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Creative Family Therapy Techniques



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Systems Theory

Family systems theory is a theory of human behavior that views the family as an emotional unit and uses systems thinking to describe the complex interactions in the unit. It is the nature of a family that its members are intensely connected emotionally. People solicit each other's attention, approval, and support and react to each other's needs, expectations, and upsets. The connectedness and reactivity make the functioning of family members interdependent. A change in one person's functioning is predictably followed by reciprocal changes in the functioning of others.

Winek, 2010



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Systems Theory

- Family members are intensely emotionally connected
- Whatever affects one part of the system (an individual) affects other parts of the system (the family)
- Patterns develop within the system, and each member's behavior impacts the other members in predictable ways
- Depending on the specific system, these behavioral patterns can lead to either balance or dysfunction of the system, or both, at various points in time.
- There are multiple perspectives to any problem

Winek, 2010



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Family Systems Therapy

In family systems therapy, family members work together to understand better their group dynamic and how their behavior can affect other members of the family. The guiding principle is that "what happens to one member of the family, happens to everyone in the family." Family therapy strives to improve family relationships to address presenting concerns.

Winek, 2010



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Benefits of Playful Family Therapy

- Provides an appropriate way for children to participate in family therapy
- Engages family members in a common, pleasurable task
- Facilitates a broad scope of diagnostic information
- Unlocks a deeper level of communication
- Exposes underlying thoughts and feelings
- Strengthens parent-child relationships
- Improves adult-child communication
- Helps families solve problems using a non-threatening method

Gil, 2015; Lowenstein, 2010b

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Evidence-Based Practice

Research stresses the benefits of using play-based activities in family therapy sessions, particularly in increasing participation and engagement, strengthening therapeutic rapport with children, and facilitating more positive family interactions

Thompson, S.J., Bender, K., Cardoso, J.B., & Flynn, P.M. (2011). Experiential activities in family therapy: Perceptions of caregivers and youth. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 20(5), 560-568.

Willis, A.B., Walters, L.H., & Crane, D.R. (2014). Assessing play-based activities, child talk, and single session outcome in family therapy with young children. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 40(3), 287-301.



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Guidelines for Playful Family Therapy

Use	Use activities that engage all family members
Select	Select activities that are developmentally appropriate for all family members (cognitive capacity, language skills)
Join	Join with each family member
Respect	Respect the family's culture
Establish	Establish rules at the outset
Limit	Limit involvement when assessing (unless safety is a concern) to allow family dynamics to emerge
Focus on	Focus on the interaction among family members
Videotape	If possible, videotape the session


Gil, 2015; Lowenstein, 2010b

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Orienting the Family

Therapist and family members introduce themselves
 Therapist shares information obtained previously
 State the purpose of the session: "We are here to talk about Dad's illness and how it is effecting each person in the family."
 Sets up the rules of therapy i.e., One person will talk at a time while the others are listening; no ganging up on one person, be respectful, etc.

*** Write each rule onto an index card and assign each rule to a family member to enforce




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Engaging the Family in Play

1) Meet with parent's prior to the family session. Inform them that play is a part of your family therapy approach. Give examples (games, art, puppets)
 2) Ask:

- Would your children participate better if we just talked the entire session or if we did a playful activity?
- Would it be easier for your children to express their thoughts and feelings if we just talked the entire session or if we did a playful activity?
- Would it be hard for your children to sit still for the entire session if we just talked?

Wark, 2003



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Engaging the Family in Play

3) Explain benefits of using a playful family therapy approach:

- (a) Children enjoy games, drawing, and using puppets, therefore they will feel comfortable with a play-based approach
- (b) Since children communicate through play, they will be able to express themselves more easily than through traditional "talk therapy"
- (c) Since play is active, children's attention is more likely to be captivated and sustained for the duration of the session

Wark, 2003



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Factors Underlying Reluctance

- Weren't asked to be part of family therapy or were somehow discouraged from attending
- Skeptical of family therapy
- Previous negative experience with family therapy
- Refusal to attend therapy is their way of exerting control
- Discomfort with others in the family
- May not feel they have a problem

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Engaging Reluctant Family Members

Assess	Assess communication between family members regarding how their involvement in family therapy was discussed
Encourage	Encourage their commitment to attend 3 sessions then reassess continued sessions
Stress	Stress that they still have a valuable perspective and can contribute regardless of who appears to have the problem
Explain	Explain that they are in the best position to relay their own story, and their absence can lead to their position being misinterpreted
Empower	Empower reluctant family members

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Engaging Reluctant Family Members

Improve	Improve the therapeutic alliance
Collaborate	Collaborate with the family to set meaningful, realistic treatment goals
Give	Give reluctant member a task
Shift	Shift focus from the problem to family strengths
Create	Create basis for hope
Reduce	Reduce stigma (even professional athletes have a coach!)

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Managing Disruptive Behavior

- Decipher the message behind misbehavior (need to be engaged, empowered, nurtured, heard)
- Establish rules at the outset (rule cards)
- Thank the children for showing their difficulties so the behaviors can be addressed in the present moment
- Teach parents a child management strategy then coach them to use it during the session

Lowenstein, 2006b, 2010b



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Joining

- Define family therapy
- Normalize family therapy can make people feel uncomfortable
- Build an alliance with every family member
- Respect parental hierarchy
- Emphasize that everyone plays a part in making it better

Rivett & Street, 2009



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Joining

- Address the children in age-appropriate ways
- Ask everyone for a description of the problem
- Listen carefully to each family member
- Be sensitive to the family's cultural differences
- Identify family strengths
- Compliment the parents on the children
- Help the family set meaningful goals

Rivett & Street, 2009



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Engagement and Assessment Techniques

Activity: Colored Candy Go Around

Source: Katherine Arkell, in *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Two* (Edited by Lowenstein, 2010a)

Goals:

1. Increase comfort level with family therapy
2. Increase open communication
3. Assess family relationships and dynamics

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Colored Candy Go Around

Distribute 4 candies to each family member. Have each member sort their candy by color with instructions not to eat them yet. Ask one family member who has a green candy to give a response to the question that corresponds with the green candy. If players have 2 green candies, they share two responses to the question that corresponds with the green candy. If players have 3 green candies, they share three responses to the question that corresponds with the green candy. Family members who have green candies then give responses to the green question. Once a response to the green question has been given, the green candy can be eaten. Continue with each colored candy, in the order below:

Green: Ways you have fun with your family

Purple: Say something nice to each person in your family

Orange: Things that bother / upset you about your family

Red: Things you wish were different about your family

Yellow: Things you're excited to do with your family

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Engagement and Assessment Techniques

Activity: First Session Family Card Game

Source: *Creative Family Therapy Techniques* (Edited by Lowenstein, 2010b)

Goals:

1. Increase comfort level with family therapy
2. Increase open communication
3. Assess family relationships and dynamics

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First Session Family Card Game

Take turns picking the top card from the deck. If you get an even number, answer the question. If you get an odd number, ask someone in your family to answer the question. If you pick an ace, ask someone in your family for a hug. If you pick a jack, do 10 jumping jacks. If you pick a Queen or King, you get a cookie. At the end of the game, everyone who played gets a cookie.

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First Session Family Card Game: Sample Questions

1. Fill in the blank: Define family therapy (you can ask the therapist to help)
2. True or False: When families seek therapy they often feel nervous, embarrassed, and/or overwhelmed.
3. Fill in the blank: A good therapist is someone who...
4. What would need to happen in therapy to make you feel like it was worthwhile?
5. What do you think needs to change in your family?
6. True or False: Everyone in our family plays a part in making it better.
7. How will you feel if your family gets the help you need?

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First Session Family Card Game: Process Questions

1. What new information did you learn about your family?
2. What new information did you learn about family therapy?
3. What was the most interesting or surprising response?
4. Which was the most difficult question?
5. How do you feel now, compared to how you felt at the beginning of the session?

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Family Assessment

- Who leads, makes decisions
- Which member's suggestions were utilized or ignored
- Did anyone contribute content that was provocative or emotionally laden, and how did others respond
- Communication style (open, direct, closed, respectful)
- What do they communicate nonverbally (facial expressions)
- Did the interaction take on a structure or was it chaotic
- What emotions were expressed by each member

Gil, 2015

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Family Assessment

- Who took the lead, did anyone dominate
- Were the parents able to demonstrate appropriate affection and praise and focus on the needs of each child
- Did the parents set appropriate limits
- Did any dysfunctional patterns emerge (parentification, triangulation, disengagement, scapegoating)
- Did the family work together
- Who engaged and enjoyed the play
- What was the actual product created by the family

Gil, 2015

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Roles of Family Members

- Complementary: Behaviors of one person are opposite to yet supported by behaviors of another (e.g., good kid/bad kid, authoritarian parent/permissive parent)
- Symmetrical: Behavior of one person mirrors behaviors of another (e.g., good kid/good kid, authoritarian parent/authoritarian parent).
- Other roles: Martyr, helpless one, rescuer, mediator

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Triangles

A third family member is introduced into a dyadic relationship to balance uncomfortable intimacy or conflict experienced by the dyad. The two closer people, or "the insiders" choose one another over the third person, or "the outsider" thus the "outsider" becomes an odd person out.



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Hierarchy

Hierarchy defines the way leadership and power is organized within family systems:

- **Effective:** Parents set limits while still maintaining emotional connection with their children
- **Insufficient:** Parents not able to effectively manage the child's behavior and often adapt a permissive parenting style
- **Excessive:** Rules are too strict and unrealistic and consequences are too severe to be effective

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Communication

- **Congruent:** Acknowledges and balances the needs/perspectives of self and others while acknowledging/responding appropriately to the context
- **Placator:** Acknowledges the needs/perspectives of others and the reality of the context but fails to acknowledge needs/perspective of self
- **Blamer:** Acknowledges needs/perspective of self and the reality of the context but fails to acknowledge the needs/perspectives others
- **Superreasonable:** Acknowledges the reality of the context but fails to acknowledge the needs/perspectives of others and self



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Engagement and Assessment Techniques

Activity: Family Gift

Source: *Creative Interventions for Bereaved Children* (Lowenstein, 2006)

Goals:

1. Establish a safe and open therapeutic environment
2. Identify the family interactional patterns that are contributing to the problematic behavior
3. Identify strengths within the family

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More Engagement & Assessment Activities


- Beach Ball, By Post-Sprunk in *Creative Family Therapy Techniques*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2010
- Family Have-You Evers, *Sticking Together: Experiential Activities for Family Counseling*, Gerstein, 1999
- Kinetic Family Drawing, Burns & Kaufman, 1970
- Boat, Storm, Lighthouse: By Post-Sprunk in *Creative Family Therapy Techniques*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2010
- The Way We Want It To Be, *More Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth*, Lowenstein, 2002

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Psychodrama

Psychodrama is play-acting events during therapy and may include elements of enactment, role play, or make believe. Psychodrama facilitates insight, personal growth, and integration on cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels. It clarifies issues, increases physical and emotional well-being, enhances learning, and develops new skills.

-Blatner, 1994



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Activity: Mr. Opposite Man / Miss Opposite Lady

Source: Steve Harvey, in *Creative Family Therapy Techniques*
(Edited by Lowenstein, 2010b)

Goals:

1. Increase open communication in the family regarding parent-child conflict
2. Increase child's compliance

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Mr. Opposite Man / Miss Opposite Lady

Parent is the Challenger and gives the child (Opposite Lady) a command like "stand up." Opposite Lady must perform an action that is the opposite of the command. For example, the child might sit down.

If the Judge agrees that the child performed the opposite of the command, the child earns a point. However, the parent earns a point if the child is judged to complete an action that has the intention of the command. In this case, the parent would get the point if the child actually did stand up.

The Score Keeper keeps track of points earned

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Mr. Opposite Man / Miss Opposite Lady

Parent is the challenger and gives the child (Good Listener) a command like "stand up." Good Listener must perform the action that has been requested. For example, the child must stand up.

Parent must then make a labelled praise statement appropriate to the child's compliant behavior.

If the Judge agrees that the child performed the requested command, the child earns a point.

If the therapist agrees that the parent made an appropriate labelled praise statement, the parent also earns a point.

The Score Keeper keeps track

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Examples of Labelled Praise

- "Thank-you for listening when I asked you to stand up"
- "You stomped your feet just like I asked you to—high-five!"
- "You did what I asked the first time—way to go!"
- "You showed good listening by looking up when I asked you to—I'm proud of you!"

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Creative Family Therapy Techniques

Activity: Family Locogram

Source: Heather Venitucci and Jacob Gershoni, in *Creative Family Therapy Techniques* (Edited by Lowenstein, 2010b)

Goals:

1. Identify unspoken wants, needs, desires, and wishes of family members
2. Increase open communication among family members
3. Explore differentiation of self while remaining engaged with the family

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Family Locogram

- Write the Locogram words, one word per sheet, on white or colored paper. Place them on the floor about 3 feet apart.
- Explain the activity by saying, "I am going to read a sentence and the way that I would like you to answer is by standing next to the word that expresses the best response for you."
- Read one sentence at a time. Ask family members to share information about the response they chose and why.

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Family Locogram

- Excitement	- Music
- Games	- Time together
- Movies	- Television
- Hugs	- Money
- Anger	- Love
- Laughter	- Respect
- Sadness	- Computer
- Loneliness	- Cleanliness
- Fun	- Death
- Arguments	- Compliments

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Family Locogram

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 upset is...
5. One thing I worry about is...
6. The best thing about our family is...

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Family Locogram: Process Questions

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?
4. What other words do you feel could have been presented?

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Enactment

“Situations in which therapists direct family members to talk or interact together in order to observe and modify problematic transactions”

- Minuchin, 1974

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Creative Family Therapy Techniques

Activity: Do-It-Over

Source: Lowenstein (Unpublished)

Goals:

1. Increase empathy within the family
2. Strengthen problem-solving skills

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Do-It-Over

- Draw your face on the paper plate
- Choose two family members to re-enact an argument (hold mask to your face)
- Switch masks and show me the argument again, but this time, play the other person's part.
- Switch masks and be yourself again. Think of what you can do and say to make things go better this time. Then "Do-It-Over" so there's a positive resolution.
- The other family members observe

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More Psychodrama Activities

- What's My Role in My Family: By Venitucci and Gershoni, in Creative Family Therapy Techniques, Edited by Lowenstein, 2010
- Feeling Body Sculpting: By Post-Sprunk, in Creative Family Therapy Techniques, Edited by Lowenstein, 2010
- Follow the Big Leader: By Harvey, in Creative Family Therapy Techniques, Edited by Lowenstein, 2010
- Feelings Photo Shoot, Structured Play-Based Interventions for Engaging Children and Adolescents in Therapy, Cavett, 2010

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Puppets and Dolls

Used to illustrate subjective reality or fantasy, for example, how a family member would like a particular time of day / event to play out, how to communicate with one another, and how to problem-solve (i.e., use the puppets/dolls to act out what they do during dinner time). Family members can also switch roles and act out how they perceive a different family member.



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Creative Family Therapy Techniques

Activity: Family Puppet Show

Source: *Play in Family Therapy* (Gil, 2014)

Goals:

1. Gather information about the family
2. Identify issues that are contributing to the problematic behavior
3. Set goals to be addressed in treatment

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Family Puppet Show

Introduce the activity as follows: "I'd like each person in the family to choose a puppet and then make up a puppet story all together. Your story must be a new one, not one you already know. Your story must have a beginning, middle, and end. I'd like you to act it out with the puppets (not narrate it). I will give you some time to make up your story and when you are ready I will be the audience and watch your puppet show."

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Identifying Family Strengths

Verbally articulate positive qualities about individuals within the family and the family as a whole

Example:

"Mom, I really liked how you listened carefully to both your daughters, and gave each of them an opportunity to share their idea for the puppet show."

Practice

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Circular Questions

Ask one puppet to comment on the relationship or interaction between two other puppets

Example:

Ask monkey: "How did Bear and Bunny feel when they went their separate ways instead of going together to the party?"

Practice

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Empathizing and Confronting

Confront the family in a careful and sensitive manner in order to bring about change in the family system.

Example:

"Bunny, you felt angry when you were late to the party and you hit Monkey. It's upsetting when things don't go our way. It's normal to get angry sometimes but it's important to express angry feelings in a way that doesn't hurt others. Monkey, Bear, and Bunny, can you think of a better way to handle angry feelings, and then show me your good idea?"

Practice

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Creative Family Therapy Techniques

Activity: Rappin' Family Puppet Interview

Source: Sori, in *Creative Family Therapy Techniques* (Edited by Lowenstein, 2010b)

Goals:

1. Engage reluctant families in the therapy process
2. Assess family dynamics
3. Identify how the rap puppet story may reflect issues in the family

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Rappin' Family Puppet Interview

Ask each family member to select a puppet. Then instruct the family as follows:

"As a family you are to make up a story that has a beginning, a middle, and an end, but it cannot be a story you already know, like *Dr. Seuss*. You are going to write your story as a Rap, practice it, and then have your puppets perform the rap for me. You have about 30 minutes to create your Rap."

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Rappin' Family Puppet Interview

As the family is working on the Rap, observe the following:

- How the family organizes around the task
- Level of engagement and enjoyment
- How decisions are made
- Patterns of communication
- Who dominates and who is left out
- Structural issues (such as coalitions, enmeshment, disengagement, etc.)

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Rappin' Family Puppet: Process Questions

1. What was it like to write the rap and to perform it using puppets?
2. What surprised you in doing this activity?
3. What was the best and the most difficult part about the activity?
4. What similarities did you notice between the activity and your own lives?

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More Puppet Activities

- Family Sculpting with Puppets, By Haslam in Creative Family Therapy Techniques, Edited by Lowenstein, 2010
- Puppet Movie: By Brewer, in Creative Family Therapy Techniques, Edited by Lowenstein, 2010
- Paper Bag Puppets, More Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth, Lowenstein, 2002
- Puppet Check-In, Sticking Together: Experiential Activities for Family Counseling, Gerstein, 1999

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Storytelling

Storytelling techniques allow families to personify, reframe, and externalize problems. Therapeutic stories can suggest new possibilities, intersperse suggestions, and establish hope and optimism by exposing the family to a positive ending. Metaphors can be integrated into stories to pass the conscious level and enter into the unconscious of the clients. Clients integrate the components of stories and develop healthier perceptions of their conflicts.

-Lubimiv, 1994


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Creative Family Therapy Techniques

Activity: Doves and the Hunter

Source: Susan Perrow, in *Creative Family Therapy Techniques* (Edited by Lowenstein, 2010b)

Goals:

1. Increase awareness that each family member has a part to play in making things better
2. Initiate discussion to identify ways that family members can work together toward a common goal

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Doves and the Hunter

Prepare the puppets, scenery, and props (in advance or in session with the family). Read the story "The Doves and the Hunter" (p. 118) while the family enacts it with the puppets. The family members can be the puppeteers. To help the selection process, write the names of each puppet on separate pieces of paper, fold them, and have each family member select one piece of paper. Alternatively, the therapist can be more purposeful in assigning the puppets to the different puppeteers.

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Doves and the Hunter: Process Questions

1. How did it feel to play the part of the hunter, or one of the birds, or the mouse? (The therapist may wish to expand on feelings or issues disclosed by the family members.)
2. Which part did you like playing best? Which part did you like the least?
3. What new information did you learn about working together?

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Creative Family Therapy Techniques

Activity: Modified Scribble

Source: Trudy Post Sprunk, in *Creative Family Therapy Techniques* (Edited by Lowenstein, 2010b)

Goals:

1. Increase family cohesion
2. Assess family relationships and dynamics

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Modified Scribble

Each family member chooses a different color marker. The first participant closes their eyes and creates a scribble for three seconds. The second participant, using another color marker, starts their scribble where the first scribble ended (again with eyes closed). It is important to take turns and wait patiently for a turn. This process continues until each family member has created three scribbles.

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Modified Scribble

Upon completion, the entire family participates as a "team" looking for pictures that were created by their scribbles. During this time the therapist writes the list of words the family uses to describe the pictures the family finds in their joint scribble picture.

Next, ask the family to create a story using this list of words. Ask that the story have a beginning, middle, and end. After the story is completed, ask the family to give it a title.

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Modified Scribble: Process Questions

1. How did you feel during the scribble part of the activity?
2. What was it like when you tried to present your ideas?
3. What was it like to work together as a family to create the story?
4. How is the story similar and different to how things are in your family?

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More Storytelling Activities

- Flowers and Weeds, By Lubimiv, in Creative Family Therapy Techniques, Edited by Lowenstein, 2010
- Storytelling Card Game: By Leben, in Creative Family Therapy Techniques, Edited by Lowenstein, 2010
- Garden of Birds: By Perrow, in Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families, Edited by Lowenstein, 2011

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Gameplay

Gameplay is a form of therapy that utilizes formal, organized games as psychotherapeutic tools. Games can be used to engage the family, obtain valuable diagnostic information, and to enable the family to verbalize and express thoughts and feelings.



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Creative Family Therapy Techniques

Intervention: Family Card Game

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

Goals:

- (1) Verbalize increased awareness of normal feelings associated with grief/divorce.
- (2) Increase open communication in the family about the death/divorce

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Family Card Game

Take turns picking the top card from the deck of cards. If you get an even number, answer a question. If you get an odd number, ask someone in your family to answer the question. The Question Cards will help you talk about how things are in your family, your feelings about your special person's death, and memories of the person who died. If you pick an ace, ask someone in your family for a hug. If you pick a jack, do 10 jumping jacks. If you pick a queen or king, you get a cookie. At the end of the game, everyone who played gets a cookie.

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Creative Family Therapy Techniques

Activity: Toss The Ball

Source: Trudy Post Sprunk, in *Creative Family Therapy Techniques* (Edited by Lowenstein, 2010b)

Goals:

1. Increase playful interactions
2. Increase open communication among family members
3. Identify areas for change within the family

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Toss The Ball

The family members will take turns gently tossing the ball to other family members. As they toss the ball to someone they are to **say something nice** to that family member. The pattern is repeated until every person has heard two nice things about themselves. Then ask:

1. What was it like to say nice things to everyone?
2. How did you feel when another member in your family said something nice to you?
3. Did you receive any unexpected comments?

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Toss The Ball

Play again, but this time ask them to say something they would **enjoy doing** (but are not currently doing) with the person to whom they throw the ball. Continue until each family member has had a turn.

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Toss The Ball

Lastly, when one tosses the ball to another, the recipient shares an idea about what they could do to improve family life. After each person has had a turn, ask the family to discuss how these suggestions can be incorporated into their family life.

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More Games

- On Deck and Up to Bat, Gardner, in *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Three*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2011
- Family Strengths and Needs Game: By Slobodnick in *Creative Family Therapy Techniques* Edited by Lowenstein, 2010
- Family Bubble Tag, *Play Therapy: Engaging and Powerful Techniques For the Treatment of Childhood Disorders*, Mellenthin, 2018
- Mad Game, Davidson, in *101 Favorite Play Therapy Techniques*, Edited by Kaduson & Schaefer, 1997
- Feelings Hide and Seek, *Techniques, Techniques, Techniques*, Noziska, 2008
- Road Rage, *More Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth*, Lowenstein, 2002

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Art

Art (markers, paint, clay, collage, etc.) can be used to create pictures or scenes to illustrate the perspective of each family member. Suggested prompts to give the family include:

- Draw a family problem and then draw your family solving the problem
- Draw, sculpt or collage a happy/sad/angry family memory
- Draw or sculpt an animal to represent each family member

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Creative Family Therapy Techniques

Activity: Parent-Child Clay Animal Activity

Source: Carla Sharp, in: *101 More Favorite Play Therapy Techniques*, Edited by Kaduson & Schaefer, 2001

Goals:

1. Increase open communication between parent and child.
2. Strengthen the parent-child bond.

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Parent-Child Clay Animal Activity

Ask the parent and child to each create an animal using the clay provided. Parent and child then introduce their animals, and tell a story together about the animals (the story must have a beginning, middle, and end). Encourage the animals to have a dialogue.

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Parent-Child Clay Animal Activity

The therapist observes:

- Parent's ability to encourage the child
- Playfulness, affect during the storytelling
- The kind of animal each have made and whether the two animals would relate well in nature (i.e., cat and mouse are antagonistic, two kittens might play together)
- Significant themes, conflict in the story, how conflict is resolved

During the post-play processing, the therapist engages parent and child in discussion, while staying within the metaphor i.e., "Kitty, how did it feel when the dog ate all your food?"

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Creative Family Therapy Techniques

Activity: Messages in Art

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

Goals:

1. Increase open communication among family members
2. Implement new methods of effective communication between family members
3. Share feelings that underlie conflict within the family

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Messages In Art

Introduce the activity by explaining that sometimes it can be difficult to verbally express thoughts and feelings. Expressions through art can be a helpful way to release and communicate feelings. Ask each person to "choose a family member with whom you would like to communicate or share a message. Take a few minutes to think about what that message might be." Have the family members use the art supplies to create their message. Once completed, ask members to explain their messages and the meaning of the materials they selected.

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Messages In Art: Process Questions

1. What was it like to communicate your message through art?
2. How did you feel during the message creation and message delivery part of this activity?
3. How did it feel to receive the message from your family member?
4. What did you learn through this activity about ways to communicate with your family about your thoughts and feelings?

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Creative Family Therapy Techniques

Activity: Fabulous Frogs

Source: Amy Brace, in: *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families* Volume 3 (Edited by Lowenstein, 2011)

Goals:

- 1) Identify elements of a safe place by creating a "safe environment" for a frog figurine
- 2) Discuss coping strategies/resources/materials that are used to make a safe place for the frog and that could potentially be used for self / family

82

Fabulous Frogs

The practitioner introduces the activity by discussing the need for safety. The idea of creating a safe place for a frog is introduced by asking the clients to imagine what a frog needs to survive, feel safe, or be comfortable. Each family member is given their own miniature frog and craft supplies. The family is instructed to work together to create a safe place for the frog by using the craft materials.

83

Fabulous Frogs: Process Questions

1. What did you include in your frog's safe place?
2. How is that important to your frog?
3. How does that help your frog feel safe?
4. Is that something that has helped you feel safe as well?
5. What else might help you feel safe?
6. How might you use that (identified element) to help you cope or feel better?
7. What do you think each person in your family needs to do in order to create a safe place at home?
8. (For caregivers) What do you think your child needs from you in order to feel safer?

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Creative Family Therapy Techniques

Activity: Healing Animals

Source: *Creative Family Therapy Techniques* (Edited by Lowenstein, 2010b)

Goals:

1. Identify progress made in therapy
2. Discuss individual and family strengths
3. Increase hope for the future

85

Healing Animals

Provide each family member with paper and markers. Ask them to get into a relaxed position and to close their eyes. Then say, "Imagine a family of animals...this animal family has been through great hardship...take some time to imagine what it is like to be this animal family...when you are ready you can open your eyes and draw this *wounded* animal family."

86

Healing Animals

Once the drawings are complete, ask the family members to close their eyes again. Say, "Imagine this same family of animals...this animal family has survived something very difficult...they are strong...take some time to imagine what it is like to be this animal family...when you are ready you can open your eyes and draw this *healing* animal family."

87

Healing Animals

Tape all the pictures to a wall. Process by asking:

1. What similarities/differences exist among the drawings?
2. What three words best describe the wounded / healing animal families?
3. What helped the animal families overcome their hardships?
4. What important life lessons have the animal families learned?
5. How will the animals use their strength to overcome hardships in the future?
6. What do your drawings reveal about your family life?

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More Art Activities

- Clay Sculpture: By Weitzman, in *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Two*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2010
- Family Aquarium: Play in *Family Therapy*, Gil, 2015
- Behavior Remote: By Fischer in *Creative Family Therapy Techniques*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2010
- Pulled from a Hat: By Freud, in *Creative Family Therapy Techniques*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2010
- Positive Postings: By Swank, in *Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families*, Edited by Lowenstein, 2008

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Termination Techniques

Activity: Last Session Family Card Game

Source: *Creative Family Therapy Techniques* (Edited by Lowenstein, 2010b)

Goals:

1. Review and validate therapeutic gains
2. Discuss thoughts and feelings about the therapeutic journey and about ending therapy
3. Provide a positive termination experience

90

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Creative Family Therapy Techniques

Activity: Helping Hands

Source: Trudy Post Sprunk, in *Creative Family Therapy Techniques* (Edited by Lowenstein, 2010b)

Goals:

1. Increase awareness of each family member's helpfulness
2. Verbally appreciate each family member's positive contributions to family life

91

Helping Hands

Request that each family member choose a marker that is a different color than other family members' markers. Then ask members to place one of their hands on the poster board and trace that hand. Next, ask members to write inside the outlines of their hands the things that they do or say that are helpful and/or beneficial to their family. Upon completion of the writing, family members share what they have written.

92

Helping Hands: Process Questions

1. How does each person feel about what they provide to the family unit?
2. Name two or three more activities/behaviors each of you would like to provide for your family.
3. Name one thing you like that another family member provides.

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More Termination Activities

- Our Family Can Shine, Creative Interventions for Bereaved Children, Lowenstein, 2006b
- Garden of Growth: By Cassano, in Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families Volume Three, Edited by Lowenstein, 2011
- What I Learned Layered Gift, Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families, Edited by Lowenstein, 2008
- Saying Good-bye: Breaking the Links in a Chain, by Lawrence, in 101 Favorite Play Therapy Techniques Volume Three, Edited by Kaduson & Schaefer, 2003

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Upcoming Events

- History Matters: Using ACEs Research to Conduct a Family Genealogy
Thursday, June 9th: 12 - 1 PM
- Cultivating Professional Resilience in Direct Practice: A Guide for Human Service Professionals with Dr. Jason M. Newell
Wednesday, June 15th, 12:30 – 2 PM
- Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy: An Evidence-based Developmental Approach to Treating Complex Trauma and Disorders of Attachment
Thursday, June 16th, 12 - 1:30 PM