

Air Ball

Source: Alexander Brian Yu in: Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents and Families: Volume Three, Edited by Liana Lowenstein, 2011

Theme: Coping and Problem-Solving

Recommended Age: Five to Fourteen

Modality: Individual, Group, Family

Goals

- Learn, practice and implement deep breathing as a way to manage anger, stress, and anxiety
- Increase ability to accept failure or relish in success through healthy, fair competition

Materials

- Two lightweight balls such as ping-pong balls or foam balls
- Long rectangular posterboard to turn into the gameboard (See Sample Gameboard below). Suggested length is 4 ft x 2 ft
- Table long enough to support the gameboard

Description

Introduce the activity by stating that clients are going to first learn a coping technique (deep breathing) and then they will play a game that will help them practice the deep breathing strategy.

Teach the client(s) proper breathing technique. Have participants put one hand on their chests and another hand on their stomachs. Guide clients to breathe air into their stomachs (diaphragms) and not into their chests by making the stomach hand rise and not the chest hand. Instruct clients to breathe in through their nose, and out through their mouth.

Explain the air ball game as follows:

Version 1: In one version of the game, the objective is for one player to blow the ball off the end of the gameboard before the other player. (If this is a family or group session, the family or group members will be the participants while the therapist will be a referee. If the session is an individual session with just the therapist and client, both the therapist and client will be participants and compete against each other.) Both participants will kneel/sit at the same end of the board, placing their ball on the edge of the table. The therapist (or other group members if available) will say “Go!” (If in an individual session, the therapist will signal with a hand motion to signify “Go” instead of verbally saying it since the therapist will be participating.) Before this happens, both participants will breathe in as much as air as they can (and feel their stomach rise as they inhale), and when they hear “Go” (or see the hand signal from the therapist) they will blow out all

their air as quickly as possible at their ball. Players are only allowed to take one inhalation and exhalation per round. Whoever gets their ball to fall off the opposing edge first, wins! If a participant's ball falls off the side of the gameboard, they will be disqualified. If neither participant is able to blow their ball off the edge, the winner will be the one who blows their ball the fastest and the furthest. This version of the game might be more suitable to play on the ground than on a table since you are likely to have a lot more space for the ball to roll than on a table. However, it does create a bit of an awkward position to blow at the ball.

Version 2: The second version of this game requires more precise and controlled breathing and exhaling. The goal of the game is for players to blow the ball as far as possible without blowing it off any edge of the gameboard. If a ball lands on certain areas of the gameboard (See Sample Gameboard below), the participant earns a certain amount of points. The most amount of points will be awarded to balls that roll and stop on the most difficult areas of the gameboard. If participants blow too strongly, they will blow their ball off the edge and score no points. If participants blow too softly, they will not get as much points as they can by blowing the ball as close to the opposing edge as possible. Unlike in Version 1, participants will take turns blowing their ball. The therapist will decide how many rounds each of the participants will play (at least 5 rounds is recommended). Whoever has the most points at the end of the rounds is the winner. (Just like in Version 1, the therapist can serve as a referee if in a group or family session, or if the session is an individual one, the therapist can play as the other competitor to the client.)

During the game, the therapist should encourage clients to express their feelings related to the game. When the client experiences mastery or lack of mastery over the game, ask how the client feels. Then suggest that the client verbally and physically show how they feel. The therapist can teach the client positive self-talk to help the client counter feelings of failure, for example, *win some, lose some or I tried my best and that's what counts.*

The therapist should monitor the client's deep breathing during the game to ensure the correct technique is being implemented.

Several rounds can be played with different sizes and weights of balls to help the client build skills and enhance the overall experience.

If in a group or family session, form teams so that members can experience cooperation, comradery, and teamwork.

Discussion

In *Hidden Treasures*, Violet Oaklander (2007) asserts that clients who develop a sense of self have a positive feeling of well-being and confidence in expressing themselves. Those with a strong sense of self are aware of their senses, body, intellect, and emotions, and they have the courage and security to express these aspects. If any of these aspects are thwarted, Oaklander argues that clients develop insecurities and

problematic ways to cope and act.

One way Oaklander suggests clients can develop a sense of self is by engaging them with new experiences that involve their breath and voice. The game provides opportunities to control and master the power of breathing, a biological process that is often taken for granted. In addition, many anxieties can be mollified if people learn to breathe correctly and engage in some deep breathing from time to time. This activity teaches and promotes clients to breathe correctly and to be more aware of their breathing, which in turn, can lead to enhanced anxiety management skills.

During the game, clients are encouraged to express their feelings of mastery or lack of mastery over the game. Expressing and being aware of emotions is another way of developing a strong sense of self (Oaklander, 2007), and this game provides opportunities to do this in an environment that is safe, non-judgmental, and comfortable for clients.

When used in a family session, this game can be used as an opportunity to give members a chance to play or interact with each other in positive ways that they may not typically do at home. Since this should be a brand new game to all family members, it should allow all of them to feel like they are on an even standing in therapy, which is a dynamic that cannot always exist at home with parents having authority over their children or with older siblings dominating younger ones. Keep in mind, this dynamic may not occur if parents and older siblings (who may have an advantage over younger players in the game) do not allow themselves to lose on purpose from time to time so that younger family members stay interested and motivated. If teams are made during the game, the game can help develop relationships with other family members they are not close with.

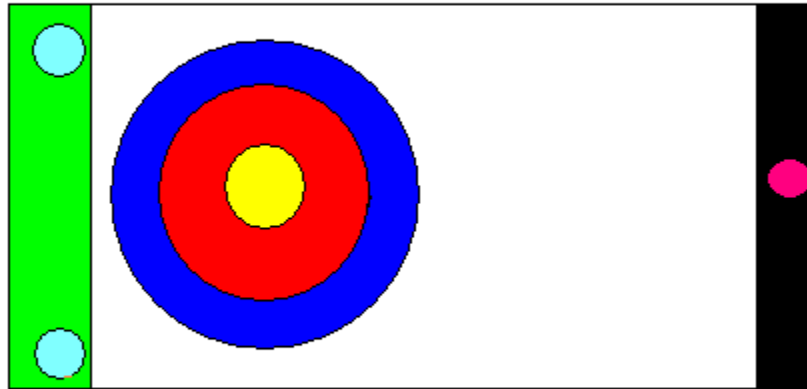
About the Author








Alexander Brian Yu, M.S. is currently a graduate student at the University of Missouri – Kansas City, working on his Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology. He has gained clinical experience working as a practicum therapist for a community mental health agency, as a school-based counselor for elementary schools, and as a peer educator for the University of California, Irvine Counseling Center. He completed his M.S. in Clinical Psychology at California State University – Fullerton and received his B.A. in Psychology and Social Behavior from the University of California, Irvine.

Reference

Oaklander, V. (2007). *Hidden treasure: A map to the child's inner self*. London: Karnac

"Air Ball" Gameboard (Sample)



 = Game Ball	 1000 pts	 600 pts
	 800 pts	 500 pts
	 700 pts	 100 pts