 or more

Materials

- Paper
- Pens or pencils
- Colored markers, colored pencils or crayons

Description

Divide the group into smaller groups of two to ten members each. Provide each group with the following information and all of the materials listed above.

"You and a group of people have claimed an uninhabited island as a new country. You have been selected to be the new government. Your first assignment is to make the following decisions and accomplish the following tasks..."

- 1. Name the country*
- 2. Nickname of the country*
- 3. Design a license plate*
- 4. Design a flag*
- 5. Choose a national bird*
- 6. Choose a national flower*
- 7. Write a national anthem*
- 8. Appoint yourselves to government offices*
- 9. Create any laws that you feel are necessary*
- 10. In addition to your government appointment each person must pick a job serving the needs of the country"*

The group must work together to complete the task and then present it to the leaders or to the rest of the group when finished. This activity may take more than one session to complete or you may wish to have the group simply select the things from the list that they can complete in the time given to them.

Discussion Prompts

1. How were decisions made in your group?
2. Is everyone happy with what was decided? Why or why not?
3. What things are important to remember when making group decisions?
4. What role do you usually take when making decisions with others?
5. How can you tell if a group has been successful when making a decision?
6. Why is it important to be able to make decisions as a member of a group?

GARBAGE ART

Creating a piece of art is an easy task for one person because his/her creativity, ideas and visions can be put into a single piece of art. When more than one person works on a piece of art all the different ideas must come together in agreement so that in the end the team creates a single piece of wonderfully creative art.

Objective

For a group of people to make decisions together, work together and to create a piece of art together.

Who

People who need to learn how to work with others on a group project by practicing making decisions and communicating with others.

Group Size

2 or more

Materials

- ⊖ Scissors
- ⊖ Glue
- ⊖ Tape
- ⊖ Any garbage item that can be used for art. Some suggestions are...toilet paper/paper towel rolls, egg cartons, milk cartons, foil, pop cans, can lids, newspaper, string, and anything else you can find!

Description

Collect anything that can be used to create a piece of “art” or “sculpture” (see materials for suggestions). Place all of the items in a pile so that group members may select items to be used in their sculpture. It is a good idea to have two to four people working on one

piece of art and to have groups take turns selecting items from the pile. You may wish to give each group glue, tape and scissors.

Allow time for the groups to create their “garbage art”. When everyone is finished with their project, allow time for an art gallery exhibit and let each group display their own piece of art, share what it is, and tell any story they have about it.

Discussion Prompts

1. How did you and the other members of your group decide which pieces of garbage to use?
2. How did you decide what to build?
3. Was everyone included in the decision process? If not, why? If so, how?
4. What unique thing did each person in the group contribute to the project?
5. Why is it important to be able to work on group projects with other people?

