



**GROUP THERAPY WITH CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS
GROUPS IN SCHOOLS
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PART I

Introduction

PERSPECTIVE

“Of all the psychotherapy modalities, group therapy, in particular, complements the normal developmental tasks that further children’s capacities for social interaction and intimacy” (p. vii).

Schaefer (1999)

PROBLEMS COMMONLY ADDRESSED IN GROUP THERAPY WITH CHILDREN

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Behavioral Problems
- Impulse Control Problems (ADHD)
- Low Self-Esteem
- Children of Divorce
- Social Skills Deficits
- Anger Management



PROBLEMS COMMONLY ADDRESSED IN GROUP THERAPY WITH ADOLESCENTS

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Behavioral Problems
- Impulse Control Problems (ADHD)
- Low Self-Esteem
- Family Problems
- Relational Deficits
- Anger Management
- Substance Abuse



WHY GROUP THERAPY FOR YOUTH?

- Group is often a “treatment of choice for adolescents with multiple diagnoses, esp. substance abuse, depression, and ODD” (Rubenstein, 2005, p. 410).
- Chief Benefits of group therapy:
 - Reduced stigma and support from similar peers.
 - Individual patterns will manifest (social microcosm).
 - Opportunity to challenge and be challenged by peers.
 - Opportunity to emote, flirt, act-out in a safe place.
 - Opportunity to learn and practice new social skills.

PRIMARY GOALS
AT GROUPWORKS

Self Regulation
Self-Esteem
Relationship
Skills



Groupworks

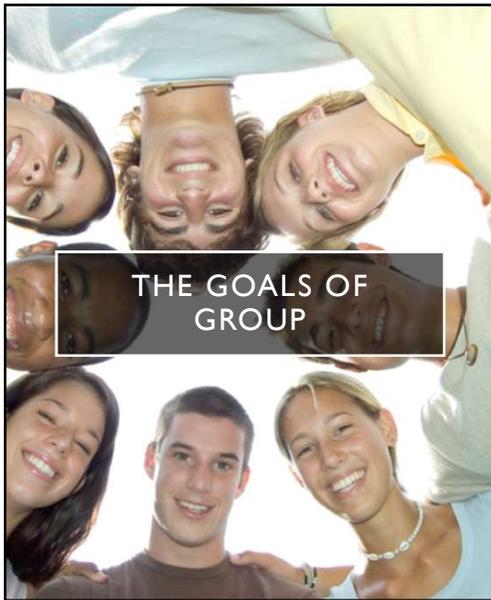
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THE GOALS OF
GROUP

Self-Regulation (Self-Control)

- *Recognizing & Dealing with emotions*
- *Recognizing why we act in certain ways*
- *Working to manage or control emotions and actions*
- *Learning to cope without substances and other unhealthy habits that can damage relationships*



Self-Esteem

- *Having a positive image of yourself*
- *Feeling confident enough to make changes in attitudes and behaviors*



Relationship Skills

- *Having an awareness of yourself and others*
- *Being able to 'read' others*
- *Learning skills to build healthy and rewarding relationships*
- *Knowing what to say and/or do around others*
- *Becoming more aware of how others impact you... in both positive and negative ways*

INTEGRATED APPROACH

- Current neurological research supports a highly interactive and experiential approach to child group therapy
- Siegel (1999) states, "...human connections shape the neural connections from which the mind emerges" (p. 2).
- The emphasis is shifted away from talking and more exclusively cognitive interventions
- Schank & Cleave (1995 in Morowitz & Singer) state, "The method people naturally employ to acquire knowledge is largely unsupported by traditional classroom practice...the human mind is better equipped to gather information about the world by operating within it..." (p. 175).
- The focus is placed upon experiential learning through interpersonal process

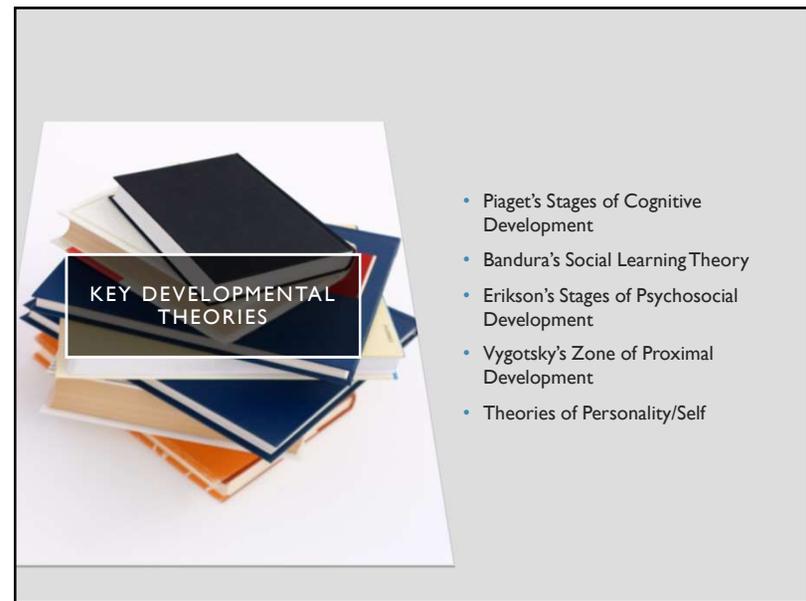


Child Development for the Group Psychotherapist



KEY REALMS OF DEVELOPMENT

Cognitive
Social &
Interpersonal
Intrapersonal



KEY DEVELOPMENTAL THEORIES

- Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development
- Bandura's Social Learning Theory
- Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development
- Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development
- Theories of Personality/Self

PIAGET'S STAGES OF COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Stage Theory

- Subsequent stages are impacted by deficits in previous ones

Sensorimotor Stage

- Roughly birth to age 2 years
- This stage is pre-verbal
- Child understands the world via his/her physical interactions with the environment

PIAGET'S STAGES OF COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Preoperational Period

- Roughly ages 2 to 7 years
- Involves the emergence of **language**, which is seen as aiding development
- The transition from the sensorimotor to the preoperational stage involves the emergence of **representational thought**

PIAGET'S STAGES OF COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Concrete Operational Period

- Roughly ages 7 to 11 years
- Most children involved in group therapy would likely be in this developmental period
- involves movement toward the emergence of operations, which Miller (1993) defines as “**an internalized action that is part of an organized structure**” (p.57).
- the emergence of **reversibility of operations** occurs in this stage.

PIAGET'S STAGES OF COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Concrete Operational Period

- Temporal awareness
- **Cause and effect** thought
- Awareness of more **abstract concepts** such as self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, etc.
- Ability to **link concepts** like emotions to facial features, bodily experiences, etc.
- Capacity to **learn and remember rules** applicable to different situations
- Organization of a **sense of self and others**
- Development of a sense of 'duty'
- Autonomy

PIAGET'S STAGES OF COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Formal Operational Period

- Roughly ages 11 to 15 years
- Formal operational thought involves what Miller defines as thought that has become “**truly logical, abstract, and hypothetical**” (p. 60).
- Mental operations become **less tied to objects and events** (Miller, 1993)

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Potential for Cognitive Abstraction



COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT-CONSIDERATIONS

The group therapist must consider:

- Reading Levels
- Language Abilities
- Conceptual Abilities
- Developmental Delays
- Variations in cognitive development among members



INTERPERSONAL (SOCIAL) DEVELOPMENT



Children make connections through doing and being active (play)



Adolescents make connections through discussing and getting to know each other (more like adults)



Sharing & cooperation are the glue of group (cohesion)



With children the focus is often on sharing the physical assets of the group (materials, space, etc.) rather than exclusively on sharing the verbal space as with adolescents & adults

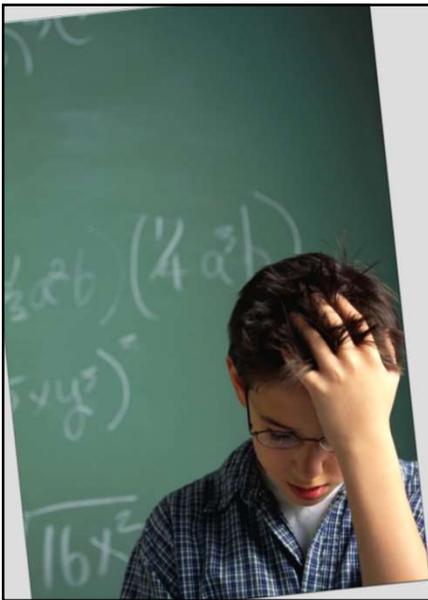
SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY (BANDURA)

- Two concepts from this theory are particularly relevant to group therapy
 - Vicarious Reinforcement
 - “The punishment or reinforcement of (a) model’s behavior has the same effect on the observer as it does on the model” (Miller, 1993, p. 185).
 - Observational Learning
 - Acquiring behaviors based upon their observed reinforcement or non-reinforcement in models



ERIKSON'S STAGES OF PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

- A Good Broad Guide to What the Objectives are for a given group
 - Basic Trust vs. Mistrust (0-1 years)
 - Autonomy vs. Shame & Doubt (2-3 years)
 - Initiative vs. Guilt (4-6 years)
 - **Industry vs. Inferiority (7-11 years)**
 - **Identity vs. Role Confusion (12-19 years)**



INDUSTRY VS. INFERIORITY (AGES 7-11)

- Children are eager to establish new skills and abilities. This creates the sense of industry or success.
- Children who do not master new skills and abilities develop a sense of worthlessness that leads to inferiority.

VYGOTSKY'S ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT

- Identifying the ideal developmental capacity at a given age/development
- Assessing the child's current functioning
- Designing interventions that bridge from his/her current functioning to the "best possible" level (given limitations)



VYGOTSKY'S ZONE OF
PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT

Expectations

- Too high—frustrating, unrealistic, highlights limitations only
- Too low—does not promote growth



RELATED TO GROUP
THERAPY...

Group leaders are called upon to facilitate and even 'engineer' successes for the members of their groups!

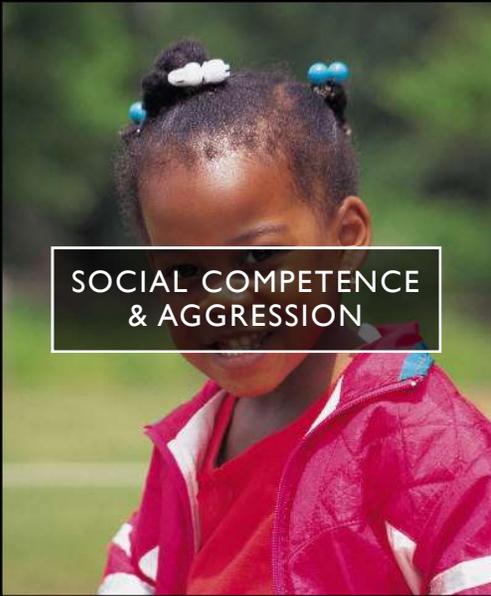
INTERPERSONAL (SOCIAL) DEVELOPMENT

←
Dependent on
Therapist for
Connecting
Interpersonally

→
Independently
Connects with
Others

INTERPERSONAL DEVELOPMENT- CONSIDERATIONS

- The Group Therapist must consider:
 - Interpersonal Awareness
 - Ability to read interpersonal feedback and react appropriately
 - The degree to which the child can meet the demands of their stage of development without assistance
 - Variations in interpersonal development among members of a group



**SOCIAL COMPETENCE
& AGGRESSION**

Singh et al. (2007) found that as children's social competence increased their aggression decreased.

INTRAPERSONAL DEVELOPMENT



- Getting to know oneself
- Quirks
- Preferences
- Triggers
- Strengths/Weaknesses



PART III

Interpersonal Theoretical Foundations

YALOM'S THERAPEUTIC FACTORS





FACTORS MOST CRITICAL FOR CHILDREN'S GROUPS

- Shechtman, Bar-El & Hadar (1997)
 - Group Cohesiveness
 - Catharsis
 - Development of Socializing Techniques



PROCESS VS. CONTENT

Process-More experiential, taps into implicit memory, facilitates the development of the social microcosm.

Content-Less experiential, relies on explicit memory, shifts focus away from the social microcosm.



PROCESS FOCUS

- While a content focus serves a purpose in groups, a process focus:
 - Reveals more about the interpersonal makeup of the person
 - Offers greater opportunity for the 're-wiring' of the brain

PROCESS WORK WITH CHILDREN

Group work with a here-and-now focus that identifies and illuminates the process is most powerful (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005).

- Step 1: The *immediate experience* of the group on both the process and content levels.
- Step 2: *Illuminating the process* (through making Here & Now comments):
 - "Johnny, looks like you are frustrated with Susie...could you tell her how you are feeling right now?"
 - "Did anyone notice what Ryan just did to help Billy?"
 - "Do you like the way it feels now that everyone is talking at once?"

PROCESS WORK WITH CHILDREN

This here and now illumination of process can also be thought of as a “**self-reflective loop**” (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005, p. 142).



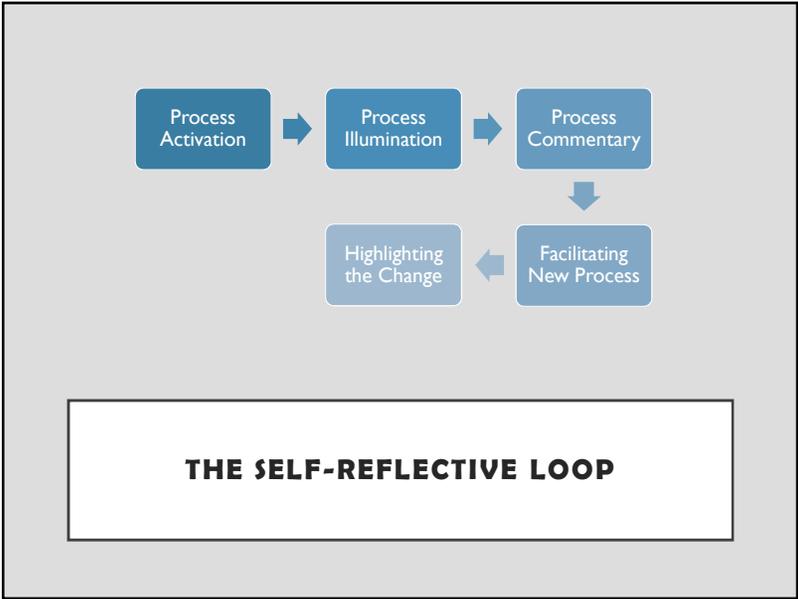
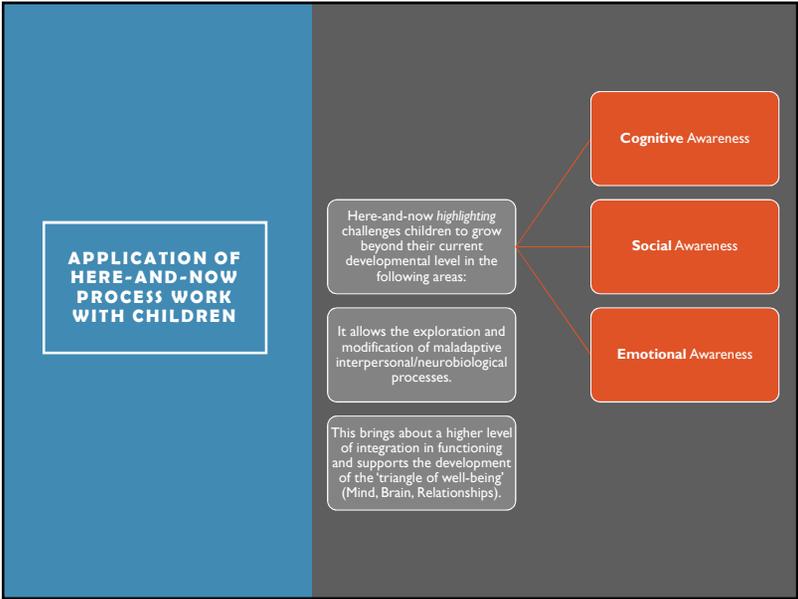
This self-reflection encourages “children **to learn to talk about immediate thoughts and feelings**, which in turn may help them in their adult relationships” (Smead, 1995, p. 10).



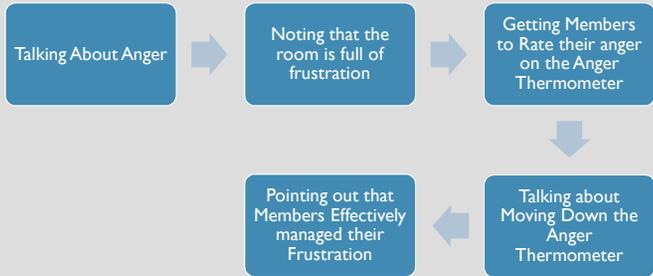
APPLICATION OF HERE-AND-NOW PROCESS WORK WITH CHILDREN

Process commentary is a way of *highlighting* (Rutan, personal communication 2001) what is happening in groups

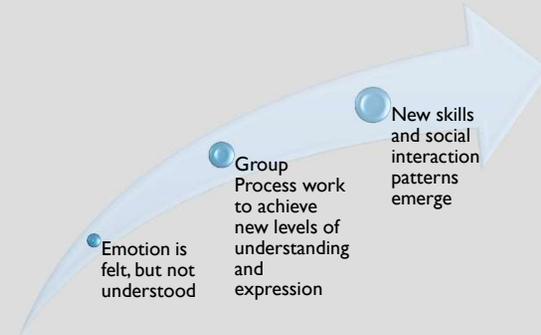
- Verbalizations
- Behaviors
- Non-Verbal Indicators



THE GOAL



GETTING BETTER



WHEN HARRY MET SALLY...

Harry & Sally are playing with Pokemon toys and cards as group is starting.

Harry loses the card game they've been playing. He gets angry. Sally calls him a 'sore loser'. Name calling ensues.

(It gets contentious from here, but...) Sally kicks Harry. Harry kicks Sally. The graduate student separates them.

And now... the interpersonal process!

HARRY, SALLY, AND "THE ANGER BUDDIES"

Two uninvolved members are engaged in problem solving with Harry & Sally.

Vicarious/Observational Learning Ensues.

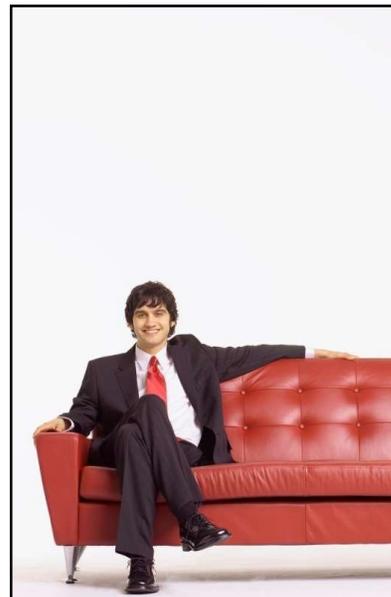
The tale has a happy ending.

We won't live happily ever after just yet, but we'll repeat this process until we do!



PART IV

Group Leadership



THERAPIST QUALITIES

- Brems (1994)
 - Self-Respect & Self-Esteem
 - Self-Awareness
 - Open-Mindedness
 - Cultural & Gender Sensitivity
 - Respect for the Child
 - Empathy & Willingness to Listen
 - Flexibility & Tolerance of Ambiguity
 - Being True to Oneself
 - Respect for the Child's Parents



MANAGING BEHAVIOR

Behavior in children IS process

Avoid the “Sit down, shut up, and fill out the worksheet” trap

Behavior Modification

- Positive Reinforcement
- Extinguishing Behaviors
- Negative Reinforcement
- Successive Approximations of the Desired Behavior

CULTURE-BUILDING

- A Degree of structure that allows for the Social Microcosm to Emerge
- Engaging in ‘in-vivo’ problem solving and processing of experiences
- Challenging children to function cognitively, socially, and intrapersonally at a level just beyond what they are currently capable of



CULTURE-BUILDING

Building a 'Process Oriented' Culture

- What would that look like?
- Worksheet Free Zones

Educating Others (Collaterals)

- Using 'Tip Sheets'
- Feedback Meetings
- Blogging
- Orientation Handbooks

COMMON ERRORS IN CHILD & ADOLESCENT GROUPS

- Assuming that 'adult process' translates directly into child process
- Group has the wrong degree of structure

Minimal Structure
Slavson's Activity
Therapy

High Degree of
Structure
Manualized CBT
Group

- Rely too heavily on insight, cognition, self-awareness
- Minimizing the impact of child development (cognitive, emotional, physical, social) on group
- Focusing exclusively on activities, management and other issues that children present
- Lack of appropriate screening and selection methods.

A SAMPLING OF INTERVENTIONS WITH KIDS

- 🕒 '3-Minute Challenge'
- 👁️ "Attention Here" Sign
- 🗨️ Emotions Charades with a Twist
- 🚗 Role Play/Re-Enactments
- 📄 Clue Cards/Emotions Flash Cards
- 😡 Anger/Frustration Thermometer
- 🧠 "Brain in the Palm of your Hand" Model
- ✓ Use of Media Observation
Participation



3-MINUTE CHALLENGE

- Three minutes of silence
- Variations
 - Visual Meditation
 - Auditory Meditation
 - The Statue
 - Re-start the clock
 - Coaching



ROLE PLAY

PRODUCTION

SCENE TAKE

DIRECTOR

CAMERA

DATE

Traditional Role Play with Scenarios

Do it Wrong, Then Do it Right

Instant Re-Play

Re-Enactments

CLUE CARDS/EMOTIONS
FLASH CARDS

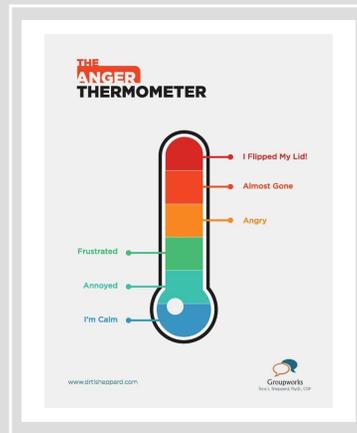
Clue Cards Game

Emotions Flash Cards

Feelings Chart

ANGER THERMOMETER & ANGER RULES

- Anger has levels
- We have more control than we think
- If we don't act, we will likely go all the way
- Different people experience and show anger in different ways



ANGER THERMOMETER & ANGER RULES

- Clean vs. Dirty Anger
- Is it Clean or Dirty?
- Cleaning up our anger



MOVING DOWN THE ANGER THERMOMETER

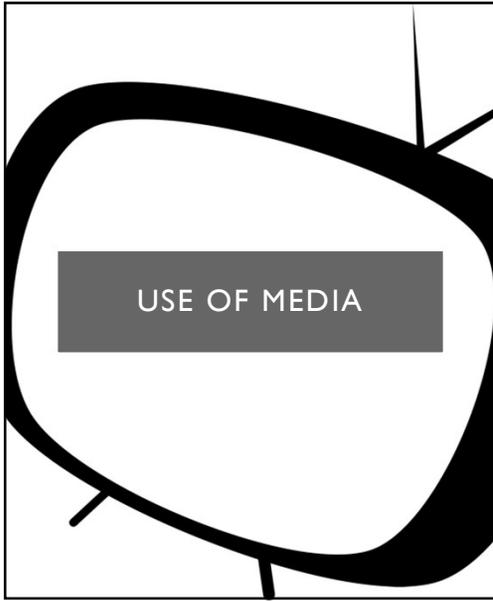
From time to time our Kids Club groups collaborate to make a list of “Ways to Move Down the Anger Thermometer”!

- How to Move Down the Anger Thermometer**
By The Kids Club
- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Splash an anger ball | 22. Think of Something Fun that's going to happen |
| 2. Punch a pillow | 23. Yell into a pillow |
| 3. Ignore annoying behavior | 24. Think before you act |
| 4. Hold a stuffed animal | 25. Think of something funny |
| 5. Tell an adult about your feelings | 26. Use humor |
| 6. Close your eyes | 27. Go back home or take a break |
| 7. Go to your room | 28. Go outside |
| 8. Ask for attention from an adult | 29. Do something fun |
| 9. Have a place you can go to calm down | 30. Run laps |
| 10. Exercise | 31. Ask someone to help |
| 11. Play a game | 32. Apologize |
| 12. Listen your best | 33. Stay away from the person who is upset |
| 13. Go in the bathroom | 34. Use Your Words |
| 14. Play a hand-held video game | 35. Run around to "Get it Out" |
| 15. Close your eyes and imagine your calm place | 36. Sit Down for a Minute |
| 16. Pray or meditate | 37. Count to 10 |
| 17. Take a nap | 38. Tell Your Mom |
| 18. Take a break and rest | 39. Think About a Place You'll Get from Playing Calm |
| 19. Read a book | 40. Put Your Mind on Something else |
| 20. Play with toys | 41. Walk Away from Someone who is Angry |
| 21. Breathe in "Gave 5 Deep Breaths" | 42. Spend time with Your Pet (Dog, Cat, Bird, Fish, Etc.) |
| | 43. Look at a Lava Lamp |
| | 44. Watch TV |
| | 45. Help Another Person |
- Groupworks**
www.groupworks.org

BRAIN IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND

Useful model to teach youth about how emotions effect their brains and how this impacts behavior





USE OF MEDIA

Observing video
Watching video clips

A SAMPLING OF INTERVENTIONS WITH ADOLESCENTS

-  Social Roles
-  Solution-Focused Brief Therapy/Scaling
-  Discussion Topics
-  Group Process
-  Sharing of Experiences
-  Skills Development/Acquisition
-  Group Traditions/Rituals

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