Creative Activity Ideas for Traumatized Children
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*Mental health practitioners are often seeking treatment interventions to make their work with traumatized children more engaging and developmentally appropriate. Below is a listing of creative activities for each of the core trauma-treatment components.*

**NOTE:** These interventions are for use by mental health practitioners who have been properly trained in clinical work with traumatized children. Practitioners must use therapeutic activities in a clinically and theoretically sound manner, and pay special attention to the process underlying each activity.

**Treatment Component: Psychoeducation**

**Objectives:**
- Verbalize an understanding of common psychosocial and behavioral reactions to trauma
- Verbalize an understanding of common symptoms related to trauma
- Decrease anxiety related to talking about the trauma

**Interventions:**

Crumpled Paper Throw game (modify the questions as needed) (Ages 4-12)
Source: *Cory Helps Kids Cope with Sexual Abuse*, Lowenstein, 2014, pages 22-30

A Terrible Thing Happened (Ages 4-7)
Source: Holmes, 2000

Sam Feels Better Now (Ages 8-12)
Source: Osborne, 2008

Source: Strauss & Farber, 2013

**Treatment Component: Relaxation**

**Objectives:**
- Verbalize an understanding of body responses to stress and how relaxation can reduce these responses
- Utilize an appropriate coping strategy to self-calm
- Decrease feelings of stress

**Interventions:**

Cookie Breathing Game (Ages 4-10)
Source: *Creative CBT Interventions for Children with Anxiety*, Lowenstein, 2016, page 49

Wild Monkeys Can Be Calm (Ages 4-10)
Source: Hartig, in *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Three*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2011, page 131

Awesome App (Ages 11+)
Source: *Creative CBT Interventions for Children with Anxiety*, Lowenstein, 2016, page 53

Pinwheels (Ages 3-10)
Source: *Play Therapy with Traumatized Children*, Goodyear-Brown, 2010, page 111

Tighten and Relax Dance (Ages 4-10)

Air Ball (Ages 5-14)
Grounding, Soothing, and Regulating Idea Cards (Ages 7+)
Source: A Therapeutic Treasure Box for Working with Children and Adolescents with Developmental Trauma, Treisman, 2017

Treatment Component: Affect Identification and Regulation

Objectives:
- Verbally articulate a range of feelings in various situations
- Identify the connection between different feelings and their appropriate facial expressions
- Verbally identify and express feelings associated with the trauma
- Articulate the intensity of various emotional states
- Learn and implement an appropriate self-calming strategy when feeling angry or anxious
- Decrease anxiety related to talking about the trauma

Interventions:

Guess Which Hand Game (Ages 3-10)
Source: Creative CBT Interventions for Children with Anxiety, Lowenstein, 2016, page 63

Lego Emotion House (Ages 7-12)
Source: Play Based Interventions for Autism Spectrum Disorder and Other Developmental Disabilities, Grant, 2016

Feelings Face Off (Ages 10-16)
Source: Play Based Interventions for Autism Spectrum Disorder and Other Developmental Disabilities, Grant, 2016

The Pick-Up Sticks Game (Ages 6-12)

Feelings Mish Mosh (Ages 4-8)

Feelings Photo Shoot (Ages 4+)
Source: Structured Play-Based Interventions for Engaging Children and Adolescents in Therapy, Cavett, 2010, page 64

Feelings Hide and Seek (Ages 5-10)

Mood Music (Ages 6-12)

Letting the Cat Out of the Bag (Ages 3-8)

Feelings Tic Tac Toe (Ages 8-12)
Source: Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth, Lowenstein, 1999, page 34

Feelings Face Off (Ages 10-16)
Source: Play Based Interventions for Autism Spectrum Disorder and Other Developmental Disabilities, Grant, 2016

Basketball (Ages 7+)
Source: Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth, Lowenstein, 1999, page 29
Air Hockey Feelings Game (Ages 8-12)  
Source: Creative CBT Interventions for Children with Anxiety, Lowenstein, 2016, page 65

Red or Black (Ages 6-12)  

Mancala Feeling Stones (Ages 7+)  
Source: Van Hollander, in Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Three, Edited by Lowenstein, 2011, page 60

If You’re Mad and You Know It (Ages 4-6)  

Don’t Flip Your Lid (Ages 6-12)  
Source: More Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth, Lowenstein, 2002, page 72

Angry Octopus: An Anger Management Story (Ages 4-8)  
Source: Lori Lite

Treatment Component: Cognitive Coping

Objectives:
- Articulate an understanding of the connection between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors
- Identify how changing thoughts can change feelings, sensations, and behaviors
- Replace unhelpful, inaccurate cognitions with helpful, accurate cognitions

Interventions:

Helpful Thoughts (Ages 9-12)  
Source: Cory Helps Kids Cope with Sexual Abuse, Lowenstein, 2014, pages 53-60

Lose the Bruise (Ages 9-12)  
Source: Digging for Buried Treasure: 52 prop-Based Play Therapy Interventions for Treating the Problems of Childhood, Goodyear-Brown, 2002

Positive and Negative Thinking (Ages 8+)

Positive Thinking Checkers (Ages 6-12)
Source: Anderson, in Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Three, Edited by Lowenstein, 2011, page 155

Treatment Component: Trauma Narration and Processing

Objectives:
- Verbally articulate the benefits of completing the trauma narrative
- Articulate the details of the trauma with diminished anxiety
- Reduce avoidance of cues, situations, and feelings associated with the trauma
- Eliminate or reduce to tolerable levels negative emotions related to the trauma
- Identify unhelpful or inaccurate trauma-related cognitions
- Identify and articulate more helpful or accurate ways to think about the traumatic exposure, self, family, worldview, and the future

Interventions:

Complete a Trauma Narrative utilizing art, play reenactment, or another engaging method
Source: Cory Helps Kids Cope with Sexual Abuse by Lowenstein, 2014, pages 62-72
Treatment Component: In Vivo Mastery

Objectives:
- Identify situations related to the trauma that trigger anxious reactions and avoidant behavior
- Develop and implement an in vivo hierarchy of avoided situations related to the trauma
- Secure the parents' commitment to follow through with the in vivo plan
- Decrease anxious reactions to innocuous stimuli associated with the trauma

Interventions:

Coping with Scary Reminders (Ages 4-10)
Source: Cory Helps Kids Cope with Sexual Abuse, Lowenstein, 2014, pages 81-85

Treatment Component: Conjoint Child-Parent Sessions

Objectives:
- Create a comfortable environment in which the child can openly express feelings with their primary caregivers
- Increase open communication between the child and their primary caregivers about the trauma
- Increase caregivers’ ability to respond appropriately to their child when discussing the trauma

Interventions:

Messages in Art (Ages 9+)
Source: Lori Gill in Creative Family Therapy Techniques, Edited by Lowenstein, 2010b, page 196

Table Talk (Ages 4+)
Source: Creative CBT Interventions for Children with Anxiety, Lowenstein, 2016, page 124

Sharing the Story (Ages 4+)
Source: Cory Helps Kids Cope with Sexual Abuse, Lowenstein, 2014, pages 87-90

Treatment Component: Enhancing Safety and Future Development

Objectives:
- Verbally identify warning signs of danger
- Increase knowledge of sexual issues such as body awareness, okay and not okay touch
- Learn and practice communication, assertiveness, problem-solving, and other personal safety skills to keep safe in the future
- Increase open communication between the child and their primary caregivers about unsafe situations
- Verbally articulate genuine positive statements about self

Interventions:

Popsicle Stick People (Ages 4-10)
Source: Cory Helps Kids Cope with Sexual Abuse, Lowenstein, 2014, pages 102-108

Okay to Say No Game (Ages 4-8)
Healthy Sexuality Dice Game (Ages 4+)
Source: Cory Helps Kids Cope with Sexual Abuse, Lowenstein, 2014, pages 91-99

Positive Postings (Ages 6+)

Empowering Bracelets (Ages 7+)

**Treatment Component: Termination**

**Objectives:**
- Verbally articulate an appropriate understanding of why, when, and how therapy will end
- Verbally articulate positive gains made in therapy
- Verbally articulate a positive goodbye experience

**Interventions:**

Cookie Jar (Ages 3-10)
Source: Creative CBT Interventions for Children with Anxiety, Lowenstein, 2016, page 132

Saying Good-bye: Breaking the Links in a Chain (Ages 4-10)
Source: Lawrence, in 101 Favorite Play Therapy Techniques Volume Three, Edited by Kaduson & Schaefer, 2003, page 77

What I Learned Layered Gift (Ages 7+)
Source: Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families, Edited by Lowenstein, 2008, page 177

Putting the Puzzle Pieces of Resiliency Together (Ages 12+)
Source: Structured Play-Based Interventions for Engaging Children and Adolescents in Therapy, Cavett, 2010, page 158

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