

One Word Answer

Source: Adapted by Liana Lowenstein from the activity: Family Locogram by Venitucci and Gershoni
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Modality: Family Therapy with children aged 10+

Objectives:

1. Identify unspoken wants, needs, desires, and wishes of family members
2. Increase open communication among family members

Supplies:

- Each family member needs several pieces of paper and a thick marker

Description:

- Provide the family with the list of words (see attached). For online sessions, this list can be sent via mail, email, or screen share.
- Explain: "I am going to read a sentence and the way that I would like you to answer is by choosing the one word that expresses the best response for you. Write the word in large letters on your paper. I will ask you all to hold up your papers with your one word at the same time."
- Read one sentence at a time. Ask family members to share information about the response they chose and why. Prior to the session, decide on the issues to be explored with the family and prepare the sentence completions accordingly. Choose from the sentence completions below or create ones that are appropriate to the family's situation.

1. The most important thing about family is...
2. One thing I wish we had more of is...
3. One thing that I don't care about is...
4. One thing that makes me happy is...
5. One thing that makes me upset is...
6. One thing I worry about is...
7. The best thing about our family is...

After the activity, process by asking the following:

1. Say something you learned about another family member.
2. What similarities emerged? How did it feel when others responded in a similar way?

3. How did it feel when you chose something different from the rest of the family?

Discussion

This activity can be used at all stages of work with families and can be used to facilitate discussion about general family issues or specific family topics such as illness, loss, divorce, stepfamily dynamics, school problems, and the effect that addiction, abuse, or trauma have on the family system.

The intervention creates a safe space for family members to explore difficult feelings, unspoken conflicts, wishes, desires, and needs. The key to the exercise is to encourage the value of open expression without the implication that the person is “wrong” or “bad,” while emphasizing that all feelings within the family unit are important. This often leads to spontaneous family interactions as members practice active listening skills, patience while waiting for their turn to speak, and tolerating uncomfortable feelings. Often similarities and differences among family members are revealed and can create a sense of bonding. At the same time, uncomfortable feelings may reveal challenging behaviors, unhealthy communication patterns, conflict, areas of disconnect, and role assignments within the family unit.

One Word Answer: List of Words

- Excitement
- Games
- Movies
- Hugs
- Anger
- Laughter
- Sadness
- Loneliness
- Space
- Privacy
- Quiet
- Fun
- Arguments
- Music
- Anxiety
- Time together
- Television
- Money
- Love
- Understanding
- Respect
- Computer
- Encouragement
- Cleanliness
- Death
- Compliments