

The Big Book of EVEN MORE Therapeutic Activity Ideas for Children and Teens

Inspiring Arts-Based Activities and
Character Education Curricula

Lindsey Joiner



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Introduction

It is hard to believe that it has been almost five years since my first book (*The Big Book of Therapeutic Activities for Children and Teens: Inspiring Arts-Based Activities and Character Education Curricula*) was published. Life has brought quite a few changes for me since that time, including a change of position from a community mental health agency to a school setting, and the birth of my two children. As with any major life and career changes, I have had to adapt the things I do for a new setting and population. In a community mental health center, I had more time to complete longer projects and spent more time working with groups. In the school setting as well as in other experiences I have had since the publication of my first book, time tends to be more limited and often my work is with individuals. As a result, I have had to create new activities that work with individuals and can be completed in brief amounts of time. This book includes many of these activities that I have developed in my practice as a counselor and behavior specialist since the publication of my first book.

Even though I have experienced a lot of change over the past few years, I continue to be a strong supporter of the use of creativity and expressive arts activities in counseling and related programming with children and teens. The children and teens I work with are actively engaged in the counseling process as a result of these activities. I have observed tremendous growth in the areas of social skills, conflict resolution, anger management skills, and positive thinking with the children and teens with whom I work that I do not believe would be possible without the use of art-based activities as a means to teach these therapeutic concepts.

While this book offers similar creative and fun activities and projects to my first book, there are some differences. Many of the activities in this book can be used with individuals or adapted for application with a group. While some of the activities require more time than others, most can be completed within 30 minutes. Some of the activities work well with young children and other activities are more appropriate for preteens and teens, but many can be adapted for either population. Most of the materials needed are readily available and inexpensive. Many times they are common household or office items that you may already have available to you. There are handouts or templates that accompany many of the activities to make it easy for the user to copy and quickly begin the activity. There are ideas for adapting the activities to different populations and settings. Please feel free to modify any activity to make it work for the individual or group in your situation.

Each of the activities is presented in the same format. The purpose (or goal) of the activity is listed first. Next, the materials needed to complete the activity or project are listed. A description of the activity is included with detailed instructions for its completion. Every activity also includes a section with variations of the activity that gives additional ideas for how to use the activity, how to adapt it, or how to display the completed activities or projects. Finally, there is a section with discussion questions to help facilitate the session and encourage communication with the participants throughout the activity. Any necessary handouts or templates are also included and are ready for reproduction.

The book is organized into six chapters. The first chapter includes icebreaker activities. These are activities that can be quickly completed (usually in ten minutes or less). The

icebreaker activities help to open the session in a non-threatening way. The activities in this chapter also help to build rapport and a relationship with the participant or group. I often complete the icebreaker activity along with the participant, which seems to put the participant at ease with the process. The next chapter in the book is called Shape It Up Series (Activities Using Shapes) and includes a variety of activities that teach therapeutic and character education topics using shapes. Many include handouts or templates that just need to be copied and are ready to use with the participant. There are activities in this section that would be appropriate for participants of all ages. Most of the activities in this section can be used in work with groups or individuals. The third chapter of the book includes visual and expressive arts activities. There are several activities in this section that include the use of collage, drawing, painting, writing, and other methods to teach, discuss, and encourage the development of a variety of therapeutic skills, including positive thinking, coping skills, anger management skills, following directions, communication skills, healthy self-expression, and social skills. Many of the activities in this section can be adapted for group or individual sessions. While some require an extended block of time, most can be completed within 20 to 30 minutes or broken down into steps to complete over several sessions. This section includes activities that would work with a wide variety of ages and populations. The fourth chapter includes ideas for monthly character education activities. There are two activities per month, which coordinate with holidays, seasons, or other significant events associated with the month. The activities teach a character education concept or a therapeutic lesson through expressive arts activities or other creative projects. Many of these activities make great displays for bulletin boards or other school spaces. If your setting has a positive behavior support program in place, many of these activities could be easily incorporated in this program. The activities in this setting can be easily adapted for different ages, populations, and settings. The fifth chapter features bibliotherapy activities, which use popular children's books to teach character education concepts and therapeutic lessons. Each lesson includes extension activities to reinforce the concept presented in the book. Most of the activities in this section would be appropriate for elementary aged participants. The final chapter includes activities for teaching therapeutic concepts through the completion of hands-on activities and experiments. These activities are fun for participants of all ages.

As a counselor and behavior specialist, I have learned the importance of organization, consistency, and routine when working with children and teens. It helps to be prepared for the session ahead of time, with all the materials needed already organized and ready to use. Utilizing a consistent and structured schedule for sessions helps children and teens know what to expect and learn the behavioral expectations and routine. Some children and teens may be initially resistant to completing some of the activities. While a full discussion of resistance is beyond the scope of this book, a few suggestions are noted below. Remind participants that there is no right or wrong way to complete any of the activities in this book. They will not be judged or graded on the final product, it is the process that is important. Do not force the participants to share their artwork or put them "on the spot," but instead give them the time and space to create. As they become more comfortable with the process, discussion and sharing about the activity will become easier. I often complete activities along with the participants to develop rapport with them and help put them at ease. I have found that when participants observe me completing the activity and see that I am willing to do what I ask them to do, they generally become more willing to participate themselves. Give the participants choice and options when they are completing the activity. Try not to

correct if they are not completing the activity exactly as it is designed. By observing the individuals, you may learn a new and unique way to complete the activity. Remember, there is no “one size fits all” approach. Adapt the activities to the needs of the participants.

When working with groups, the use of a basic behavior plan may also help with encouraging the group members to participate and display a good attitude. From the beginning, set ground rules with the group and be sure that all participants understand the expectations and purpose of the activity. Consider developing a points system so that group members may earn points for participating and attempting to complete the activity, displaying positive social skills, and exhibiting a good attitude during the group time. The points that each group member earns can be exchanged for a special snack, a reward, or time to engage in a preferred activity at the end of session. As the group members become more and more willing to participate, the rewards can be faded out. If everyone is willing to participate except one group member, proceed with the rest of the group. Praise the positive behaviors of the group members who are participating while trying to make the activity as fun and engaging as possible. The group member may become more willing to participate when he or she sees all of the other children having fun and receiving praise. Try to stay calm and positive no matter what the situation.

Confidentiality is a critical issue for groups. It is important that confidentiality of information is discussed within the group in an age-appropriate way before beginning the group sessions. Do this as part of an informed consent process, which should include a discussion of group rules, expectations, confidentiality, and the limits of confidentiality. While it should be emphasized that all information discussed in the group should remain confidential, the group leader should let the group members know that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed within a group setting. Confidentiality should be frequently reviewed and group members should be reminded of the importance of creating a safe place to share with others. Be sure to pay attention to any conflicts or tension in the group and address these in an open and honest manner as soon as they arise so that the unity and trust with the group are not impacted.

At times, some of the activities and projects may bring up difficult emotions or memories for participants. Group leaders will have to use their best judgment to decide how to address the issue. For some concerns that come up, the group leader and other members may be able to offer valuable feedback, insight, and suggestions for how to deal with the issue. However, there are other issues that may arise within the group setting that may not be appropriate for discussion and feedback within the group. Examples might include abuse, neglect, trauma, and related issues. The group leader may need to discuss these issues in private with the individual depending on the nature of the issues, the maturity level of the group, the setting, and other factors. The group leader will need to communicate with the participant’s parent or guardian and consider a referral to more intensive counseling or therapeutic services. Always consult with a colleague as well as the ethical guidelines for your profession if you are unsure how to handle a difficult situation within your practice.

The ideas in this book are a collection of activities that I have developed and adapted as part of my practice as a counselor and behavior specialist working with children and teens. These activities have been instrumental in helping me relate to the children and teens with whom I work. Not only have the activities helped the children and teens learn and implement new skills in areas such as social skills, positive thinking, coping skills, anger management, and conflict resolution, but the use of the creative activities within this book

has made the process enjoyable for them as well. It is my hope that you and the children and teens you work with will have the same experience with the activities and projects provided in this book. Thank you for selecting this book and best wishes in your practice of the activities.

Icebreakers

STATUS UPDATE

Materials needed

- Copies of the Status Update Handout
- Markers/pens

Purpose of the activity

- To put individuals at ease and build rapport for the session
- To express thoughts and feelings about current events and situations
- To provide insight into the individuals' thoughts and feelings

Description of the activity

Explain to the individuals that just as they update their “status” on social media by sharing current thoughts and feelings, they are going to complete a “status update” to open the session. This will give them an opportunity to briefly share what is going on in their life and what they are currently interested in. This status update can then be discussed and used to build rapport as well as open the session based on the information provided by the individual. Consider starting the discussion with some of the topics that tend to be of more interest to the individual such as “Listening to” and “Watching,” and build rapport discussing these before beginning discussion on some of the other topics such as “Feeling” and “Thinking about.”

Variations of the activity

- If completing the activity in a group session, allow each individual to share one of the items from his or her status update.
- If group time allows, the group could go through item by item and share and discuss each individual's responses.



Status Update Handout

Listening to.

.

Watching.

.

Looking up.

.

Thinking about.

.

Wishing for.

.

Dreaming

.

Feeling.

.

Up next for me.

.

Posted by (name) on (date)

LIKE, DISLIKE, SHARE

Purpose of the activity

- To build rapport and put the individual at ease
- To identify positive and negative aspects of the individual's day as well as potential topics for discussion during the session
- To assist individual in becoming more aware of his thoughts and interests

Materials needed

- Copies of the Like, Dislike, Share Handout
- Markers/pens

Description of the activity

Ask the individual if he is familiar with the "Like" and "Share" buttons on social media websites. If not, explain that the buttons allow a person to "like" different photos, status updates, and other items as well as to click the "share" button and share things with their friends. Give the individual the Like, Dislike, Share Handout and ask him to complete it by listing some of the things that he is currently liking and disliking as well as something that he would like to share with others. Consider completing a handout along with the individual to put him at ease. After completing the handout, discuss the individual's responses and use them to begin discussion for the session.

Variations of the activity

- This activity can also be completed as a group icebreaker. Each individual would tell the group about the response that he listed in the "Share" section and discuss the information. Individuals can also share about their likes and dislikes, as appropriate. For example, if an individual's dislikes include the names of other people, then it would not be appropriate to share within a group setting.



Like, Dislike, Share Handout



Like:

.....

.....

.....

.....



Dislike:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

PICTURE PERFECT

Purpose of the activity

- To put the individual at ease and build rapport
- To promote creative thinking
- To provide an opportunity for self-expression

Materials needed

- Blank paper
- Markers/crayons/pencils
- A variety of single object pictures cut from magazines (examples include flowers, birds, cars, trees, animals, etc.)
- Scissors
- Glue

Description of the activity

Provide each individual with a sheet of paper and one of the magazine pictures of a *single* object as well as the other materials. Explain to the individual that he can glue the single object picture anywhere he would like on his paper. Next, he is to envision the scene around the picture and draw it using the markers, crayons, or other supplies. After completing the activity, allow the individual to share his drawing.

Variations of the activity

This activity can be easily adapted to a group setting. When completing in a group setting, it works well to give each individual a picture of the same type of object. For example, give each individual a picture of a different variety of flower or different types of animals. After completing the activity, allow each individual to share his drawing.

Discussion questions

- What inspired you about your magazine picture?
- Tell me about your drawing.
- What did you think about this activity?
- What was challenging about the activity? What was easy about the activity?
- What skills did you have to use to complete the activity?