

Air Ball

Source: Alexander Brian Yu

Theme: Coping and Problem-Solving

Recommended Age: Five to Fourteen

Modality: Individual, Group, Family

Goals

- Learn, practice and implement deep breathing as a way to manage anger, stress, and anxiety
- Increase ability to accept failure or enjoy success through healthy, fair competition
- Develop a positive sense of self

Materials

- Two lightweight balls such as Ping-Pong balls or foam balls
- Poster board (4 ft. x 2 ft.)
- Table long enough to support the game board

Description

Introduce the activity by stating that the client is going to first learn a coping technique (deep breathing) and then a game will be played that will help him/her practice the deep-breathing strategy.

Teach the client the proper deep-breathing technique. Have the client put one hand on his/her chest and another hand on his/her stomach. Instruct the client to breathe air into his/her stomach (diaphragm) and not into his/her chest. The client can do this by making the stomach hand rise and not the chest hand. Instruct the client to breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth.

Explain the Air Ball Game as follows:

Version 1: In the first version of this game, the objective is for one player to blow the ball off the end of the game board before the other player does. (If this is a family or group session, the family or group members will be the participants while the practitioner will be the referee. If the session is an individual session with just the practitioner and client, both the practitioner and client will be participants and compete against each other.) Both participants will kneel/sit at the same end of the board, placing their balls on the edge of the table. The practitioner (or other group members if available) will say “Go!” (If in an individual session, the practitioner will signal with a hand motion to signify “Go!” instead of verbally saying it, since the practitioner will be participating.) Before this happens, both participants will breathe in as much air as they can (and feel their stomachs rise as they inhale), and when they hear “Go!” (or see the hand signal from the practitioner), they will blow out all their air as quickly as possible

onto their balls. Players are only allowed to take one inhalation and exhalation per round. Whoever gets their ball to fall off the opposing edge first, wins! If a participant's ball falls off the side of the game board, he/she will be disqualified. If neither participant is able to blow his/her ball off the edge, the winner will be the one who blows his/her ball the fastest and the furthest. This version of the game might be more suitable to play on the ground than on a table since you are likely to have a lot more space for the ball to roll than on a table. However, it does create a bit of an awkward position when blowing at the ball.

Version 2: The second version of this game requires more precise and controlled breathing and exhaling. The goal of the game is for players to blow their individual balls as far as possible without blowing them off any edge of the game board. If a ball lands on certain areas of the game board (see sample game board below), the participant earns a certain amount of points. The most points will be awarded to balls that roll and stop on the most difficult areas of the game board. If participants blow too strongly, they will blow their ball off the edge and score no points. If participants blow too softly, they will not get as many points as they can by blowing their ball as close to the opposing edge as possible. Unlike in Version 1, participants will take turns blowing their individual balls. The practitioner will decide how many rounds each of the participants will play (at least five rounds are recommended). Whoever has the most points at the end of the rounds is the winner. (Just like in Version 1, the practitioner can serve as a referee if in a group or family session, or if the session is an individual one, the practitioner can play as the other competitor to the client.)

During the game, the practitioner should encourage the client to express his/her feelings related to the game. When the client experiences mastery or lack of mastery over the game, ask how the client feels. Then suggest that the client verbally and physically show how he/she feels. The practitioner can teach the client positive self-talk to help the client counter feelings of failure, for example, *win some, lose some or I tried my best and that's what counts.*

Some clients may become overly focused on the game and lose sight of the therapeutic goal, which is to practice deep breathing. As such, the practitioner should monitor the client's deep breathing during the game to ensure the correct technique is being practiced.

Several rounds can be played with different sizes and weights of balls to help the client build skills and enhance the overall experience.

If the game is played in a group or during a family session, form teams so that members can experience cooperation, camaraderie, and teamwork.

Discussion

Oaklander (2007) asserts that clients who develop a sense of self have a positive feeling

of well-being and confidence in expressing themselves. Those with a strong sense of self are aware of their senses, body, intellect, and emotions, and they have the courage and security to express these aspects. If any of these aspects are thwarted, Oaklander argues that clients develop insecurities and problematic ways to cope and act.

One way Oaklander suggests clients can develop a sense of self is by engaging them in new experiences that involve their breath and voice. This game provides opportunities to control and master the power of breathing, a biological process that is often taken for granted. In addition, many anxieties can be mollified if people learn to breathe correctly and engage in some deep breathing from time to time. This activity helps clients learn to breathe correctly and to be more aware of their breathing, which in turn, can lead to enhanced anxiety management skills.

During the game, clients are encouraged to express their feelings of mastery or lack of mastery over the game. Expressing and being aware of emotions is another way of developing a strong sense of self (Oaklander, 2007), and this game provides opportunities to do this in an environment that is safe, non-judgmental, and comfortable for clients.

When used in a family session, this game can be used as an opportunity to give members a chance to play or interact with each other in positive ways that they may not typically do at home. Since this should be a brand new game for all family members, it should allow all members to feel that they are on an even playing field in therapy, which is a dynamic that cannot always exist at home with parents having authority over their children or with older siblings dominating younger ones. Keep in mind that this dynamic may not occur if parents and older siblings (who may have an advantage over younger players in the game) do not allow themselves to lose on purpose from time to time so that younger family members stay interested and motivated. If teams are made during the game, this can enhance intimacy among family members.

Reference

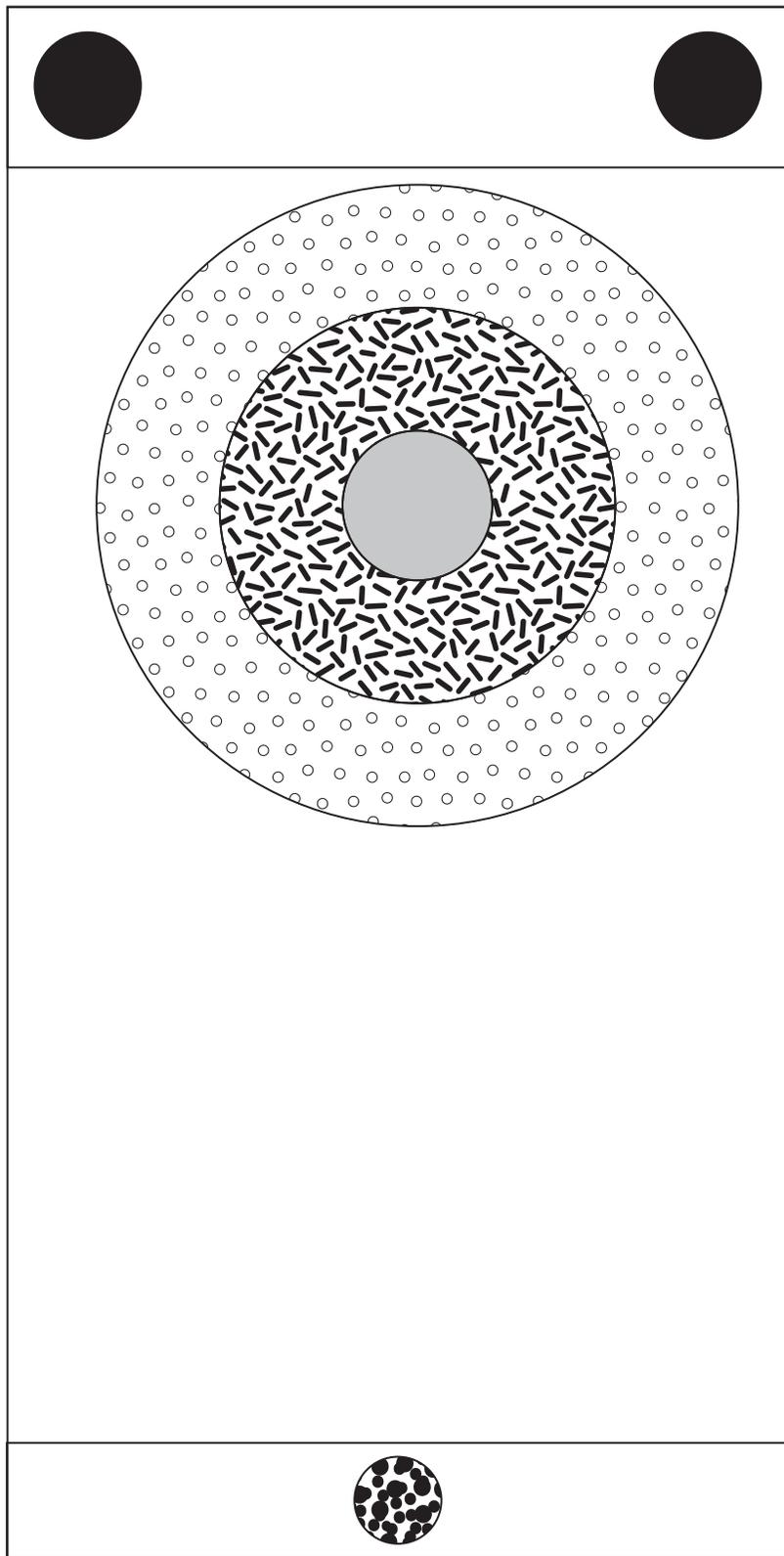
Oaklander, V. (2007). *Hidden treasure: A map to the child's inner self*. London: Karnac.

About The Author

Alexander Brian Yu, MS, is a graduate student at the University of Missouri in Kansas City, working on his Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology. He has gained clinical experience working as a practicum therapist for a community mental health agency, as a school-based counselor for elementary schools, and as a peer educator for the University of California, Irvine Counseling Center. He completed his M.S. in Clinical Psychology at California State University, Fullerton and received his B.A. in Psychology and Social Behavior from the University of California, Irvine.

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Gameboard (Sample)



	=	Game		1000 pts		500 pts
		Ball		800 pts		600 pts