Creating Children's Art Games for Emotional Support

Vicky Barber

Jessica Kingsley *Publishers*
London and Philadelphia

First published in 2011
by Jessica Kingsley Publishers
73 Collier Street
London N1 9BE, UK
and
400 Market Street, Suite 400
Philadelphia, PA 19106, USA

www.jkp.com

Copyright © Vicky Barber 2011

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any material form (including photocopying of any pages other than those marked with a ✓, storing it in any medium by electronic means and whether or not transiently or incidentally to some other use of this publication) without the written permission of the copyright owner except in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 or under the terms of a licence issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd, Saffron House, 6–10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS. Applications for the copyright owner's written permission to reproduce any part of this publication should be addressed to the publisher.

Warning: The doing of an unauthorised act in relation to a copyright work may result in both a civil claim for damages and criminal prosecution.

All pages marked ✓ may be photocopied for personal use with this programme, but may not be reproduced for any other purposes without the permission of the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Barber, Vicky.
Creating children's art games for emotional support / Vicky Barber.
p. ; cm.
ISBN 978-1-84905-163-7 (alk. paper)
1. Play therapy. 2. Art therapy for children. I. Title.
[DNLM: 1. Child. 2. Play Therapy--Handbooks. 3. Adolescent. 4. Art Therapy--Handbooks. WS 39]
RJ505.P6B36 2011
618.92'891653--dc22
2010026403

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 1 84905 163 7
eISBN 978 0 85700 409 3

Contents

Introduction 11
How to Get the Most Out of This Book 17
Step-by-Step User Guide 19
List of Materials 21
Case Studies 23

Part I Warm-Up Games
Pass the Ball 31
Guess the Colour 31
Make the Sound of… 32
Guess What? 32
Feel What It Is… 33
Whose Nose Is It? 33
Getting to Know Each Other 34
Colour Appreciation 34
Quick Colour Responses 35
Feeling Is the Object 35

Part II Creating Games for Improving Self-Esteem and Confidence

Pushing the Boundaries 39
Charades with a Difference 41
Run Rabbit 43
Whatever (Sticks and Stones) 45
What Am I Really Like? 47
Guess What It Is 49
Contour Drawings 51
Drawing Together 53
Drawing with Different Body Parts 55
Let Rorschach Help Your Story 57
Future City 59
Happy Families 61
Why Am I Feeling This Way? 63
Large Group Scribble 65
Against Time 67
Alphabet with Feeling 69
Cube Fun 71
Area Awareness Spinning Top 73
Pass the Compliment 75
What Am I Like? 77
Drawing Blindfold 79
I'm the Greatest 81

Part III Creating Games for Raising Self-Awareness

Opposites Attract 85
Going with Change 87
My Patch 89
Treasure Hunt 91
Changing Faces 93
Shape Town/Village 95
Where Do I Belong? 97

Please Don't Distract Me 99
Building Up Clusters 101
Changing Circles 103
Scribble Exchange 105
How Do I Feel? 107
Paper Roll Game 109
Jigsaw – Self-Portrait 111
My Patch Spinning Top 113
Playing Detective 115
Listening and Responding 117
Please Pass the… 119
Who Am I? 121

Useful Templates and Resources

Box 125
Face 127
Rabbit's Ears 129
Cube 131
Emotion Sheet 1 133
Emotion Sheet 2 135
Emotion Sheet 3 137
Emotion Sheet 4 139

Introduction

The ideas for this book came to me many years ago while watching my children's reactions to presents received for birthdays and Christmas. Often the toy would be briefly inspected and then cast aside for the greater delights of the box and wrapping-paper debris – the excitement they had crawling in, out and amid it showed just how much fun could be had out of what we consider to be 'rubbish'. So we (my son, aged four, and I) went on to engage with a host of toy-making activities. The toys we created together gave him huge amounts of enjoyment, especially in the creation stages – he learnt how to sew, cut, paint and paste, and his pride in the end result was immense. Yes, he had hours of fun playing with and disappearing into the toys with his friends, but I couldn't help but remember how much more he got out of the making stages. This is what I tapped into when I decided to write this book – just how powerful and important creating, ownership and empowerment is to a child or young person.

The importance of game-playing as a psychological intervention can be traced back as far as the early 20th century when the Austrian psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (1882–1960) developed her play therapy techniques, in which toys and play were used much as dreams and free association were as part of the analytic process for adults. Following on from Klein, D.W. Winnicott (1896–1971), an

English paediatrician, used games as part of his analysis practice. In his book *Playing and Reality*[1] he summed up his thoughts around the significance of playing:

> If the therapist cannot play, then he is not suitable for the work. If the patient cannot play, then something needs to be done to enable the patient to become able to play…

Winnicott used games to engage and communicate with his patients very successfully. It is from his 'Squiggle' game that the idea of the Scribble games originated. More recently as a practitioner, I found Marian Liebmann's book *Art Therapy for Groups*[2] invaluable, especially in my early days as a newly trained art therapist. She directly inspired and stimulated my thinking and convinced me that there is a very real place for game-playing in the world of art therapy and beyond, in fact for anyone working with children.

The words *play* and *game* immediately instil in us a feeling of lightness and fun – thoughts like 'I don't need to worry about this as it's only a game' or 'It's only a bit of fun' enter our minds and place us on a different plane. Our bodies and minds relax and a frisson of excitement sweeps through us. Similarly, mention the word *game* to children and they're instantly with you, they become a captive audience. Game-playing is as natural to children as eating and sleeping. It's the way they assimilate all the learning that continuously takes place in their daily lives. Playing, exploring, touching, feeling, tasting and smelling are all part of a child's life, so why not use these aspects of life to assist when things go wrong or become confusing?

In my work as an art therapist within schools, Winnicott's words once again echoed in my head, and this is what led me to devise art games that I felt could be used with children to confront their particular problems and issues. Consequently I set out to find strategies to help them explore what is going on and, it is hoped, enable them to come up with solutions.

For instance, working with a group of nine-year-old boys who had problems with anger, socialisation and self-esteem, we first had to

1 Winnicott, D.W. (1971) *Playing and Reality*. London: Routledge, p.54.

2 Liebmann, M. (1986) *Art Therapy for Groups: A Handbook of Themes, Games and Exercises*. London: Routledge.

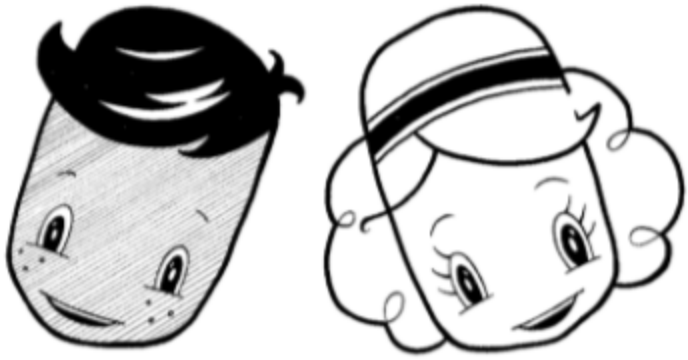
enable them to talk about situations that drove them to lose control, and then we looked at how they could have acted differently to the way they did. From the role-play they engaged in it became very clear to me that they were greatly influenced by the media, films and computer-animated games. Violence and aggression seemed to be what they aspired to. When even the 'good guys' acted in an untoward way in order to ensure that good conquered evil, it was no wonder these boys thought this was the way forward. It was interesting that when we were sorting out roles no one wanted to play the victim, they all wanted to be the 'bad guy'. If they agreed to play the law enforcer this too was delivered in an aggressive way, as if this was how reality was. They had no problem being shot down and dying; it seemed that this was part of life. I knew I had my work cut out to try and turn things round and let them learn that there was a right way and a wrong way, and that good was more desirable than evil. It was a long, arduous journey, but we had made considerable progress by the end of the sessions. One of the last pieces of work the group engaged in was that of inventing a game that was tailor-made to help them with their particular problems. They invented a town especially for this. Through discussion about their needs and their problems a wonderful town with a difference grew. I asked 'What would you need to help manage your problems?', and one bright individual called out 'Psychology'. We explored what he meant and quite soon the town had areas such as sports, retail therapy, art/music/drama therapy, a space they called 'emotions' and a beach – the presence of which I think would help with a lot of life's problems for many of us, let alone that of the average nine-year-old. I knew that we had found something of value when they wanted to forgo their playtime to extend their sessions with me.

This confirmed thoughts I had been having for some time that if children are given the opportunity and space they are great inventors and fearless creators, brimming with such amazing ideas. It's as if they value their own creations more than manufactured games. This is what makes this book unique and different, as its main focus is on the making of the game, the actual hands-on creation of it. The emphasis is on the empowerment of the children/young people. By enabling

them to externalise their own ideas and thoughts, there is no doubt that their confidence will soar.

The games in this book follow this format – time for the game to be thought through, discussed and formulated, which is titled 'Creating the game', and then 'Playing the game'. Although the games sometimes include competitiveness, winning and scoring as elements of game-playing, these are almost an irrelevant part of the process. Being creative, understanding and experiencing through play are what I am primarily aiming for. The areas covered relate to raising awareness of self and then of others, as in so doing the children can gain a better understanding of how their world operates, why things may go wrong and how things can then be worked through, corrected, accepted and developed. In game-playing there is an unspoken rule that there are winners and losers, but this can change by using strategies and making choices. It reminds me of a very old saying someone wrote in my autograph book when I moved away from Sri Lanka, which has always stayed with me: 'When the one great scorer comes to write against your name he marks not that you won or lost but how you played the game.'

Many of these games are reminiscent of games played when we were children but have been altered to meet the criteria. The book had to be fun as I feel humour is important, even in the world of



therapy, so I used 'Lucy and Leon', my granddaughter and godson, to lead the reader through the game-playing. Let's meet Lucy and Leon.

Lucy and Leon are ordinary children who love game playing. Lucy can be demure and ladylike at times, but together with Leon she becomes a more physical adventurer, willing to take chances and becoming a fearless explorer. Leon on the other hand is very much a football-playing, physical go-getter, who does, however, have his quiet moments, especially when read to. So you see they complement each other perfectly. They are ageless as at times they appear young and naive, but at others they appear seasoned beyond their years.

They are portrayed as cartoon characters who are continually grappling with the games they are engaged in, much as cartoon characters do when they are trying and failing to achieve what they want. I chose Lucy and Leon for this as they are such different children from such different backgrounds.

Part I
Warm-Up Games

Pass the Ball

Objective: To expand imaginative thinking.

Playing the game: A ball is passed round to music; when the music stops the person holding the ball is given a colour by the person on their right. Then the person with the ball has to think of three different things in that colour, e.g. a bus, fire engine, post box…

Guess the Colour

Objective: To use role-play and colour playfully.

Playing the game: One person goes out of the room. The group selects a specific colour and an object/animal in that colour The person is then invited back and has to guess what the colour is from the clues offered. The clues given should be of the objects, animals, etc. (e.g. elephant, bus, things in that colour).If the person guesses right they choose the next person to go out.

Make the Sound of…

Objective: To use sounds playfully.

Playing the game: One person thinks of something and makes its sound (e.g. a car, cat, bird, etc.). The group has to guess what it is. The person who guesses right goes next.

Guess What?

Objective: To use air drawing to inspire the imagination.

Playing the game: One person draws an object in the air (e.g. a chair, mirror, etc.) and the group has to guess what it is. The first person to do so correctly goes next.

Feel What It Is…

Objective: To inspire the imagination.

Playing the game: Standing in a circle, the first person draws on their neighbour's back and this is passed round; the last person has to reveal what it is.

Whose Nose Is It?

Objective: To be creative with the minimum of information.

Playing the game: Each person in turn draws a nose belonging to an animal and the person who guesses it correctly goes next. The drawing could take place in the air too.

Getting to Know Each Other

Objective: To learn names.

Playing the game: Each person thinks of a positive/fun way to describe and introduce themselves using the first letter of their name (e.g. Lovable Lucy, Likeable Leon). Then in a circle each person takes turns to present their name with a description using mime (e.g. Lovable Lucy – here she can hug herself and say her name).

Colour Appreciation

Objective: To enable mixing and mingling.

Playing the game: On cue the group is invited to find another person wearing the same colour as themselves (this could go on to hair colour, eye colour, etc.).