

Creative Therapeutic Activity Ideas for Children and Youth

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Mental health practitioners are often seeking therapeutic interventions to make their work with children and youth more engaging. Below is a list of common treatment objectives and creative activities.

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

Treatment Focus: Rapport-Building

Objectives:

- Articulate increased comfort with the therapist
- Verbalize positive thoughts about attending therapy
- Disclose information about self to the therapist

Interventions:

Rock, Paper, Scissors (Ages 4-10)

Source: *Structured Play-Based Interventions for Engaging Children and Adolescents in Therapy*, Cavett, 2010, page 8

Paper Bag Puppets (Ages 4-10)

Source: *More Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth*, Lowenstein, 2002, page 5

How About You? (Ages 6-12)

Source: *Creative CBT Interventions for Children with Anxiety*, Lowenstein, 2016, page 27

The "I Don't Know, I Don't Care, I Don't Want Talk About It" Game (Ages 7+)

Source: *More Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth*, Lowenstein, 2002, page 3

Five Favorites (Ages 6-12)

Source: *Creative CBT Interventions for Children with Anxiety*, Lowenstein, 2016, page 28

Google It (Ages 10+)

Source: Sousa, in *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Three*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2011, page 4

Truth, Lie, Wish (Ages 10+)

Source: LaRochelle, in *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Three*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2011, page 36

Therapeutic Magic Tricks (Ages 5+)

Source: Frey, in: *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2008, page 12

Funny Faces (Ages 6-10)

Source: Snailham, in *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Three*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2011, page 2

Draw Switch (Ages 5+)

Source: Labonte, in: *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Two*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2010, page 13

Treatment Focus: Relaxation and Coping Skills

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

Air Ball (Ages 5-14)

Source: Yu, in *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Three*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2011, page 94

Hockey Life (Ages 8-16)

Source: Sun-Reid, in *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Three*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2011, page 112

Protective Armor (Ages 7-14)

Source: Will, in *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Three*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2011, page 117

Music Carpet Ride for Calming (Ages 4+)

Source: *70 Play Activities for Better Thinking, Self-Regulation, Learning, and Behavior*, Kenney, 2016

Grounding, Soothing, and Regulating Idea Cards (Ages 7+)

Source: *A Therapeutic Treasure Box for Working with Children and Adolescents with Developmental Trauma*, Treisman, 2017

Feel Better Bag (Ages 7+)

Source: *Creative Interventions for Bereaved Children*, Lowenstein, 2006b

Hug (Ages 3+)

Source: Russell, in: *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2008, page 148

Fabulous Frogs (Ages 4+)

Source: Brace, in *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Three*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2011, page 109

Sweet Dream Box (Ages 3-10)

Source: Snead, in: *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2008, page 142

Treatment Focus: Feelings Expression

Objectives:

- Verbally articulate a range of feelings in various situations
- Identify the connection between different feelings and their appropriate facial expressions
- Articulate the intensity of various emotional states

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

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

Source: McDowell, in *101 Favorite Play Therapy Techniques*, Edited by Kaduson & Schaefer, 1997, page 145

Feelings Mish Mosh (Ages 4-8)

Source: *Paper Dolls and Paper Airplanes: Therapeutic Exercises for Sexually Traumatized Children*, Crisci, Lay, & Lowenstein, 1997

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)

Source: *Techniques, Techniques, Techniques: Play-Based Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families*, Noziska, 2008, page 25

Mood Music (Ages 6-12)

Source: *Play Therapy with Traumatized Children*, Goodyear-Brown, 2010, page 181

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

Source: *More Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth*, Lowenstein, 2002, page 25

Feelings Tic Tac Toe (Ages 8-12)

Source: *Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth*, Lowenstein, 1999, page 34

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)

Source: LaRochelle, in: *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Two*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2010, page 52

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

Treatment Focus: Anger Management

Objectives:

- Verbally identify situations, thoughts, and feelings that trigger anger
- Verbally articulate feelings masked by anger
- Verbalize an understanding of the internal warning signs of anger
- Implement an appropriate self-calming strategy to reduce the frequency of aggressive anger outbursts
- Increase compliance with rules at home and school
- Increase verbalizations of acceptance of responsibility for misbehavior
- Parents to establish and maintain appropriate limits when the child reacts in a verbally or physically aggressive manner
- Parents will say an appropriate labelled praise statement to child at least once per day to increase the child's positive behaviors
- Increase the frequency of positive parent-child interactions

Interventions:

I Get Angry When... (Ages 7-12)

Source: *Seeing Red: An Anger Management and Peacemaking Curriculum for Kids*, Simmonds, 2014, page 21

The Mad Game (Ages 7-10)

Source: Davidson, in *101 Favorite Play Therapy Techniques*, Edited by Kaduson & Schaefer, 1997, page 224

Warning Cards (Ages 7-12)

Source: *Seeing Red: An Anger Management and Peacemaking Curriculum for Kids*, Simmonds, 2014, page 34

Core Feeling Cards (Ages 7-12)

Source: *Seeing Red: An Anger Management and Peacemaking Curriculum for Kids*, Simmonds, 2014, -
Verbally articulate feelings masked by anger
page 38

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

Source: *More Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth*, Lowenstein, 2002, page 48

Don't Flip Your Lid (Ages 6-12)

Source: *More Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth*, Lowenstein, 2002, page 72

Rate It (Ages 9+)

Source: *More Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth*, Lowenstein, 2002, page 68

Road Rage (Ages 7-12)

Source: *More Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth*, Lowenstein, 2002, page 64

Balloons of Anger (Ages 7-12)

Source: Horn, in *101 Favorite Play Therapy Techniques*, Edited by Kaduson & Schaefer, 1997, page 250

Angry Character (Ages 7-12)

Source: Bulak, in *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Three*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2011, page 98

Angry Yes Calm Yes (Ages 7-12)

Source: *Play Based Interventions for Autism Spectrum Disorder and Other Developmental Disabilities*, Grant, 2016

Brag Journal (Ages 3-12)

Source: Source: *Cory Helps Kids Cope with Sexual Abuse*, Lowenstein, 2014, page 31

123 Magic Parenting Program DVD (3-12)

Source: Phelan

Positive Parenting Program (Triple P) (All ages)

Source: Sanders

Playdate (Ages 3-12)

Source: *Creative CBT Interventions for Children with Anxiety*, Lowenstein, 2016, page 127

Treatment Focus: Social Skills

Objectives:

-Increase pro-social behavior such as following rules, good manners, active listening, turn-taking, sharing materials, assertiveness, respecting personal space, maintaining appropriate discretion when discussing personal information

Interventions:

Bubbles (Ages 4-6)

Source: *More Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth*, Lowenstein, 2002, page 79

Getting Along with Others Game (Ages 7+)

Source: *More Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth*, Lowenstein, 2002, page 84

The Social Brick Road (Ages 7-12)

Source: *AutPlay Therapy for Children and Adolescents on the Autism Spectrum: A Behavioral Play-Based Approach*, Grant, 2017

The "May I... Thank You" Card Game (Ages 6-10)

Source: Leben, in: *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2008, page 108

Where Does it Belong? (Ages 4-10)

Source: Heinrichs, in: *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2008, page 71

Work It Out Game (Ages 6-12)

Source: *Play Therapy: Engaging & Powerful Techniques for the Treatment of Childhood Disorders*, Mellenthin, 2018, page 130

Captain's Quarter's Game (6-10)

Source: *More Creative Coping Skills for Children*, Thomas, 2016, page 14

Stop, Slow, Go (Ages 6-10)

Source: Johnson, in *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Three*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2011, page 85

Hands Off! That's the Rule (Ages 4-10)

Source: Reis, in: *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2008, page 134

Who, What, Where, and When (Ages 5-16)

Source: *Techniques, Techniques, Techniques: Play-Based Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families*, Noziska, 2008, page 87

Magic Carpet Ride (Ages 4-7)

Source: *Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth*, Lowenstein, 1999, page 58

Who's Got the Turtle? Game (Ages 3-7)

Source: Walton, in: *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2008, page 102

Hugs (Ages 4-12)

Source: *Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth*, Lowenstein, 1999, page 67

Building Blocks (Ages 7-16)

Source: *Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth*, Lowenstein, 1999, page 70

InventoGame (Ages 12+)

Source: Roberts, in: *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2008, page 114

Line-Up Game (Ages 8-16)

Source: Cadore, in *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Three*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2011, page 82

Treatment Focus: Self-Esteem

Objectives:

- Increase positive verbalizations about self
- Verbalize an understanding that self-worth is inside, not outside, of oneself

Interventions:

The Colors of Me (Ages 6+)

Source: Arkell, in: *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2008, page 162

I Have Heart (Ages 7+)

Source: *Techniques, Techniques, Techniques: Play-Based Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families*, Noziska, 2008, page 65

Positive Postings (Ages 6+)

Source: Swank, in: *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2008, page 164

Positive Thinking Checkers (Ages 7-12)

Source: Anderson, in *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Three*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2011, page 155

Gift Bag (Ages 9+)

Source: *More Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth*, Lowenstein, 2002, page 110

Blind Self Session (Ages 9+)

Source: Borryo, in: *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Two*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2010, page 108

Empowering Bracelets (Ages 7+)

Source: Thome, in: *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Two*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2010, page 112

Inside the Special Box (Ages 4-12)

Source: Danilewitz, in: *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Two*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2010, page 119

Kaleidoscope of Hope (Ages 10+)

Source: DeVries, in *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Three*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2011, page 148

Balloon Bounce (Ages 7-10)

Source: *Creative Interventions for Bereaved Children*, Lowenstein, 2006b, page 123

The Hero in You (Ages 9+)

Source: *Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth*, Lowenstein, 1999, page 92

Write on Board (Ages 9+)

Source: Waddell, in: *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Two*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2010, page 142

Treatment Focus: 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

Garden of Growth (Ages 8+)

Source: Cassano, in *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Three*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2011, page 176