Mad Libs® Assertiveness
Source: Amy Flaherty

Recommended Age Range: Eight and Up
Treatment Modality: Individual, Group, Family

Goals
• Increase expression of feelings
• Learn appropriate ways to handle conflict

Materials
• Pen/pencil
• Index cards (can use paper if desired)
• Sample Mad Libs (included)
• Parts of Speech (included)

Description
Teach the assertiveness skill of expressing feelings appropriately using the sentence structure of “I feel ___ when you __. I would like you to ____” (Perry, 2002). Discuss with the client or group ways that this can be used in everyday situations.

Next, make three separate stacks of index cards. With the first stack, work with the client or group to write a feeling word on each card. Write any type of verb or verb phrases on each card separating these into two different stacks. Instruct the client to mix up the cards keeping each in the separate stacks (one stack for each blank in the exercise) and then draw one from each stack to finish the assertiveness sentence learned earlier.

Using the three stacks created, practice the sentence structure learned above and use the three stacks of cards created to complete the sentence. A sentence may be created that is not realistic but does use the STRUCTURE of the assertiveness. For example, a sentence may be created that reads “I feel sad when you jump rope. I would like you to eat spaghetti.”

Sample Mad Libs have been included to guide this activity.

Discussion
The activity reinforces assertiveness skills, as suggested by behavioral therapists (Skinner, 1976). Many clients have difficulty learning and remembering how to express feelings appropriately. This activity teaches assertiveness skills, and helps clients practice by creating Mad Libs. Clients have repeated exposure to
various feeling words and the practice of using the skill in a non-threatening, fun environment. With this activity, the STRUCTURE of the skill is what is important, not necessarily the specific words used.

This activity can be used in an individual, group, or family therapy setting. Younger clients may need help identifying different types of verbs.

References


About The Author

Amy Flaherty, M.S., LPE-I, RPT, has worked as an outpatient therapist since 2005. She is currently the president of a private practice in Arkansas, True Hope Counseling, where she conducts counseling and psychological testing with a variety of populations. She also acts as Senior Therapist for an outpatient therapy clinic working primarily with children. Most recently, she began teaching a training program specializing in Sandtray therapy as well as other types of play therapy techniques.

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Sample Mad Libs

Example One: A Day at the Park

Today I went to the park. I saw a __________(adjective) __________(noun) running up and down in its tree. She __________(verb: past tense) __________(adverb) through the large tunnel that led to its __________(adjective) __________(noun). I got some bread and passed it through the fence to a gigantic gray __________(noun) running around in circles. Feeding that animal made me hungry. I went to get a __________(adjective) scoop of ice cream. It filled my stomach. Afterwards I had to __________(verb) __________ (adverb) to catch my ride. When I got home I __________(verb past tense) my aunt for a __________(adjective) day at the park.

Example Two: A Bully on the Playground

I hate going to school. First, I ________ (verb) in my seat during the first part of the _________ (noun) and then I __________ (verb) outside. When I’m outside, I love to __________ (verb) on the monkey bars, but it is not all fun on the playground. One day, I was being bullied by an older kid. At first I was ________ (feeling word) but then I was able to ________( verb). After I did this, I felt so proud! I used my assertiveness skills! I told him “I feel ________ (feeling word) when you ________ (verb present tense). I want you to ________ (verb present tense).” Who knew that standing up for yourself could really work??!
# Parts of Speech

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>part of speech</th>
<th>function or &quot;job&quot;</th>
<th>example words</th>
<th>example sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Verb</strong></td>
<td>action or state</td>
<td>(to) be, have, do, like, work, sing, can, must</td>
<td>A cat <strong>runs</strong> around the house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Noun</strong></td>
<td>thing or person</td>
<td>pen, pencil, table, dog, car</td>
<td>My <strong>cat</strong> is really cute.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adjective</strong></td>
<td>describes a noun</td>
<td>a/an, the, three, some, good, big, yellow, well, interesting</td>
<td>That <strong>red</strong> car can go really fast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adverb</strong></td>
<td>describes a verb, adjective or adverb</td>
<td>quickly, silently, well, badly, very, really</td>
<td>It is nice to read <strong>silently</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pronoun</strong></td>
<td>replaces a noun</td>
<td>I, you, he, she, some</td>
<td>Amy is really smart. <strong>She</strong> loves to read books.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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