

# Introduction

The fun, interactive games found in this book are unique variations of popular games that can be used to enhance the therapeutic experience. By using one game in a variety of different ways, value is added to each game you own. The amount of time needed to prepare for each group session is simplified by mostly using the supplies provided with the games, with the occasional paper and pen added. *Discussion Prompts* are also included with each activity to simplify the therapeutic application.

In addition to making changes to existing games, it is also simple to use almost any ordinary board game as a therapeutic activity without making *any* changes to the game at all. The game can be used as an object lesson that leads to a discussion and teachable moment based on what occurs when playing the game. The discussion that occurs after the game opens the door for the lesson to take place.

## Game Selection

You will find various “board games” used in this book to create new *Therapy Games*. Some of these games have been around for years and are commonly found in the family game closet such as SCRABBLE, MONOPOLY, and the OPERATION game.

Other games haven’t been around for very long but have grown quickly in popularity. Many of these newer “board games” require group members to engage with one another in conversation and are considered “party games.” This type of game is very interactive and can often be played in teams and with larger groups. Examples of interactive games are APPLES TO APPLES, TABOO, and IMAGINIFF.

Some of the “board games” used in this book will be more familiar to those who work in a therapeutic setting. The UNGAME is a good example of a game commonly utilized by counselors to help people open up in a non-threatening environment.

Other games, such as jigsaw puzzles, decks of cards, dice, and foam balls, don’t require a board, but just simple props. These game props are easy to acquire, versatile, and simple to use.

No matter which types of games you choose, you will be able to use the same game over and over again. With all the game variations found in this book, each activity will always be a fresh and new experience.

You will find anywhere from five to twelve creative new variations for each “board game” or game prop used in this book. If you already own a number of these games, you will be able to pick up this book, grab a game off the shelf, and be ready for group. If your game library is currently very small, there are several games utilized that can be purchased even if you have a small budget. You will find a majority of the games used in this book to be common, affordable, easy to use, and easy to find.

### **Group Assessments**

Games are a powerful tool for making observations and assessments about an individual’s behavior. By observing behaviors during a competitive, or even a non-competitive game, the group leader will be able to make assessments about social skills, communication skills, anger control, and the individual’s level of self-esteem and confidence. Once an assessment has been made, it will become clear what topics the individuals in your group need to focus on. With this assessment in mind, you can use the *Objective* that is listed with each game to find the right games for your group.

### **Group Goals and Objective**

When planning your group session, it’s important to know the goals and objectives you have for your group. The objectives should be based on the outcomes you are hoping to achieve. If a goal is to create an atmosphere where individuals can share more openly, then the games that focus on self-discovery will be best. (A complete index of the issues each game addresses can be found in the back of the book, and each individual game comes with its own *Objective*.) If a goal is to work on social skills, then use games that address communication skills, teamwork, or anger management. Games that address coping skills are primarily focused on finding new and healthy ways to use one’s extra time. Free time tends to be a time when negative behavior occurs and exploring ways to fill this time with healthy alternatives

is important for those who need it. Self-esteem games are always beneficial in our society where we are often told what it is we need to do better as opposed to what our strengths and talents are.

## Discussion Prompts

The group discussion that takes place after playing a game is an extremely important part of the process of turning a regular game into a therapeutic experience. Without a discussion, the game is just a fun group interaction. Without debriefing what occurred during the course of play, participants will walk away from the session without digging deeper into their individual behaviors. The discussion will also create an opportunity to talk about the object lesson the game was meant to reveal.

At the beginning of each chapter, there are *Discussion Prompts* that can be used with the “board game” that is the focus of that chapter. These questions can be used when simply playing the game as it is meant to be played (without making any changes to the rules).

You will also find a list of *Discussion Prompts* with each game variation found in this book. The type of questions you ask will depend on the therapeutic outcome you want to address during your session. Each group has its own personality and sometimes you won’t know what lesson will come out of an activity until it is played. Sometimes the competition itself will lead to behaviors that can be addressed.

## Competition

Many of the games in this book offer an element of competition. The leader of any game can create a positive competitive atmosphere, where having fun is more important than winning the game. The leader can also create a more intense environment where winning is the main focus. How the game is presented makes a difference in the competitive experience for all those involved.

Competition is a very real part of life. Competition for jobs, promotions, to get into certain schools, to make the team, etc., can lead to stress and disappointment or excitement and pride. Playing competitive games and learning how to deal with losing can be a great life lesson. It’s equally important to learn how to be a gracious winner.

## **My Hopes for You and Your Group Members**

The games in this book are meant to enhance the therapeutic experience for both the leader and the participants through the power of play. My hope is that you will view “ordinary” board games in a new light after using the variations in this book. Perhaps you will even invent some of your own unique activities using games you already have to create a new therapeutic experience for your group. I hope you find these games useful, entertaining, engaging, productive, and fun for all those involved!

# JENGA

The JENGA game is an individual challenge as well as a game. The challenge is to be the one who doesn't make the tower collapse. It can be played with very little setup and is easy to explain to anyone who joins the group.

For the games in this chapter, you can play with one JENGA game. Using a marker, write the number 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 on the bottom of each brick (there should be ten of each number with four blank bricks left over). Also put a star on one of the blank bricks. Not all of the games need these numbers. However, your game will be all ready to go if you do this to your game to start with.

## **Game Summary**

JENGA is a set of wood bricks that are stacked with three bricks for each layer. Players take turns carefully removing one brick from the stack and placing it on the top of the growing tower. As pieces are moved from the lower layers to the top, the tower becomes increasingly unstable until eventually the tower falls.

## **Therapeutic Applications of the JENGA game**

This game is often used in the therapeutic setting as a way of answering questions. The way it is most commonly used is for group members to take turns answering a question for each brick they successfully remove and place on the top. It can also be used as a discussion prompt for ways to deal with feelings of anxiety or of feeling like your life is falling apart.

## **Discussion Prompts: Dealing with anxiety**

1. When it was your turn, did you feel any anxiety?
2. What symptoms does your body display when you feel anxious?
3. What situations do you find yourself in when you feel the most anxious?
4. What are some things you can do to calm yourself down when you feel anxious?

# Bigger and Better

## Objective

To compare how much harder a group will work together to accomplish a task when there is a reward at stake than when there is no reward. To compare stress levels in individuals when there is more pressure to perform a task.

## Who

People who experience stress in an unhealthy manner who need to talk about ways to deal with the stress. People who are only willing to do work when there is a reward in place.

## Group Size

2 to 8 is ideal (but the game can be played with larger numbers)

## Materials

- JENGA Game
- Some type of prize for the group (bag of candy, stickers, or other tangible items they would like) or you can offer something such as extra free play time or a game of their choice.

## Description

Play the JENGA game one time just “for fun” and don’t say anything else to the group about the game. Count how many layers the group can build up before the tower falls. For the second round, offer the group a prize for each layer achieved that is higher than the first time they played. This can be a piece of candy for each level, extra minutes of free time, etc. Count the levels as they play and hand out the reward afterwards. For added excitement, you may stipulate that they owe you something (cleaning, exercise, etc.) if the tower topples at a shorter level than it did the first time.

## **Discussion Prompts**

1. Were you more relaxed the first time you played this game or the second? Why?
2. Did you feel stress when the whole team was counting on you to be successful when it was your turn?
3. How does your body let you know you are feeling stress?
4. Is stress a good or a bad thing for you? Why?
5. Are you willing to try your hardest when there is no reward or do you always need a reason to do your best?
6. If you only do your best when there is a reward involved, how does this impact your life?

# Three Strikes You're Out

## Objective

To talk about the consequences that come when someone continues to wrong others or society.

## Who

People who often find themselves in trouble with authority figures.

## Group Size

3 to 5 is ideal (but the game can be played with larger numbers)

## Materials

- ☉ The JENGA game with the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 written on the bottom of each brick. There should be ten of each number with four blank bricks left over.

## Description

Play the JENGA game by taking turns pulling out one brick at a time and placing it on the top of the game. When someone pulls out a brick with a "1" on the bottom, they do not place it on the top of the game but instead they keep it. Once someone has a "1" and they pull out a "2," then they must place the 1 on the top of the game and keep the 2. Then do the same the next time they pull out a 3. Any block with a 4 or 5 on it, or that is blank, goes back on top and is not kept.

Once someone reaches a 3, then they have three strikes against them. They must sit out the game, and they can only watch the rest of the team play the game after placing their brick on the top.

## Discussion Prompts

1. If you were someone who struck out and had to watch, how did it feel to be on the outside looking in?
2. Can you relate to "striking out" in your own life?
3. Can you think of a situation where you only get a few chances before someone or society gives up on you?



4. How many chances do you get in life to mess up before you are “out”? What would you define as being “out”?
5. Do you have any strikes against you right now?
6. Can you take back what you have done?
7. Can you make right something you have done that was wrong?
8. How can you move on after you have strikes against you?

### **Variations**

- When someone gets eliminated, they can reenter the game when someone else gets eliminated.
- Use bricks with blank, 4 or 5 on them where a 4=1 and a 5=2 and blank = 3.
- Play “Five Strikes You’re Out,” going from 1 to 5.
- If the tower topples, each person starts where they left off (i.e., if you were holding a 2 brick, you would start with 2 strikes for the next game).

# Magic Block

## Objective

To talk about the need for some people to always be searching for the one thing that they feel will make their life complete, which can sometimes cause people to miss out on the good things they already have in their life.

## Who

People who are so focused on getting to the next level (more money, more drugs, becoming more popular, finding a boyfriend/girlfriend, etc.) that they miss out on what they already have.

## Group Size

2 to 8 is ideal (but the game can be played with larger numbers)

## Materials

- The JENGA game with one block that has a star or other symbol marked on the bottom side of the block.

## Description

Play the JENGA game with one block marked with a star (or other symbol). Offer a prize to the group if they can find the magic block before the tower falls. This can be anything from a treat to extra minutes of free play time or allowing the person who finds the star to select the next game the group plays. However, if the tower falls before anyone can find the magic block, then the group has to complete a task (this can be anything from cleaning, to exercise, to singing a silly song).

## Discussion Prompts

1. Were you focused primarily on finding the star or were you enjoying the process of playing the game?
2. Once the star was found, did you want to continue to play the game to see how high the tower would go, or to see who would knock it over, or was the fun over?
3. Have you ever been so focused on getting something in your life that once you achieved it you were left wondering what to do next?
4. Is it good to have things in your life that you are striving to find?
5. Are there some things you could be striving for that are negative?
6. What things are you always searching for in your life?
7. Do you ever miss out on things in your life because you are so focused on a goal that only the future seems to matter?
8. How can you achieve balance in your life when striving to reach a goal?

# 10, 20, 30, 40, 50

## **Objective**

To play a game of chance and focus on how some people seem to be luckier in life than others. Also, to discuss feelings people have when they feel their life is “unfair.”

## **Who**

People who make excuses for why they can't move forward in life. People who place the blame on outside circumstances, rather than doing what they can to improve their own situation.

## **Group Size**

2 to 8 is ideal

## **Materials**

- The JENGA game with the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 written on the bottom of each brick. There should be ten of each number with four blank bricks left over.

## **Description**

Play the JENGA game by taking turns pulling out one brick at a time. When someone pulls out a brick, they do not place it on the top of the game but instead they keep it until it is their turn again. After the first round, each person should be holding one brick which they will place on top of the tower, prior to pulling their next brick (which they hang on to until their next turn).

When the tower topples, each person should be holding onto a brick that has a number on it (except for the person who toppled the tower who possibly may not have a brick). At this point, announce an exercise that the group must do (jumping jacks, sit-ups, running in place, etc.), and everyone that has a 1 must do 10 repetitions, 2 equals 20 repetitions, and so on. Or you can do something for a set amount of time (running in place for 10 seconds, 20 seconds, and so on). If anyone had a blank brick, they get a free pass. The person who

knocked the tower over is assigned the number 6 if they didn't manage to pull out a brick before it fell.

### **Discussion Prompts**

1. Did you feel that the amount of exercise you had to do was fair or unfair? Why?
2. Do you ever feel like in your own life you are in an unfair situation where you have to do more work than others? What are these situations for you?
3. Do you ever look at others who you know and think it is unfair that they don't have to work as hard for something as you do?
4. If you feel your life is unfair, what do you do about it? Do you complain or do you realize you just might need to work a little harder to get the same things that others have?
5. Are you willing to work harder if your life is unfair? Why or why not?

### **Variations**

- Offer a prize for completing the exercises to give the group incentive to do them, rather than just telling them to do so. This will also emphasize the message of some people working harder for a reward.
- Focus the discussion on the advantages of getting more exercise than others get.