

Red Light/Green Light Scribble

Source: Tammi Van Hollander

Theme: Coping and/or Anger Management

Recommended Ages: Three to Twelve

Modality: Individual, Group, Family

Setting: In-Person

Goals

- Improve impulse control and ability to self-regulate
- Improve listening skills, eye contact, and focus

Materials

- Large paper
- Markers or crayons (one for each group or family member)

Advance Preparation

Place the paper and markers on a table or on the floor. Ensure there is ample space for all group or family members to sit around the paper.

Description

Part One

The first part of the activity is Winnicott's Interactive Squiggle Game (1971b). Each person in the group or family picks a marker and one person draws a scribble on a large piece of paper. Then the next person adds to that scribble and continues to make connections. (The following person must watch carefully where the last scribble ended.) The next person connects as they start their scribble where the last person left off. The scribbles become continuous lines of connections and the lines can go in whatever direction they choose.

Part Two

Turn over the paper and say: "This is too easy, so we are going to make it harder. We are going to play a different version of Red Light, Green Light. We are going to continue the game of connecting scribbles, but the scribbler cannot go until the leader (the person sitting to their left) says, 'green light.' They have to keep scribbling until the leader says, 'red light.' When the leader says, 'Red light' the scribbler has to immediately stop drawing, look the leader in the eye, and wait for the leader to say, 'green light.' The leader can also say, 'yellow light' and then the scribbler must draw slowly. If the scribbler starts before the green light or keeps going through the red light, then they get a warning for a speeding ticket. If this happens again (the scribbler starts before the green light or keeps going through the red light), then they get an imaginary speeding ticket."

Once several rounds have been played, switch roles and have another group or family member be the leader.

Part Three (optional)

If there is time, the group or family can create a story about the pictures they see in the scribble. At the end, everyone signs the drawing, which gives them a sense of importance and accomplishment.

Discussion

There are many benefits to this activity, such as: Following rules, taking turns, controlling impulses, focusing, and maintaining eye contact, and learning how to work together. The activity also assesses dynamics of control, collaboration, and self-regulation. For instance, some children proceed slowly because they are afraid to get a speeding ticket. Some parents have difficulty stopping and listening to the child's commands in the game. Some children will quickly say, "red light/green light" in one breath, so the player is unable to do a scribble. Others will not say, "red light" so the player's scribble goes on and on.

Creative activities that are mutually inclusive of all group or family members strengthen cohesion and positive interaction.

This activity can also be played in individual therapy with the practitioner and client taking turns being the leader and scribbler.

Reference

Winnicott, D.W. (1971b). *Therapeutic consultations in child psychiatry*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

About the Author

Tammi Van Hollander, LCSW, RPT-S, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Registered Play Therapist-Supervisor, and owner of Main Line Play Therapy in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. She is an international speaker and play advocate. Her work and creative interventions in the field of play therapy have been published and internationally recognized. She is a Certified Trainer for the Nurtured Heart Approach®, a Certified FirstPlay® practitioner. Tammi is a founding board member of The World Association for Sand Therapy Professionals. She specializes in sand tray play therapy, sensory integration, and attachment, working with children, families, and adults of all ages. Tammi authored the book *Casey's Greatness Wings* and created *Greatness Sticks*®. Tammi is a sought-after expert for speaking engagements, podcasts, and webinars.

