

Creative Activity Ideas for Traumatized Children

Compiled by Liana Lowenstein www.lianalowenstein.com

Mental health practitioners are often seeking treatment interventions to make their work with traumatized children more engaging and developmentally appropriate. Below is a listing of creative activities for each of the core trauma-treatment components.

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

Treatment Component: Psychoeducation

Objectives:

- Verbalize an understanding of common psychosocial and behavioral reactions to trauma
- Verbalize an understanding of common symptoms related to trauma
- Decrease anxiety related to talking about the trauma

Interventions:

Crumpled Paper Throw game (modify the questions as needed) (Ages 4-12)

Source: *Cory Helps Kids Cope with Sexual Abuse*, Lowenstein, 2014, pages 22-30

A Terrible Thing Happened (Ages 4-7)

Source: Holmes, 2000

Sam Feels Better Now (Ages 8-12)

Source: Osborne, 2008

Healing Days: A Guide for Kids Who Have Experienced Trauma (Ages 6-11)

Source: Strauss & Farber, 2013

Treatment Component: Relaxation

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

Tighten and Relax Dance (Ages 4-10)

Source: *Structured Play-Based Interventions for Engaging Children and Adolescents in Therapy*, Cavett, 2010, page 90

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

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

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

Treatment Component: Affect Identification and Regulation

Objectives:

- Verbally articulate a range of feelings in various situations
- Identify the connection between different feelings and their appropriate facial expressions
- Verbally identify and express feelings associated with the trauma
- Articulate the intensity of various emotional states
- Learn and implement an appropriate self-calming strategy when feeling angry or anxious
- Decrease anxiety related to talking about the trauma

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

Feelings Face Off (Ages 10-16)

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

Feelings Face Off (Ages 10-16)

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

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

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

Angry Octopus: An Anger Management Story (Ages 4-8)

Source: Lori Lite

Treatment Component: Cognitive Coping

Objectives:

- Articulate an understanding of the connection between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors
- Identify how changing thoughts can change feelings, sensations, and behaviors
- Replace unhelpful, inaccurate cognitions with helpful, accurate cognitions

Interventions:

Helpful Thoughts (Ages 9-12)

Source: *Cory Helps Kids Cope with Sexual Abuse*, Lowenstein, 2014, pages 53-60

Lose the Bruise (Ages 9-12)

Source: *Digging for Buried Treasure: 52 prop-Based Play Therapy Interventions for Treating the Problems of Childhood*, Goodyear-Brown, 2002

Positive and Negative Thinking (Ages 8+)

Source: *Techniques, Techniques, Techniques: Play-Based Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families*, Noziska, 2008, page 37

Positive Thinking Checkers (Ages 6-12)

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

Treatment Component: Trauma Narration and Processing

Objectives:

- Verbally articulate the benefits of completing the trauma narrative
- Articulate the details of the trauma with diminished anxiety
- Reduce avoidance of cues, situations, and feelings associated with the trauma
- Eliminate or reduce to tolerable levels negative emotions related to the trauma
- Identify unhelpful or inaccurate trauma-related cognitions
- Identify and articulate more helpful or accurate ways to think about the traumatic exposure, self, family, worldview, and the future

Interventions:

Complete a Trauma Narrative utilizing art, play reenactment, or another engaging method

Source: *Cory Helps Kids Cope with Sexual Abuse* by Lowenstein, 2014, pages 62-72

Puppet Show

Source: *Cory Helps Kids Cope with Sexual Abuse*, Lowenstein, 2014, pages 74-79

Guilt Trip game (Ages 8-11)

Source: *Paper Dolls & Paper Airplanes: Therapeutic Exercises for Sexually Traumatized Children*, Crisci, Lay, & Lowenstein, 1998

Write on Board (Ages 9+)

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

Treatment Component: In Vivo Mastery

Objectives:

- Identify situations related to the trauma that trigger anxious reactions and avoidant behavior
- Develop and implement an *in vivo* hierarchy of avoided situations related to the trauma
- Secure the parents' commitment to follow through with the *in vivo* plan
- Decrease anxious reactions to innocuous stimuli associated with the trauma

Interventions:

Coping with Scary Reminders (Ages 4-10)

Source: *Cory Helps Kids Cope with Sexual Abuse*, Lowenstein, 2014, pages 81-85

Treatment Component: Conjoint Child-Parent Sessions

Objectives:

- Create a comfortable environment in which the child can openly express feelings with their primary caregivers
- Increase open communication between the child and their primary caregivers about the trauma
- Increase caregivers' ability to respond appropriately to their child when discussing the trauma

Interventions:

Messages in Art (Ages 9+)

Source: Lori Gill in *Creative Family Therapy Techniques*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2010b, page 196

Table Talk (Ages 4+)

Source: *Creative CBT Interventions for Children with Anxiety*, Lowenstein, 2016, page 124

Sharing the Story (Ages 4+)

Source: *Cory Helps Kids Cope with Sexual Abuse*, Lowenstein, 2014, pages 87-90

Treatment Component: Enhancing Safety and Future Development

Objectives:

- Verbally identify warning signs of danger
- Increase knowledge of sexual issues such as body awareness, okay and not okay touch
- Learn and practice communication, assertiveness, problem-solving, and other personal safety skills to keep safe in the future
- Increase open communication between the child and their primary caregivers about unsafe situations
- Verbally articulate genuine positive statements about self

Interventions:

Popsicle Stick People (Ages 4-10)

Source: *Cory Helps Kids Cope with Sexual Abuse*, Lowenstein, 2014, pages 102-108

Okay to Say No Game (Ages 4-8)

Source: *Paper Dolls & Paper Airplanes: Therapeutic Exercises for Sexually Traumatized Children*, Crisci, Lay, & Lowenstein, 1998

Healthy Sexuality Dice Game (Ages 4+)

Source: *Cory Helps Kids Cope with Sexual Abuse*, Lowenstein, 2014, pages 91-99

Positive Postings (Ages 6+)

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

Empowering Bracelets (Ages 7+)

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

Treatment Component: 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

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(Tel) 416-575-7836 (Email) lianalowenstein@gmail.com