The therapeutic use of games in groupwork

when, why, and how to use them

Includes a section on training games for mental health, welfare and education professionals

Naomi Audette and Wendy Bunston
The Royal Children’s Hospital
Mental Health Service, Victoria
The therapeutic use of games in groupwork

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Foreword

Groups are a tremendously important part of human life. Human beings are social beings. Relating to one another is a vital part of peoples’ lives. Group acceptance and acknowledgment provide a sense of connectedness, which is an immensely nourishing experience.

It is in groups of various kinds that we live our lives: family groups, peer groups, social groups, work groups. In each we learn to play, and play to learn. The child playing on their parents’ knee learns about relating, turn taking, about being enjoyed, valued and loved. The children playing house and school are learning about adult roles, and trying to understand the world in which they live. Groups of families playing together show their children how to co-operate and collaborate and be appreciated; how to cope with, and make the most of differences. Groups of children playing together are learning how to be creative together, solve problems together, how to cope with excitement and jealousy, and how to get on with others. Adults at work may ‘play around with ideas’, or undertake what they do with a sense of playfulness.

Playing in groups is a potent part of our learning: we learn from each other. Games create a structure, which harness ideas and provides a focus for learning. This selection of games covers a wide range of opportunities from which children and adults can play and learn.

Bowlby (1969) showed that a secure attachment is essential for confident exploration of the world; it creates a sense of safety that allows the child to notice and to learn, instead of feeling constantly anxious and worried.

Much attention has been paid to this aspect of playing and learning in groups in this manual, in order to create the right atmosphere in which children, young people, families and professionals can gain from their experiences.

This games manual is the outcome of a tremendous collaboration of all the members of the Community Group Program, both past and present. It represents several hard years of work and play. The interventions they have developed have been subject to continuous evaluation, with objective measures where this is possible, to show that they do benefit the young people. Behind the apparent simplicity, is an enormous amount of careful thought, discussion, and experience of running these groups to ensure that they work and that they are effective at helping clients with the problems they are struggling with.

I would like to congratulate the writers and the members of the Community Group Program for this manual, and am confident that anyone running therapeutic groups will find this manual an invaluable resource.

Dr Bob Salo
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The Community Group Program (CGP), is a collaborative mental health and education department initiative that commenced in early 1999. Since its inception the CGP has developed and evaluated over 20 different types of groupwork interventions. These therapeutic groupwork programs have been delivered over 400 times in schools, community health and mental health settings across Western and North Western metropolitan Melbourne.

The CGP’s aim is to bring mental health services to children (aged 1–15) and their parents within their own school and/or local community. Running imaginative, exciting and relevant groupwork interventions, the CGP provides non-stigmatising mental health assistance to children at emotional, psychological, and familial risk, in a non-threatening and accessible manner.

The focus of our programs is to address a range of emotional, psychological, behavioural and social issues that may be inhibiting the well-being and self-esteem of the child. We also utilise a variety of intervention strategies to engage with children and families who may feel reluctant, or may not wish to have any involvement with a mental health service. We do this by meeting the children ‘where they are’, and using interventions that are ‘user friendly’. These include adventure based counselling programs, art therapy, psychotherapy, dance and movement therapy, role-plays, puppetry, games, cognitive, behavioural and discussion based interventions.

All of our programs are evaluated using clinically standardised pre and post questionnaires, consumer satisfaction surveys, focus groups, and attitudinal and behaviour inventories. This commitment on our part to provide the best service and to gain feedback from participants has helped form our approach in a flexible and creative manner.

The CGP runs groups with children who have been identified by either the school or a mental health worker as:
- possessing low self esteem
- often having conflict with others
- struggling with poor body image
- suffering from anxiety or depression
- exposed to family violence
- engaging in self-harming behaviours
- socially isolated and unable to form friendships
- having poor impulse control, aggression and anger issues
- struggling to demonstrate respectful attitudes/beliefs regarding sexuality.

The mental health members of the CGP also provide specific specialist interventions to infants, children and families affected by severe family violence. The RCH MHS Addressing Family Violence Programs (AFVP) consists of groupwork interventions, the production of educational products and the delivery of specific training and workshops to welfare professionals.

This manual is the product of the CGP’s expertise and experience in running hundreds of groupwork programs over seven years with children and adolescents in The Royal Children’s Hospital Mental Health Service and in schools in Western and North Western metropolitan Melbourne.

It also draws on our expertise in running experiential training for professionals in the fields of education, welfare, and mental health. This rich legacy of experience has been drawn upon to compile this manual so that other groupwork facilitators can apply what we have found to be effective.

Awards won by the Community Group Program
- 2002 Australian & New Zealand Mental Health Services Gold Award
- 2005 Royal Children’s Hospital Team Award

Awards won by the RCH MHS Addressing Family Violence Programs
- 2003 Australian Crime & Violence Prevention Award
- 2004 Australian and New Zealand Mental Health Services Gold Award
- 2005 National Child Protection ‘Highly Commended’ Award
Introduction

Using this manual

Games are universal and passed on in all cultures with many variations and with many different names. This collection is by no means complete but is representative of games we have utilised to great benefit in the therapeutic groupwork setting.

The intention for this manual is not to be an exhaustive guide for games that you can play, but rather to look specifically at which games you may play, when, and why you may choose to play them. This manual can be helpful to start the process of thinking about how a facilitator can employ and channel a group’s energy within a game, and how you can use games to serve social or learning functions.

Participants in groups will always show their immediate response to playing games, whether it is through resistance, enthusiasm, relaxation, excitement, challenge, or depth of feeling. This offers an immediate gauge for facilitators to know how to target the specific group or population they are working with, and how to adjust or direct the next session’s activities and games. The capacity to play (with ideas, thoughts and with each other), no matter what age, is something we encourage in all those who participate in our groups, and will hopefully be how you approach the material in this manual.

As groups grow in their complexity, so too does this manual. This manual is hopefully a true reflection of the life of a group and how it develops. The beginning sections of this manual reflect what occurs in the beginning of good groupwork practice – that is, to lay simple yet solid foundations upon which complex exploration can be built. As this manual progresses the reader will find increasing complexity built into how we interpret and implement the use of games in groupwork.

This manual is for anyone who facilitates groups and is interested in understanding how to utilise games in a therapeutic manner to meet the needs of the group, rather than as a ‘time filler’, or as a reward for the group. Whether you are a classroom teacher running an activity group, a mental health worker running a therapeutic group, or a facilitator conducting professional training, this manual will be of assistance to you.

Using games in groupwork

It’s how you play the game

When we play games with participants, we are first and foremost having fun with them, enjoying them for who they are, taking pleasure in their experiences, and providing a safe and tenable atmosphere in which this can happen.

Games embody our need for structure, security and belonging. Whether played alone or with others, games give a sense of order and purpose. They can be enjoyed purely as the vehicle that facilitates our journey, as the impetus for reaching our destination (as a sense of achievement), or both.

We use games because it is a currency with which we are all familiar and all engage. As facilitators, we see the beauty of games as providing an intervention that can subtly or blatantly shift the dynamics and emotional field of the group.\(^2\)

Games allow both the facilitator and the participant great opportunities to explore and understand how they interact in the world. They can be built into a teaching or therapeutic program in order to:

- assist the group to learn new skills
- facilitate group interactions and focus
- work together
- foster leadership and skills in co-operating
- develop trust and support
- create an atmosphere conducive to forming new friendships
- have fun with the clients that we work with
- engage the energy of the group ‘where they are at’
- engage the group around therapeutic themes
- build mastery with the participants.

Games often allow for more spontaneous interactional patterns to emerge, can shift the tempo of the group, and can illuminate more clearly the roles that participants take on and the responses and reactions towards each other in the group.

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Recognising the importance of play

The capacity to play is critical in understanding and working with children, young people and adults alike. Play provides children in particular with an important transitional space through which they can explore the fit between their internal and external world, as well as developing their capacity for reflection, abstract thinking and creative problem solving.

“Playing occurs within an intermediate area – it is a transitional phenomenon which bridges the inner and outer world. Through creative enacted expression the child manipulates the external environment”.

Play is the space in which the sense of self emerges and as we develop in life, ushers in what is known as our ‘introspective consciousness’: our ability to know that we exist as an autonomous self.

The healthiness of play rests within its explorative, creative and restorative properties. It can be a safe place within which to ‘test the waters’ and a joyful way of connecting with ourselves and with others.

Play is one of our earliest and most important tools for interacting with the world, and is a precious space that allows us to make sense of and reflect on how we pull together our meaning. It is often the first place that we test out our problem solving skills, cause and effect, and evolve our own internal sense of who we are, both in relation to ourselves and in relation to others.

“It is only in playing that the individual – child or adult – uses his whole personality in creative activity, and it is only in creative activity that he discovers this self”.

When we use games we are engaging in play. Inherent in the use of games is the sense of play. Play is a therapeutic intervention that is highly effective to use with children, and it can achieve many therapeutic goals while the children are being creative and having fun. There are many aspects of play, and using games is only one way in which we can access the playfulness in children and adults alike.

Whether unstructured, or structured through games, play within groupwork has multiple benefits. These include:

• engagement
• breaking the ice
• group formation
• having fun
• building social skills such as listening, problem solving, co-operation, self control, and confidence, working in pairs, working in the group
• encouraging positive and pleasurable feelings of excitement, joy, liveliness, laughter, and smiling
• learning to control our impulses of tension and release of energy
• encouraging self expression and creativity
• working at the client/child’s level, allows the client/child to lead and be led
• easily adapted to different age groups
• encouraging connections and mutual enjoyment between clients/children and facilitators
• helping facilitators observe and assess difficulties that clients/children may be experiencing, their attitudes to winning/losing, developmental levels, and progress in the group
• facilitators can model options for behaving for participants.

Why we play

“You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.”

– Plato *

* Plato (427BC – 347BC) was a Greek author and philosopher.


Issues to consider when running groups

The CGP conducts a formal assessment process before the actual group, which involves a referral and pre-program interview selection. In this way we have an understanding of the specific needs and issues that each participant may face. This helps guide our planning and keeping our clients ‘in mind’. It is within this context and through our experience in running groups that the following logistics have been considered to be important.

1. Group logistics

Group size
Most groups we run have a limit of eight participants but this may vary according to your resources and needs.

Group length
Our groups run for eight weeks generally, but this may change depending on each setting.

Age of participants
We are a child and adolescent mental health service, but we also run parent groups and professional training. Therefore, we play games with a range of age groups, and you will find that most of the games listed will be adaptable to the context of the age group you are running.

Throughout the manual, we use the term ‘facilitator’ to refer to the actual person leading the group, and ‘participant’ to refer to the group members, regardless of what background or context the group is run in.

Confidentiality (and its limitations)
As mandated professionals (within the state of Victoria) we have to inform authorities if a child participant makes a disclosure that in some way places them or another ‘at risk of harm’. We address this issue at the beginning of each group and discuss the nature of confidentiality, what it means, and that we may not always be able to keep information confidential if participants disclose they are being hurt by someone. This gives participants warning that some information they share may not be kept in strict confidence.

Competitive games
Some games in the manual have participants ‘going out’ for various reasons. As a facilitator you may choose to ignore this for the sake of ‘play’ in the group, and allow everyone to stay in the game until the end, although the children themselves will often protest against this.

Alternatively, you may wish to use this as an exercise to explore giving and taking, sportsmanship, and to foster an appreciation that ‘winning isn’t everything’. It can also be used as a tool to observe how the participants will play the game, how they tolerate ‘losing’, and what the issues are as they arise.

2. Group stages

Groups have been observed to move through a number of distinct stages. Understanding what these stages are can assist in highlighting the issues that the group is facing. These stages can guide the facilitator in selecting appropriate games to play to take the group through a stage or to address issues that the group may be facing in each stage. The stages, taken from Tuckman (1965)6 and extended by Bunston, Millard, Audette and Pavlidis (2006)7 are:

- warming
- performing
- forming
- mourning
- storming
- transforming
- norming

In our experience, groups may get stuck at certain stages, or jump around between stages depending on many external and internal factors the group may be facing. Following is a brief outline of each stage.

Warming
This is the stage that is often exemplified in the legwork and organisation that facilitators engage in to get a group ‘off the ground’. It also refers to the ‘mind space’ the facilitator/s creates enabling the conception of the idea of a group. This involves the planning, preparation, thinking about the participants involved, meeting with the clients, parents and children prior to the group starting. It basically sets the scene about the intention of the group and the themes that are presented.

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7 These are two additional stages added by Bunston, Millard, Audette and Pavlidis (2006) – Understanding the life of the group (submitted for publication).
Forming
This stage is usually the beginning of a group where participants and facilitators meet and formally begin their time together, and create the culture of their interactions as a dynamic, living and breathing unit. Many games can be used to assist this process of getting to know each other and creating a safe environment. This stage may extend past the first few sessions as new members join and need to be integrated into the group.

Storming
This stage usually occurs when group members become familiar with each other and they start to question or rebel against what is being offered in the group. This may involve ‘acting out’ behaviour or a certain level of resistance to group activities.

Storming can occur at any time during the group life depending on group members. In order to travel safely through this stage it is important to provide a structure to allow this energy to play itself out in the group rather than trying to manage this behaviour in a punitive manner.

Storming can be a positive sign that group members are starting to feel comfortable and safe enough to show themselves, or to question the authority of the group. It can indicate a period where participants wish to be more proactive and involved in decision making processes, and charting the course and direction of the group.

Norming
After the storming phase has been addressed and hopefully managed successfully, norming can occur as a way of consolidating group identity and familiarity. Rituals in the group and ways of dealing with certain behaviours are familiar and group members concur to reach a level of understood norms of behaviour. This may be an overt process or it can occur through peer pressure to conform to certain standards of behaviour in order to ensure ongoing group membership and survival.

Performing
Having created a sense of ‘group’ identity the group is now free to ‘perform’. This phase of group life involves group members addressing issues or themes that may be important or, if it is a task oriented group to actually get the work done. How this presents may differ in many groups but generally it is a smooth time of effective group interaction and working together for mutually satisfying goals and achievements. It may also just look like there is no conflict as the group settles into a rhythm together.

Mourning
Having satisfied the goals or learning of the group, the next phase usually signals the beginning of the end of the group. The ‘mourning’ phase can spiral the group back into ‘storming’ as its message of ending challenges the existence and identity of the group. Mourning can be addressed and prepared for in many ways and it is important to give the participants space to allow for this process.

Sometimes ‘mourning’ can be addressed by having a closure party to celebrate the group life together. Awards, certificates and other ways of recognising individual achievements in the group can give participants a sense of accomplishment, success and fulfilment. These awards also serve as a physical reminder of the group and their participation that they can keep long after the group has ended. In this way these and other gifts can serve as ‘transitional objects’ to help ease the pain of giving up the attachment to the group by transferring the good feelings and experiences derived in the group to the object until they can tolerate the separation process.

Transforming
This period of the group process refers to an ‘integration stage’, which occurs post-group and allows participants a chance to integrate new narratives that may have emerged about themselves within the group experience. This is a stage where participants can internalise the experience as well as the learnings of the group, and consolidate this integration through keeping what is hopefully a growthful relational encounter as a marker for informing and encouraging participation in future interactions and relationships.

We have found this ‘transforming’ evidenced through group members subsequently participating as role models with other groups, or teachers and parents relaying back positive shifts that they have seen occurring. We have also found participants themselves indicating a sense of positive personal change when meeting up again at a group one to two months later for a group reunion.

8 ‘Transitional objects’ refer to Winnicott’s (1971) concept of objects serving as a comforter, (e.g. a soft toy). An object that a child embues with an emotional attachment and symbolises a connection whose separation can be tolerated through the possession of an object that serves as a tangible reminder/replacement until that person can internalise the sense of safety it symbolises for themselves. See Winnicott D.W. (1971). Playing and Reality. Tavistock/Routeledge Publications: London, New York.
3. Dynamics of individual sessions

The dynamics of the actual session can also affect the mood and attention of the group members. Early groupwork therapists utilising movement therapy interventions outlined ‘five stages’ that an individual group session was repeatedly observed to generally move through (this ‘five part session’ includes Warm-up, Release, Theme, Centring, and Closure). This model has been adapted to six stages through our work and can be applied to almost any group session, although the time spent and readiness to move onto any stage may vary. These include:

- introduction
- warm-up
- release of energy
- themes
- bringing it all together
- closure

Whatever the group’s context or intention, whether it is in the classroom, or in the therapy or art group, each session will most likely pass through these phases. Let’s look at them in closer detail:

Introduction
The introduction is a way to begin each session that marks the group in space and time as special and distinct from other activities in the course of a participant’s day. It can include a beginning ritual to signal the commencement of the session. This may be as simple as the participants taking their shoes off and then sitting in a circle signalling their readiness to begin. The introduction is usually brief, and can roll into the warm up, or if it is the first session, it will often take up more time. It is fairly self-referencing. The facilitator introduces the participants to what they will be doing in the session, possibly introduces the themes they may explore, or just generally ‘checks in’ with the group, and how they are. An example of this may be a ‘news’ or ‘joke’ circle.

Warm-up
This part of the session involves warming up the group and assisting participants to become present to the experiences in the group. This aims to connect participants to the physical space in which they have come together for a specific group. It is also an opportunity for participants to psychologically ‘warm-up’ to being in the ‘group space’, whether through becoming present or by leaving the rest of the day behind, especially if there has been conflict at home, work or in the schoolyard. In addition it is a ‘wake up’ and ‘warm-up’ of participants’ physically. Importantly, it endeavours to ‘re-engage’ participants with the other people they are in the group with, particularly if they haven’t seen them since the previous session.

This part of the session is really aimed at creating readiness to begin the work of the group. Many games can be utilised to assist this part of the session.

Release of energy
This part of the session involves letting some energy out, letting the energy peak, or allowing a little chaos to prevail. If this part of a session is able to play itself out, the participants can be ready to settle into the ‘guts’ of the session. This is a good time in the session in which to play physical games that channel or utilise large amounts of energy. Some groups may not be able to move past this ‘release of energy’ stage for the whole session and that may take the form of the theme for that particular session. An example of this is when groups just can’t seem to settle and it is pointless to try to get them to explore a theme. It is more productive to meet the group where their energy is and play games that can channel this energy in a positive manner.

Theme
This is the part of the session where the themes can be introduced, where the work that the group is to do together can be done. Whether this is cognitive, emotional, psychological, or creative, the group can settle in and produce the goods.

Bringing it all together
This part of the session is used to bring the participants back from their individual, dyad, or small groupwork to the whole group. This is a good time to show work that has been done, or share in a discussion around what has been learned. It could be done individually, as in journal work, or finishing and cleaning up, or giving some feedback and rewards to group members such as stickers. It is generally the time when the group or individuals in the group come back to the whole group space, leave the work that they are doing, and prepare to end the session. Some games can be utilised at this stage to bring the group together, such as ‘Relaxation’ games (see page 60).

Closure
This is the end of the group, and can be bookmarked by a ritual closure. This may be to re-group or to come into the circle to do an ending activity e.g. ‘Huh’ (see the ‘Group closure’ games from page 64). Other rituals may be to send a pulse around the circle through each person’s hands, and so forth. Depending on the group and the groups needs the participants can create their own closing ritual. The closure ritual is a coming together of all group participants, and each participant knows that this marks the end of the session.

4. Space considerations
The spatial arrangements created in the group can effect the dynamics of the group just as much as the individuals that make up the group can. Different group formations can be utilised to assist participants to learn new things and to subtly yet powerfully effect the spatial relationships between group members. Facilitators can use different spatial formations in order to consciously assist in creating safety, equality, and belonging; for example, someone standing up at the front of the room with everyone else sitting down automatically creates an imbalance of power and an atmosphere of authority, whereas all members seated in a circle gives everybody the potential to access the ‘power’ symbolised by the form of a circle.

Issues of containment and space also need to be taken into consideration; for example, too much space can be bewildering for children who may need a more ‘contained’ space such as sitting around a table with chairs.

Circle formation
Having participants in a circle formation helps to create a safe and mutually accessible space. Every participant is the same distance away from each other and from the centre, and every participant has access to the facilitator. The facilitator is part of the group, and each member is just as important in creating this group shape as the next. This formation allows eye contact with each member in the group, and demands that each member’s body is facing the middle, and is therefore open in posture to the other members of the group.

Traditionally circle formations have been used in ritual and culture to assist in connecting social groups. All traditional circle dances are danced in this formation to facilitate the group sense of connectedness and openness to each other.

Line formation
This formation can be used in order for participants to understand the nature of taking turns, waiting patiently, and being part of a group. Games utilising the line formation are generally aimed at getting the sense of working ‘as one’. Formations symbolising a snake, worm, chain, or train can assist participants to feel they are an integral part of this group. Group members can practice pacing themselves as part of the group rhythm, walking in time, allowing themselves to be led, and to lead, and practice waiting in turn.

Cluster formation
Cluster formations can be used when all eyes need to be on the facilitator and for generating discussions such as brainstorming. This is the classical teaching style, with the teacher in front and children facing the teacher. This is a good formation for imparting information, and having access to a blackboard or video. It automatically creates a power hierarchy between the facilitator and participants, which can be good to utilise if the facilitator needs the group to focus and pay attention to get an important message across.

Dispersement formation
Dispersement formations are useful when wanting to create intimacy through dyads or subgroups, or to disperse the group into individual spaces to undertake work of a more personal or private nature. It is useful on occasion to allow group members to move into their own personal space in order to facilitate individual reflection and focus on particular activities such as reflection sheets or journals.
Starting a program or a new group can be both exciting and scary for participants as well as for facilitators. Issues that facilitators need to be sensitive to in relation to the participants include: coming to a new venue/school/setting for the first time, meeting new people, participants’ feelings of nervousness, shyness, and generally not knowing what to expect.

The following games can be used at the beginning of a program or at the start of a session in order to make participants feel welcome, break the ice, and start to get to know each other. The focus is on having fun and starting to create an atmosphere of safety and trust for group members.

Setting up the ‘forming phase’ is an important time in each group when group members are ‘feeling out’ the facilitator and each other. It is a time of working out whether they will be accepted, whether they could belong to this group, whether they enjoy the group and are having fun and whether it feels safe to do so.

Having the group start sitting in a circle either on chairs or on the floor is conducive to encouraging a feeling of a supportive social network, and equality with group members. In this way each participant can observe the whole group, and through this, feel a sense of belonging.

An issue to be aware of is the height of facilitators chairs compared to the group. If you wish to enhance the sense of ownership and control for the group as opposed to being the ‘leader’ as an authority figure with all the power it is recommended that facilitators’ chairs are at the same height as the other group members.
Name games

The following games can be used to introduce group members and start the process of familiarising and getting to know each other. These games are useful in creating a positive feeling in the group, and for the participants to share something about themselves that is special and can be recognised by others.

Name games assist in the initial encouragement and acceptance of each person’s identity and membership in the group. As each group member shares something about themselves, for example, talking about something they like, sharing something about themselves, or offering a unique movement expression, other group members get a chance to see each participant’s personality start to emerge.
‘My name is’ game

Directions
• Sit in circle.
• Go around the circle and the first person says their name and something about themselves; for example, “My name is Mary and I like strawberries”.
• The next person introduces the previous person, and adds their name and what they like, and so on, until the last person who has to repeat back to the whole circle each person’s name and response.

When to use
At the beginning of a program.

Therapeutic value
Begins to create a sense of trust and safety as the participants’ anxieties and curiosity about each other start to be met and the group becomes more familiar and friendly.

Issues to be aware of
If participants are familiar with each other then it can be requested that what they offer about themselves is something that others wouldn’t know.

Circle name and action

Directions
• Participants sit or stand in a circle.
• Each person introduces themselves with a movement; for example, the participant says “Mary” whilst shaking one leg.
• Everybody copies that movement back to the person; for example, everybody says “Mary” and shakes one leg.
• The next person introduces the previous person’s movement and name, then adds their own movement and name. The group mirrors each new person’s movement back to them.
• The next person in the circle introduces each person that has gone before them, till the whole circle is done.
• At the end the whole group can go over the names and the movements of each person again.

When to use
At the beginning of a program or throughout the program as part of a warm-up activity.

Therapeutic value
Begins to create a sense of trust and safety as the participants’ anxieties and curiosity about each other are starting to be met and the group starts to feel more familiar and friendly. Each participant is expressing and offering a unique part of themselves to the rest of the group as well as their name. This game encourages uniqueness of expression and personalising the way participants present themselves. Participants are offered immediate recognition and affirmation through having their name and movement mirrored back and amplified by the group. It also encourages listening and memory skills, and confidence building.

Issues to be aware of
Some participants need to be fairly confident to use movement and take risks with expressing themselves in front of each other. If participants are uncomfortable using movement then it can be limited to a hand gesture or movement while still sitting as opposed to a whole body movement standing in a circle, or be used later in the program when participants are more at ease with expressing themselves with each other.
Name addition

Directions
- Sit in a circle.
- Go around one person at a time and ask participants to find a positive adjective or word to describe themselves, which begins with the same letter as their first name; for example, “Delightful Diana”, or “Sporty Samantha”.
- Each participant introduces all the people prior to them and then themselves, so the last person has to try to remember the whole group.

When to use
At the beginning of a program or as a warm-up activity in later sessions.

Therapeutic value
This game gets participants thinking around something positive about themselves that they can offer to the group. If they can’t think of anything then other group members can be asked to offer a positive word, which is then like being given a compliment. This game engenders positive feelings for each group member and identifies their strengths to share with the group.

This exercise can illuminate much about a participant’s level of self-esteem and/or confidence, particularly if they insist on using a negative word or struggle to find any positive adjectives for themselves.

Issues to be aware of
Some participants find it extremely embarrassing to hold the group’s attention and the facilitator can diffuse this by assisting and encouraging them with words so that it eases the pressure. If a participant gets stuck, the rest of the group can help them come up with a word, especially with participants whose name begins with letters which are harder to come up with adjectives to describe themselves. Only positive words are encouraged.

Name game

Directions
- Participants stand in a circle facing each other.
- They must say the name of a person, and making eye contact, gently throw the koosh (soft flour-filled ball or other suitable soft ball) to them.
- This is repeated until every participant has been thrown to.

Variations
The order in which the koosh balls are thrown can also be used as a memory game to make it more complex; for example, participants need to remember who threw it to them and then whom they threw it to and then continue to repeat this cycle.

Facilitators can introduce more than one koosh ball to add to the fun and heighten the attention and focus needed to catch a ball that is thrown to them.

When to use
At the beginning of the group.

Therapeutic value
This game is good to build connections with the group and increase physical proximity of members of the group. It fosters kinaesthetic learning and subsequent remembering of names. This game is non-threatening – all you have to know is your name. The extra balls add heightened spontaneity and exhilaration usually resulting in even the shyest and more anxious participants laughing and joining in the chaos.

Issues to be aware of
This game needs to be contained in a smaller circle in order to discourage any aggressive throwing of the ball. Participants (in particular children) who, irrespective of warnings, continue to throw in an unsafe manner may be struggling with poor impulse control or engaging in aggressive play. This information can assist facilitators in selecting future activities and games and monitoring how much or little control the group or individuals in the group can tolerate.

Eye contact is important between throwing and catching to facilitate the actual throwing and catching, breaking the ice and getting to know the participants. Name tags can be used in the beginning to help participants remember each other’s names.

* ‘Kinaesthetic’ refers to the internal sense of our physical self. The term literally means ‘feeling of motion’. It is used as an umbrella term to describe the sensations originating in muscles, tendons and joints (Reber A.S. (1985) Dictionary of Psychology. Penguin books; Great Britain, p. 383). ‘Kinaesthetic learning’ refers to an experiential way of learning that involves creating pathways through both physical and brain patterning, in order to reinforce the memory of people/events/ideas; for example, in this game names are remembered through simultaneous verbal and physical repetition.
Name zap

Directions

- Participants stand in a circle.
- A clap is passed around the circle in one direction with each person saying the name of the person standing next to them that they are passing the clap to. This can get faster and faster as participants’ confidence increases in naming the people in the group.
- If the group can manage this stage of the game, the facilitator can introduce the option of participants putting up their hands in a ‘stop’ position, which sends the clap around the circle in the opposite direction.
- The next level involves participants’ passing a clap to anyone in the circle, saying the person’s name as you aim the clap in their direction.
- The person who was ‘zapped’ catches the clap by repeating their own name then sends a clap to another member of the group by saying their name. This is repeated and continues for as long as seems necessary.
- An instruction is to have eye contact with each person as the clap goes around or across the circle.

Variation #1

‘Zap’ can be played with movements (which can be created with the ‘circle name and action game’ movements on page 16).

- Start with your movement, and ‘zap’ it to another group member by adding on someone else’s movement. That person catches the ‘zap’ by performing their movement firstly, then ‘zaps’ it on by adding on another member’s movement they want to send it to and so on.

Variation #2

- Another variations involves playing ‘zap’ with nicknames when the group already knows each other quite well.
- Participants need to introduce their nicknames first so everyone can remember in order to play ‘zap’.

When to use

At the beginning of the group, as a warm-up activity, or if you need a game to quickly contain and channel the rowdy energy of the group. ‘Name zap’ is a good game for remembering and repeating a lot of names in a group in a fun way.

Therapeutic value

This game involves co-operation, focus, eye contact, remembering names and repeating them, and engaging with the group as a whole.

Issues to be aware of

These more action-oriented games are suitable for very active and restless groups that can’t sit still, or who are racing around from the beginning. These games help them to get to know each other, while channelling some of their physical energy in a more constructive manner.
Mexican wave

Directions

- Participants stand in a circle.
- One participant says their name and jumps straight up in the air at the same time.
- As soon as the last person has jumped in the air and said their name, the next person follows and so on around the circle.
- The aim of the game is to find a group rhythm as they go around the circle, not skip a beat, and make it as fast as the group can go.

Variation

A version of this game can be played with participants either sitting on a chair or sitting with their legs folded under them in a circle. ‘The Mexican wave circle’ is played with each participant introducing themselves with a wave of their arms up and their body rising up to a kneeling position if they’ve been on the floor or standing if seated on a chair. This movement travels around the circle like a ‘Mexican wave’.

When to use

At the beginning of a group when you want a quick game of introductions that has a physical dynamic to it. This game can be a fun way to introduce each other and to repeat a lot of names quickly.

Therapeutic value

The physical aspect of this game means that a lot of energy can be channelled quickly so it is a good game for participants who can’t settle first off. The physical rhythm ensures that each member falls into the larger rhythm of the group and starts to feel a sense of belonging through the shared rhythm. The jumping and arm waving are also physical statements declaring the participants’ presence and can be a good game to boost confidence in shy participants.

Issues to be aware of

This game can harness a group’s excitability, most notably through the physical exertion of having to jump or rise up from the floor/chair. However, participants not comfortable with their body or weight may resist or feel embarrassed by this game. A simplified version of just raising arms may be substituted if these issues are present.

Name tiggy

This is a tag game with a twist, which will keep participants on their toes and thinking as well as moving fast!

Directions

- A person is nominated to go ‘it’ first.
- Person who is ‘it’ tries to catch others, who run around the space.
- If the person who is ‘it’ gets close to participants they can protect themselves by yelling out someone else’s name in the group except the person who is ‘it’.
- The person that has been named then becomes ‘it’ and the dynamic changes quickly as participants in close proximity to the new ‘it’ can be caught out before they have a chance to protect themselves.
- If someone yells out the wrong name, or can’t remember a name, or gets ‘tagged’ before they get a chance to yell a name out, then they go out, and so on, until there is a winner.

When to use

At the beginning of the session when the group is familiar with each other’s names or as a way to remember and repeat participant’s names. This game can also be used as a warm-up game or a release activity when the group needs to run around.

Therapeutic value

This is a good get to know you game. It involves quickness of mind, anticipation, engagement and excitement, and thinking on the spot. It is a good game to disperse a lot of excitable energy and serves to help remind participants of each other’s names.

Issues to be aware of

A large enough space for participants to run around in is needed. This game involves lots of start and stop movements.
‘Getting to know you’ games

The following games can be used to familiarise participants with each other and to facilitate some information about each group member.
Balloon game

Directions
• Facilitators ask each participant to blow up and tie off a balloon each (will need two balloons of each colour, enough for each member of the group).
• Participants are then asked to keep the balloons up in the air, firstly with two arms, then one arm, then no arms, then their heads, knees, etc. while music is played.
• When the music stops, tell participants to find the closest balloon and pair up with the person who has the same colour balloon as them.
• The pairs then find three things that they have in common (e.g. favourite foods, music, etc). These are the first stages in getting to know each other.
• Participants are then invited to return to the big group. Each pair introduces one another, and shares with the group the three things they have in common.

When to use
At the beginning few sessions of a program when participants are getting to know each other.

Therapeutic value
This game introduces the element of chance and mixing up partners with people that they may not know, and does so in a fun and non-threatening manner.

Issues to be aware of
The use of balloons and running around needs to be contained and in some instances the group won’t be able to tolerate this much freedom. Other more structured and sitting down games may be more appropriate for groups who become over-elevated when engaging in games that possess chaotic elements such as this.

Postcards

Directions
• Cut up postcards into two pieces (free postcards are easy to collect in cafés in Victoria).
• Participants select a piece of postcard from the ‘hat’ and have to find the other person with the matching bit of postcard to make it complete.
• Each postcard pair asks each other a number of questions (e.g. “What is your favourite colour?”, “What is your favourite food”, “What football team do you barrack for?”) and then reports back to the larger group introducing their partner.
• This game can also be used to create teams or smaller groups for activities in a random way. A number of the same postcards can be chopped up and used to break up the group into two or three.

Variation
A similar game can be played with pieces of paper that have half of a famous couple or pair on it, and the partners have to find each other (e.g. yin/yang, tennis/ball, up/down, king/queen, left/right, etc).

When to use
At the beginning few sessions of a program when participants are getting to know each other. This game is good to use when groups members are sticking to people they know already and you want to mix them up a bit.

Therapeutic value
This game introduces the element of chance and mixing up partners with people that they may not know in a fun and non-threatening manner.

Issues to be aware of
Participants (particularly children) can resist being paired up with other group members and are not always pleased with who ends up being their partner. This game keeps a random element involved so that everyone gets a chance to partner different people they may not know so well. If there is a particular clash between two participants that end up in a pair, this can be discussed with participants depending on the judgment of the facilitator. It could be seen as an opportunity to tease out the reasons behind their discomfort, discussing with them why they don’t want to be paired together. It can also serve as an encounter to highlight the fact that in life we are not necessarily going to like everyone, but we need to be able to work with people different from ourselves.
‘Get to know you’ action game

Directions
• All participants sit in a circle.
• Facilitator calls out some categories (e.g. “Everybody with a brother stand up and click your fingers”).
• If a participant fits into the category, they stand up, and then the facilitator says an action they have to do.
• Participants complete the action then sit back down.

Other examples: “Stand up if you:
• have gone to this school for more than three years: give a wave
• have moved house more than four times: raise both hands
• like rainy days: click your fingers
• were born in July: call out the date
• like to wear hats: wink an eye
• have read a book in the last week: clap your hands twice
• have a step-parent: tap your feet.”

When to use
At the beginning of a program or as a warm-up activity in other sessions. To help foster a sense of similarity with other group participants, especially when there are common issues that group members share that they don’t know about each other until this game.

Therapeutic value
Helps participants share information about themselves in a fun manner. It entails a sense of anticipation, listening to and following instructions. Can be used to settle a group when they are excitable. It also gives facilitators a great way of gathering information in a non-threatening manner; e.g. if a child has moved house multiple times this tells you about potential ‘loss and grief’ issues or maybe some family instability. As a result you may move to raising some of the issues for discussion in the group if appropriate.

Issues to be aware of
This game can be evolved to allow group members to think up instructions to give to the group but this needs to be mediated appropriately by the facilitators.

Rolling introductions

Directions
• A toilet roll is passed around the group and each member is asked to take as much or as little as they would like.
• Once the roll has been around the group the members are asked to count how many sheets they have.
• The group members are encouraged to share as many pieces of information as they have pieces of paper.

Variation
A variation to this game is that facilitators can write on some of the pieces of the toilet paper before they hand it around with questions that the person who tears it off has to answer as well as offering general information of their choice with the blank pieces. Examples of written directions could be: ‘Share a secret’, ‘Your happiest birthday memory’, or ‘Something you achieved which was hard to attain’.

When to use
At the beginning of the group forming.

Therapeutic value
There is an element of chance and intrigue as participants don’t know why they are taking pieces of toilet paper and if they take a lot they will have to share something about themselves for each piece taken. It also gives participants permission to talk about themselves without it seeming that they are showing off or taking the limelight.

Issues to be aware of
Some participants will take an excessive amount of paper and then lack the confidence or become too shy to reveal so much about themselves (facilitators can help out by offering suggestions, i.e. “you have blue eyes”, “have a dazzling smile”, etc). Others will take very few pieces of toilet paper and will use the chance to share very little about themselves.
Who are you?

**Directions**
- Group members are paired off (can use the ‘Postcards’ game on page 21).
- Each pair is asked to go away and come back with answers to a number of questions.

These questions may vary from group to group. Some common and interesting ones include:
- What do they hope to get out of this program?
- Who makes up their family?
- What are some of their favourite hobbies?
- What would they do with a million dollars?
- What is their most embarrassing moment?
- Who would they most like to have dinner with?

**When to use**
At the beginning of the group or in subsequent sessions as a warm-up activity.

**Therapeutic value**
The facilitator can introduce some more intimate themes in the questions alongside some more general questions. This game gives the group an opportunity to share at whatever personal level they feel comfortable to through the material included in the questions. It also encourages as well as gives participants permission to engage with others in a more structured (and thus safe) manner.

**Issues to be aware of**
Some participants may not be comfortable sharing personal information and it may not be beneficial to suggest that each pair to report back on their partner’s answers. Rather than reconvening as a large group it may be more appropriate to reconvene in two smaller groups to create more intimacy than would occur with the whole group.

Truth is stranger than fiction

**Directions**
- This activity involves each member sharing three personal stories or facts with the group, two of which are true, and one of which is false.
- Group members take a vote on which story they think is false.
- The member sharing then reveals the truth about their stories.

**When to use**
When group members know each other fairly well or are just getting to know each other. To encourage more intimacy and sharing in the group.

**Therapeutic value**
Can provide an opportunity for group members to share personal or unique aspects of themselves. Also gives members an opportunity to create a fantasy about what they could tell the rest of the group. Engages group members’ imagination in wondering about each other and their lives outside of the group.

**Issues to be aware of**
Facilitators may get more than thet bargained for with this game: occasionally a participant may reveal information that reveals more about themselves than seems appropriate for the tone or closeness of the group. This calls for the facilitator to be sensitive to managing how the group respects and responds to such revelations and may require some individual follow up from the facilitator.
Warm-up games

Working together as a group

The following games can be used at the beginning of a group’s commencement but equally can be used as session starters when participants have commenced forming (second session onwards). These games assist the group to warm up at the beginning of each session, as participants are unlikely to have seen each other since the last session.

These games also respect the time in which it takes for participants to feel at ease with fellow group members recognising that it may take weeks for participants to find their place in the group. These games can act as ‘ice-breakers’, and can further facilitate the group forming process as group participants begin to work together as a group.
Clap

**Directions**

- Participants stand in a circle.
- Pass a clap one way around circle, with each group member ‘zapping’ a clap to the next person.
- This game can be played silently or the person can say “zap” as well as clapping.
- The clap can get faster and faster as group members focus and concentrate on the clap being passed around.
- An instruction is to have eye contact with each person as the clap goes around the circle.
- The clap can be passed the other way around the circle, and across the circle (by looking at and aiming a clap at someone other than the person either side of them) as the group gains confidence with the game.
- A ‘stop’ can be introduced with the person putting their hands up when the clap comes towards them, which has the effect of rebounding the clap back to the person who just passed it to them. They then have to pass the clap onto someone else. If you are using sound in this game, “Whoa” can be used as the hands go up.

**When to use**

At the beginning of the group, as a warm-up activity, or if you need a game to quickly contain and channel the rowdy energy of the group.

**Therapeutic value**

This game involves co-operation, focus, eye contact, and being part of the group. It also elevates the mood of a group and centres the energy within the group as a whole as distinct from activities that move the energy into differing sub-groups.

**Issues to be aware of**

These more action-oriented games are suitable for very active and restless groups that can’t sit still, or who are racing around from the beginning. These games still help them to get to know each other, while channelling some of their physical energy in a positive manner.

Poison ball

**Directions**

- Choose two people to throw a large, but soft, rubber ball from either side of the room. Ask all the other participants to stand in the middle.
- The two people on the outside throw the ball to each other, trying to hit those in the middle. Participants in the middle have to avoid being hit. When they are hit, they are out of the game.
- It can be useful to have a rule of not hitting above the knees (and if this happens the participant gets to stay in the game) to encourage safety.
- The person who has gone out can re-enter the game if another participant offers them a ‘spare life’, which is earned if they catch the ball before it reaches the ‘thrower’ on the other side, or alternatively they may join the throwers on the outside instead of just sitting out of the game.
- The two people on the outside can also attempt to throw the ball over the top of the participants to each other. If the ball is caught by the thrower on the other side, without it touching the ground they can call out “freeze”.
- ‘Freeze’ requires those in the middle to freeze like statues, and to give the ball throwers an opportunity to hit (gently!) one of the participants, as they are unable to move away from the ball.
- If those in the middle move to avoid the ball during ‘freeze’, they are automatically ‘out’, regardless of whether or not the ball hits them. If one of the participants in the middle should catch the ball during ‘freeze’, they earn a spare life to use at a later time if they go out, or they can offer this life to someone who has already gone out.
- If this person chooses to give away their spare life to another, the other person is able to rejoin the game. A life can only be used once, thus the person loses their spare life, and if they are hit by another ball they must go out.

**When to use**

This is a good warm-up game when participants need a good run around in order to settle into the group.

**Therapeutic value**

Can be used to practice good sportsmanship, going out, playing fairly, focusing and paying attention. It also involves physical challenges, risk taking, anticipation, fun, and excitement. This game can diffuse and channel physical energy positively.

**Issues to be aware of**

This game needs a large space marked out. Physical safety is paramount so ground rules need to be laid out. When more than one person joins the outside as a thrower, competitiveness can often occur with one person dominating rather than taking turns in throwing.
Musical chairs

**Directions**
- Put chairs back to back in two lines in the middle of the room, or scatter around the room.
- Make sure there is one less chair than the number of participants.
- Participants move to music (you can give different directions like “moving sideways, backwards, creeping, stalking like a tiger”, etc.) and find a chair when the music stops.
- The participant left without a chair is ‘out’ of the game.
- An optional activity for participants who go out can be created to keep them in (eg: getting them to make a farmyard animal sound/impersonation). If it is judged good enough the group can decide that this participant can stay in for another round, otherwise, they go out.
- Continue this process of elimination until you find a winner.

**Variation**
Squares of cardboard or hoops can be used instead of chairs. When the music stops participants find a square to stand on, or a hoop to stand in.

**When to use**
When the group is unsettled, not focused or needs to express and channel some energy.

**Therapeutic value**
This is a good game to see how the participants react to ‘going out’. Special elimination challenges (e.g. farmyard animals) can bring out creativity and expression in participants. Assists in building up anticipation and the subsequent release of energy.

**Issues to be aware of**
This game needs to be kept safe and ground rules need to be established before the game begins. Participants who have gone out can be given special roles of being judges to keep them involved and engaged in the game.

Scarecrow tiggy

**Directions**
- One person volunteers to be ‘it’. Their job is to ‘tag’ as many people as possible.
- Once ‘tagged’, a person must stand like a scarecrow, with arms out and legs open wide enough to allow someone to crawl through their legs.
- The people who are the scarecrows are not allowed to move however they can earn a new ‘life’ if they can convince someone else to crawl through their legs.

**When to use**
At any stage when wanting to alter the tempo of the group.

**Therapeutic value**
This game builds camaraderie as different people take the risk of crawling through the ‘scarecrow’s’ legs to give them a new life. This game is quite symbolic as it demonstrates how someone who takes a risk to put themselves out for another person can indeed ‘enliven’ them by investing in them emotionally. Depending on the calibre of the group this activity could be used as a metaphor for discussion.

**Issues to be aware of**
If participants are not physically comfortable with the idea of going under other’s legs, facilitators may need to vary the way the game is played (e.g. crouch behind the person).

Indians and tepees

**Directions**
- Participants form pairs in a circle with one being the ‘Indian’, sitting with legs crossed on the ground, the other the ‘tepee’, standing with legs apart behind the ‘Indian’.
- Facilitator stands in the centre of the circle and calls out “Indians”, which requires the ‘Indians’ to climb through their “Tepees” legs, run around the circle, then go back through the legs of their ‘Tepee’, or calls out “Tepees” which requires them to run around the circle and return to stand behind their ‘Indian’.
- After a few minutes swap over roles.

**When to use**
This is a good run around game used to warm up a group or settle their energy down. It also emphasises working in pairs and having someone who is encouraging you on to get back to your home base.

**Therapeutic value**
A good listening and responding game. This is a good non-competitive game where winning is about re-connecting with your partner.

**Issues to be aware of**
If participants are not physically comfortable with the idea of going under other’s legs, facilitators may need to vary the way the game is played (e.g. run around the person).
**Duck, duck goose**

**Directions**
- Participants sit in circle.
- One person goes around the outside of the circle and gently taps each participant on the head saying, “duck, duck” and so on until they choose one participant as they tap and say “goose”.
- The participant who has been tagged ‘goose’ jumps up and chases the other participant around the circle and tries to tag them before they get back to their original spot.
- Whoever is left out is the person who goes around again tagging.

**Variation**
By having two or more people (depending on size of group) moving around the back of the circle, and changing the direction in which they run, this game can be spiced up.

**When to use**
This game can be used as a quick warm-up or closing game.

**Therapeutic value**
This game is good to settle a group who can sit on the floor in a circle with suspense being built around who is going to be tagged. This game also acts as a physical container as all participants need to wait their turn in the circle. It involves suspense, anticipation, release, being seen, and being chosen.

**Issues to be aware of**
Facilitators may need to be aware of encouraging the participant ‘tagging’ to give the participants a go at being ‘goose’ who haven’t had a turn yet. Conversely some participants may feel hurt at not being chosen and (as in all games) can act out in frustration.

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**Fruit salad**

**Directions**
- Participants sit in a circle on chairs with one person in the middle.
- Participants are named either apples or oranges.
- Person in middle calls out “apples” or “oranges”, and those children have to get up and swap seats with each other without the person in the middle taking a seat.
- If they call “fruit salad” everyone has to get up and swap seats.
- Person left without a seat is the next person in the middle.

**Variations**
Person in middle can call out any characteristic (e.g. “Anyone whose birthday is in July”, “Anyone who barracks for Collingwood”, etc). Can be used as a ‘get to know you’ game also.

**When to use**
This is a good game to use when participants have got to know each other, or when groups can’t be contained in running around games. The circular formation of this game means there are safe boundaries for participants to move about in.

**Therapeutic value**
Good for anticipation, release, suspense and listening. Whilst some participants crave to be in the middle, others find being at the centre of attention very anxiety producing. This game occurs so quickly that individuals move between the centre and the circle with great speed and as such are given a pleasurable, fun and ultimately, tolerable experience of being the focal point.

**Issues to be aware of**
These games work within a confined space, are physical and can result in participants unintentionally (or intentionally) coming into contact.
Group games

The following games can be used generally to create fun and expression within the group, to continue group ‘norming’, getting to know each other, and particularly when a group is ‘performing’ well together.

They can be used to diffuse excitable energy when the group is getting rowdy, or to have a quick break if other work in the group has been on a cognitive level, and they need a change of focus.
Team building games

The following games can be used to generate group identity and cohesion. They assist in the ‘forming’, ‘norming’, ‘storming’ and ‘performing’ stages of the group and can be used to channel the energy of the group in a fun way.
Follow the leader

Many variations can be played with this simple game.

Variations

- Can be played in a circle, with each participant given a chance to be the leader in turn, and everyone copying their instructions, their actions, or their movements to music one at a time around the circle.
- Can be played in a line, with each participant given an opportunity to be at the front of the line leading others.
- The facilitator can lead the group, and can say “Baltazar says clap your hands” (“Baltazar” is just a variation on ‘Simon’ and the word ‘Baltazar’ must be said before issuing an instruction or the instruction is not valid), e.g. “Baltazar says stand up”, “sit down”, in order to trick the participants in following instructions that aren’t in the game.
- To catch participants’ attention quickly, the facilitator can say “hands on head”, “tummy”, “nose”, etc., for participants to follow while the facilitator puts their hands on a different part of their body than what they say. This is to get participants to attend and catch you out, and say “that’s not your tummy”, or to see whether they follow your actions or your instructions (it can confuse them!).

When to use

When required this can teach group members how to lead, follow and to listen carefully to instructions. Can be used at any point to bring the group into a shared experience together, or for all eyes to be on the facilitator.

Therapeutic value

This game involves developing listening skills, following instructions, focusing quickly and attending closely to detail. It allows facilitators to observe how different individuals in the group enact ‘leadership’ and ‘followership’ roles; for example, do they go out co-operatively, do they try and challenge the leaders? Does the leader in this game conduct their leadership respectfully or not? In addition to this, it provides participants with practice in ‘going out’, allows developing social skills of leadership and following to be practised, and can boost confidence by giving each child a chance to be the leader and having others see them and respect them in this role.

Issues to be aware of

That each participant gets a go at leading the group, and that instructions and movements are simple enough for everyone to copy and join in.

Warm-up machine

Directions

- The aim of this game is for the group to create a ‘machine’ through movement to music.
- Everyone starts sitting on the floor – one person volunteers to create a still shape or sculptured position in the centre of the room, which includes a movement of a part of their body in time to the music and which they keep repeating.
- One person at a time gets up and finds a shape in relation to the shapes that participants have already made, and adds their own movement to the existing group ‘machine moving sculpture’.
- In the end, everyone is part of the ‘machine’ that is moving to the music, and each person has found a way to ‘fit into the group’ with their movement.
- The last person in is the first person to leave and sit down, and the machine is dismantled one by one.
- Facilitators can assist the group by asking them to look at creating an interesting sculpture using the dimensions of shape, height, depth, shaping the space.
- Participants on the outside are encouraged to look at the beauty and overall shape of what the rest of the group is creating. This game is best if repeated a few times until the group begins to understand how they can create interesting and unique shapes together.

Variation

A group sculpture can be created without music, and in stillness. Participants need to understand the exercise before they do it to music. It just involves one person at a time making a freeze shape in the space, and each person adding their own shape one at a time.

When to use

When the group can work together well and enjoy each other’s uniqueness in the group.

Therapeutic value

This game involves an exploration of being part of a group and how participants can contribute their uniqueness to the group ‘machine’. This symbolises a person’s ability to be part of something larger than themselves. It also explores complementing and working with what is already there, and accepting and working with what people offer us. It involves creativity and lateral thinking.

Issues to be aware of

Choice of music here is important. Music with an easy rhythm or beat, which is sustained throughout the whole track and that the group can relate to, is the most appropriate to use. This exercise also requires a level of physical intimacy so facilitators need to monitor the comfort of participants with regards to proximity and personal space.
Chain chasey

Directions
- The game begins with one participant who is ‘it’.
- The participant runs around a specified area that is not too large, trying to tag another member of the group on the back or shoulder.
- As people are tagged they form a group working together (this can be negotiated before the game starts) to link arms, or hold hands) to get those who have not yet been caught.
- The last person left wins the game.

When to use
This is an ideal game to use when there is lots of excess energy in the group in order to release it and channel it in a positive manner.

Therapeutic value
This game is useful for group formation, leading and following and negotiating how to work together, practicing ‘going out’ and being a good sport.

Issues to be aware of
This game needs to be kept physically safe and contained and this should be communicated to participants before they begin; for example, a rule may be that a participant will automatically be out if they are intentionally rough or hurt another participant.

Footy frenzy

Directions
- Participants are separated into two lines sitting down facing each other with their legs straight, together, and feet touching.
- Each line is considered a team.
- Each pair with their feet touching names a footy team they want to represent.
- Facilitator calls out one footy team and that pair jumps up and jumps over everyone’s legs down the line, race around the lines, and then back over the legs to get back to their original place.
- The winner out of this pair scores a point.
- When “footy frenzy” is called out, everyone must jump up from their spot, run around from the beginning to the end of their line and back to their original spots.
- The first team that settles first scores a point.
- The line/team with the most points at the end of the game is the winner.

When to use
This game is good to use when the group needs to expel any excess energy and to build team spirit.

Therapeutic value
This game involves building listening skills, anticipation, sportsmanship and team spirit. As the name says, it becomes a ‘frenzy’ of movement and animation and is a wonderful way of diffusing any unsettled energy to allow for a calm space for reflection and discussion to follow.

Issues to be aware of
Clear ground rules need to be set at the start regarding keeping all legs straight and together to make it safe for each person to jump over them.
Ball on material

Directions
- Group sits closely in circle holding a large piece of lycra stretchy material quite taut.
- Put a ball in the middle of the material. The idea is to keep the ball bouncing on the material by moving the material up and down as a group, but not to let it go out of the circle.
- Some music can be played also to create a rhythm to move the material up and down by.

When to use
When the sense of group is fragmented or in a ‘storming’ phase. Brings a sense of cohesion and togetherness to the group with a shared rhythm.

Therapeutic value
This game acts as a container through the circular formation of the group and the material connecting each participant. It involves the group working together to achieve a common goal, and the satisfaction of keeping the ball in the middle. It is a fun activity that tests the skills of the group in working together collaboratively and explores the subtlety of teamwork as it is only by all members contributing that this game has any possibility of succeeding. This of course provides a wonderful metaphor for a discussion about working together.

Issues to be aware of
This game can be adapted to suit the needs of all participants with varying degrees of impairment or skill. It is a great game to include for those with poor fine motor skills as they can participate at their own pace and enjoy being part of a game that doesn’t require individual skills but requires each participant to work as part of the larger group.

Pass the hoop

Directions
- Participants form a circle and hold hands.
- One participant starts with a (hula) hoop looped over their shoulder and waist.
- The object of the game is to pass the hoop from one person to the next around the circle without breaking the chain or unlinking hands.
- Participants pass the hoop through stepping through it carefully and moving under and out of the hoop until it moves to the next person.

Variations
More than one hoop could be added to the circle, the circle could be made bigger, every second member could be blindfolded, or the hoop can be sent in the opposite direction.

When to use
To encourage group harmony and working together and when you want to harness a group’s energy.

Therapeutic value
To engage group members in an activity that involves all of them equally which is fun and has an element of problem-solving. To positively match and then alter any excess energy in the group.

Issues to be aware of
Some children may need assistance with this activity. Always make sure the hoops are large enough to comfortably fit over everyone so as not to cause any embarrassment or discomfort – particularly for those participants struggling with a positive body image. Hula hoops are available from sports stores however we use hoops that are detachable (and as such can be made smaller or bigger as needed) which are available online from Project Adventure Australia at www.paa.org.au
Taken for a ride

Directions
• The group is divided into two teams, with at least four participants per team, clustered at one end of the room.
• Each team is directed to find a way to carry each team member, one at a time, off the ground from the start to the opposite wall and back again.
• Each person in the team must take part in carrying the weight of each person, even if it is only holding a hand – it needs to be a group effort!
• The first team to carry all its members across the room is the winner.
• If a person is dropped on the way across, the team has to go back to the beginning again.

When to use
This game is great to use when the group has formed, and is gaining confidence in working together and ‘performing’, and are ready for a fun challenge. It can be used to explore themes of support, trust and working together.

Therapeutic value
This game assists group members to both consolidate and re-form their identity as two sub-groups. It involves teamwork: building confidence through being able to rely on each other; issues of trust and support; physical contact and working together efficiently and quickly. The element of competition heightens the energy level, which requires each team to quickly work out the best way to carry each team member; and requires that each team member play an important role. The metaphors inherent in this activity can be explored in a group discussion after this game, talking about what roles different group members adopted, whether they were able to trust their team members, and what it was like to achieve something as a group that they would have been unable to achieve individually.

Issues to be aware of
Consideration of when and why to use this is important before playing. It involves direct physical contact between participants, and as such, issues of safety and the capacity of participants to both physically and emotionally hold each other through the exercise needs to be considered. This game should not be used if there are any concerns for participants with a known history of abuse, or if facilitators consider that the group is not ready or able to work together intimately in this way. This game should only be used after group members have worked together for some time and are comfortable and confident in being able to support each other. In the right environment, this game is great fun and elevates both the level of trust and intimacy within a group.

Group start / stop

Directions
• The idea of the game is that the group stops and starts walking in tune together. The facilitator instructs the group to start walking around the space in random order, filling up the whole space.

The facilitator then gives the following rules:
1. Anyone in the group can stop moving, by freezing on the spot.
2. As soon as one person has stopped, everyone has to ‘freeze’ also.
3. When the group has frozen, anyone can start moving again, and the rest of the group has to follow.
4. This may need to be practised by the group a few times in order for them to get the hang of it.

Variations
Once the group has mastered initiating stopping and starting together, the game can be layered with more complexity by the person initiating the movement adding a tempo, sound or action which the rest of the group has to follow. If someone doesn’t like the tempo, sound or action, they can ‘freeze’ again which brings the whole group to a standstill, and allows another group member to start the movement off again.

When to use
This game is good to use when exploring themes about awareness of others, of working together harmoniously in a group, and taking the lead or initiative in the group. This is a good game to use if the group is out of harmony, or if they are working well together in order to explore and consolidate this further.

Therapeutic value
This game involves a heightened level of awareness and participation of the group energy, developing sensitivity to others, and the willingness to take a risk and lead a group. Additionally, it facilitates a group ‘sensing’ each other and moving as one as it calls for an ability to anticipate the group’s needs, as well as asserting oneself in stopping and starting the activity. This activity lends itself to a fuller discussion on how we might ‘stop’ and ‘start’ in relationships and why, when, and how we might do this.

Issues to be aware of
If the group struggles to reach a shared rhythm then try it again at a later stage as an activity that they can strive to master over time.
Communication games

The following games can be used to explore aspects of communication including listening to others, being heard and recognising and accepting difference.
Wink circle

Directions
• Participants stand in a circle with one person standing in the middle.
• Participants find someone across the circle from them to wink at, making sure there is eye contact.
• When they get a wink in return those two people attempt to swap positions in the circle.
• The person in the middle tries to go into one of the other participant’s spots while they swap. If they succeed, the person who is left in the middle becomes the next person to try and take someone else’s position.

When to use
To encourage eye contact and to initiate connections with group members. To lighten the mood of a group if needing to alter the tempo in the room.

Therapeutic value
This game encourages group members to non-verbally connect and interact with each other. Facilitates engagement and eye contact for participants who have difficulty making eye contact. Involves eliciting responses from others, and working together collaboratively. It involves risk-taking and communicating with others. This is a good game for participants who are shy and assists them to learn to try and take the initiative with others to get a response.

Issues to be aware of
Facilitators need to remind participants to have eye contact before they wink and encourage those who haven’t crossed the circle to try and wink at someone, as a way of building up their courage to connect with others.

Wink murder

Directions
• All participants close their eyes (no peeking!).
• Facilitator picks out a ‘murderer’ by tapping them on the back.
• Participants open their eyes and begin to walk around the space.
• The ‘murderer’ has to catch the eye of someone and wink at him or her.
• When winked at, participants make a very loud, theatrical, drawn out death.
• Other participants try to work out who the ‘murderer’ is without getting winked at.
• They can put their hand up after someone has been ‘murdered’ to make an allegation.
• If they are wrong they have to go out.
• If they choose correctly, then a new game is started.

When to use
When the group can concentrate and focus together. When trust is built up and the group is able to enjoy each other and share their sense of humour.

Therapeutic value
This game involves suspense, wit, subtlety, drama, creativity, focus, and attentiveness. Facilitators need to assess the group’s readiness to tolerate playing with themes that are ‘darker’ but not interpreted as attacking or destructive, and this is usually with a group that is forming/norming.

Issues to be aware of
Facilitators can never fully know the history of every person who attends the groups they will run. Never assume! Be sensitive to the comfort levels of participants at all times in all groups. If you have inadvertently stumbled upon an issue that distresses a participant (e.g. a family member/friend who has died or even been murdered, immediately attend to their distress and if appropriate deal with and discuss then and there (individually or if the trust is strong – within the group). This may bring about surprising results of building intimacy with the group through shared stories of grief.
Wandering whispers

**Directions**
- Form a circle.
- The facilitator or a volunteer makes up a sentence with at least ten words.
- They then whisper the sentence into the ear of the person next to them (so others cannot hear!) and it passes around the circle.
- The last person to hear the message repeats what they heard out loud.

**When to use**
When a game is needed that is contained and calm. Also, use it when exploring themes of communication, how rumours and secrets can spread, and about mixed messages.

**Therapeutic value**
This game involves listening and communication skills. This game can be used to introduce the themes of backbiting and how stories can be exaggerated. An interesting discussion can occur as to whether the message changed considerably or not and what this might reflect about the group or about how rumours (generally) might happen. It is also a calming game to play.

**Issues to be aware of**
Ground rules need to be put in place whereby there is no swearing or rude language involved. Participants might become accusatory (e.g. “They completely changed the sentence on purpose!”). Even if this is true it may be the starting point for a discussion as well. This game is not suitable for participants with a hearing impairment or speech difficulties.

Group storytelling

**Directions**
- Participants sit in a circle.
- One participant starts with one word to begin a story.
- Each participant contributes a word to the story as you proceed around the circle.
- It can be played with each participant contributing a phrase.

**Variation**
- The same game is used with a piece of paper.
- One participant writes a sentence, then folds the paper over, like a fan, and puts the last word/s on the next piece left showing so the next person has a place to start off.
- Each participant writes a sentence as his or her contribution to the story.
- When all participants have written their sentence, unfold the piece of paper and read out the collective story.
- This technique can be employed using drawings.

**When to use**
When the group can work together with one another, concentrate and listen to each other, or to practise listening to others. It also marks the group’s identity as a unit.

**Therapeutic value**
This activity can be used as a free association technique with a group of participants to see where a story may lead when given free reign. The themes that arise can give an indication of the conscious or unconscious material of participants. It provides a sense of anticipation about where the story is going to lead and involves the whole group in the creation of the story. Each participant’s contribution to the group story is valued equally as part of the end product.

**Issues to be aware of**
As with any activity that invites the use of participants’ projective material one should be tentative in making conclusive interpretations about content and allow the activity to be part of a myriad of sources of information regarding the individuals’ as well as the group’s functioning.
Taking a stand

Directions

• Put up on opposite walls a piece of paper with ‘AGREE’, ‘DISAGREE’, ‘I DON’T KNOW’, and ‘NEUTRAL’ written on them.
• Have a series of questions or statements that link into the themes that you may be exploring in the group.
• Ask participants to then stand under the sign that they think in response to a statement (e.g. ‘children should never be hit’).
• Go around the room and ask for volunteers to explain why they stood under each sign.
• This game can be used with older children, young people and adults to explore current issues such as gender, culture, or current affairs. It can be used with younger children with questions or statements about ice-cream flavours, football teams, etc.

When to use

When the group is ready to explore themes that are specific to their developmental experiences and/or are present and relevant to their experiences in their peer group or social context. If used early on in a group it can assist in accelerating the intimacy of the group as personal information may be disclosed.

Therapeutic value

This game be used to generate discussion and debate around current topics that can help to start to challenge and confront attitudes and thoughts that may not be healthy. This game is a useful way of getting participants to hear other people’s opinions, share about themselves, reflect on their own attitudes and opinions, and accept differences in others even if they disagree with them.

Issues to be aware of

Peer pressure can exert its influence in this activity by participants following each other or making ‘safe’ or politically correct choices. Facilitators can challenge this behaviour by putting themselves in a purposefully controversial position and encouraging discussion through the participants being able to fully talk through their choices and their attitude towards the facilitator’s stance.

Chants

Directions

• Divide the group into two.
• Each group creates a chant/rhythm together that they can easily repeat and rehearse together.
• The two groups start from opposite ends of the space and walk towards each other chanting their rhythm.
• Each group tries to hold onto their own rhythm and outdo the other group as they walk towards each other and through each other to the other side, seeing if their group rhythm is still intact.

When to use

When exploring themes of identity and peer pressure, and what it takes to stick to your own opinion and not be swayed by others.

Therapeutic value

Promotes the value of having your own voice, and the uniqueness of expression as well as (in a fun way) exploring the complexities of influencing and being influenced by others. It demonstrates the strength of working together as a group, being part of something larger than ourselves, keeping focused on what is going on and not being distracted by what is going on around us. It builds commitment and group cohesiveness.

Issues to be aware of

Sounds need to be decided on and practised a few times in each small group before the wall of sound otherwise it could end chaotically.
Problem solving games

The following games can be used in groups where there have been clearly established norms and the group can begin to ‘perform’ together and work as a team. These games complement the psychological as well as collective ‘work’ of the group, enhancing the relational opportunities this intimate space provides.
Object memory

Directions
• On a tray, place 10–15 items (e.g. pencil, watch, comb, shoe-lace, spoon, toy car, etc.) and cover them with a cloth.
• Sit everyone in a circle.
• Place the tray in the middle of the circle and remove the cloth for a minute.
• Everyone has to remember the objects.
• When the time is up, replace the cloth.
• In turn, everyone has to name an object on the tray. If the person can’t remember an object, or repeats an object, they are out of the game.

Variation
An object is taken away and participants have to guess which is missing.

When to use
If attention difficulties are a theme for participants in the group, this is a fun way of collectively focusing and promoting recall.

Therapeutic value
Good for creating focus, attention and recollection. For those who have difficulty remaining focused this creates a fun way of introducing a game that promotes and encourages attempts to stay with a task as well as to access their capacity for recall.

Issues to be aware of
This activity will work best when a group is settled and calm and not when excess energy requires release.

Group knot

Directions
• In this activity the participants have to work as a team and come up with a solution as to how to untie the group knot.
• Each group member stands in a circle and reaches with both hands in to the centre and takes hold of other participants’ hands. Ensure that no one holds both hands of one person.
• Once all hands are held the group must then try and unravel to form a circle again. No one can drop hands but crawling under or jumping over arms is allowed.

When to use
When the group is ready to begin to work together for a collective outcome and can start to ‘perform’ together.

Therapeutic value
The group has to work together to unravel the knot and has to communicate and suggest ideas to each other about how this is to be done. This activity demands a group response and is a terrific gauge for judging just how well the group has engaged as a unit. The facilitator, whether as a participant in the activity or just as an observer, can gain information about how together the group tolerates the frustration and anxiety inherent in solving a problem as well as their energy available for collaborating and suspending their own individual needs in the interest of meeting the group’s needs.

Issues to be aware of
The physical agility of group members and assessing the comfort levels of participants in working on an activity requiring close physical proximity.
Magazine mix up

Directions

• Buy two copies of the same weekly magazine.

• Take one copy and cut out all the page numbers and take out the staples.

• Hand out the pages all ‘jumbled up’ to participants and ask them together to put the magazine back in its original form.

• When the group has finished, compare their reconstruction with that of the other original magazine.

• A time limit can be introduced to create an atmosphere of excitement in racing against the clock.

Variation

This can also be done in two small groups with each group having a copy of the same magazine (minus page numbers) and introducing an element of competition to the game.

When to use

When the group is ready to work collaboratively.

Therapeutic value

This game will give facilitators a good initial indication of group dynamics: who will initiate activities, dominate the group, help out, or be passive, hesitant, engaged, easy-going, or bored. Roles that participants adopt in this activity can be used for further discussion and reflection. It will also instil an atmosphere of working together. When using with more than one group (e.g. two or more smaller groups) it is fascinating to observe how each group approaches the task and what problem solving strategies they adopt.

Hint: the quickest way to reorder the magazine is through following the headings on the contents pages and aligning accordingly!

Issues to be aware of

Group dynamics may need to be mediated by a facilitator if certain group members are being too dominant or passive. This may be to acknowledge group members who haven’t engaged and giving them the opportunity to do so as well as alerting group members to giving each member a go and praising and encouraging participant contributions.

Changes

Directions

• Participants sit in a circle.

• Ask for a volunteer to start the game. The volunteer stands in the middle or in front of the group and turns around in a circle for the audience to have a good look at them.

• The volunteer is then taken to another part of the room where they cannot be seen clearly by the audience.

• The volunteer then changes something about themselves, e.g. puts their shoes on the wrong feet, rolls up a sleeve, tucks one side of their pants into their sock etc.

• They then come back out in front of the audience who guesses what has been changed.

• To make it more exciting the audience can be given only two or three guesses, which necessitates them working as a team.

• Whoever guesses correctly has the next turn. If they have already had a turn they may choose someone who has not yet had a turn. If the change is not identified, the volunteer may choose someone else to go next.

When to use

When developing memory, concentration and observation skills.

Therapeutic value

Participants get a chance to be the centre of attention and in control of the game. It assists other group members to pay attention to detail and use their memory skills. This game is also a great leveller as it requires no special additional talents, it is simply about self, and that self is worthy of attention from others. This attention is about someone taking the time to consider them and to notice when something about them has changed.

Issues to be aware of

If the participant ‘volunteer’ is lacking in confidence they may need facilitators to assist them in selecting something to change about their appearance, to ensure it is not a copy of what has been done previously (e.g. rolling up a sleeve). Facilitators also need to ensure that the changes are obvious enough for the other participants to guess.
Who am I?

**Directions**
- Facilitators write down the names of famous people (or, perhaps the names of people whom all participants are familiar with; for example, the name of one of the group facilitators, or if the group is in a school, the name of a teacher or the principal).
- These names are written on ‘post-it’ notes or paper stuck on a hat, and are kept out of sight from all participants until ready to play.
- The group is divided in half. One half sits at the front, facing the rest of the group. These participants then have the hat placed on their head, or the ‘post-it’ note stuck to their forehead so they cannot see the name of the famous/familiar person that is written there. Their role is to guess ‘who they are’ (i.e. the name that is written on their hat/Post-it’ note). They can ask one question at a time of the audience about who they are; but only questions that have a “yes” or “no” answer, e.g. “Am I a cartoon character?”, “Am I alive?” etc.
- The other half of the group becomes the audience and it is their job to answer “yes” or “no” to the questions asked.
- If the person asking the question receives a “yes” response, they get to ask another question. If not, the next person with a name attached to them has a chance to ask a questions about their identity.
- This continues until someone wearing a the hat/’Post-it’ note correctly guesses who they are.
- The group then swaps roles and new hats/’Post-it’ notes are handed out.

**When to use**
This game can be used when exploring lateral thinking and problem solving. It also quickly engages a rowdy group and can act as a bridging game between a highly energetic game and an activity or discussion requiring reflection.

**Therapeutic value**
This game is valuable in encouraging participants to develop lateral thinking, hone their listening skills, focus and recall. Participants are generally keen to ‘have a go’ at being the person to guess ‘who they are’ – and in fact, often keen to have more than one go, necessitating an ability to practice taking turns and demonstrate patience.

**Issues to be aware of**
This game can be used as a springboard for further discussion, should the facilitator choose to use the names of people who might share a common theme or issue, and then asking the group what these might be (e.g. choosing sporting heroes in Australia who originally came from other countries to explore issues around cultural identity). To make this game more inclusive, the facilitator can ask the ‘audience’ group to help come up with different names (of course, keeping the name secret from those that will be guessing the name!).

Back to back

**Directions**
- Divide participants into pairs, sitting back to back.
- Give both participants the same number of drinking straws, instructing one to make a pattern.
- When they have finished they instruct their partner how to make the same pattern without looking around.
- Participants can discuss what was hard/easy about this activity.

**When to use**
To develop communication between participants, when the group is ready to work together and able to sit still and focus and concentrate on this type of activity.

**Therapeutic value**
This game is a good exercise for listening to instructions and using their imagination and visual cues. It encourages participants to work together and communicate with others. The success in this exercise rests on both the ability of one participant to clearly give instructions and the other to fully listen and receive instructions. The facilitator can take on a useful observer role and provide feedback on just how well these partners fulfil their roles as ‘instructor’ and ‘instructed’. This activity mimics real life relationships where communication styles may be quite complex.

**Issues to be aware of**
The frustration levels of partners in this game can be readily aroused and may need the facilitator to contain and moderate any inappropriate behaviour or put downs. As with any interaction within any group, these frustrations can used as an immediate point for reflection, discussion and an opportunity for exploring different ways of dealing with and responding in relationships.
Impulse control games

These games can be introduced in groups where participants have poor impulse control. They encourage a mastery of tension and the release of energy, which can help to train the participant in anticipation, and holding energy until an appropriate outlet or release is available.

They are especially good for children who are aggressive, have behavioural difficulties, or present with ‘attention deficit hyperactivity disorder’ (ADHD) type spectrum behaviours, and for groups who are engaged in the ‘storming’ phase.
What’s the time Mr / Mrs / Ms Wolf?

Directions

• Someone volunteers to be Mr, Mrs or Ms Wolf. The ‘wolf’ stands by themselves at the far end of the room with their back to the others. A ball is placed behind them.

• The aim of the game is for the other participants to creep up and try to take the ball, and run back to the other end of the room without getting caught by the wolf.

• The children sneak up behind the wolf, calling “What’s the time Mr/Mrs/Ms Wolf?” The wolf responds by saying the time, for example, “1 o’clock”, “4 o’clock”, and so on, and looks over their shoulder every so often.

• Whatever time the wolf says, participants have to take that amount of steps towards the wolf, stop, and then ask again “What’s the time Mr/Mrs/Ms Wolf?”

• When the wolf yells, “Dinner time!” the wolf turns around and tries to catch participants before they get back to the opposite side of the room with the ball.

When to use

When participants need to learn how to regulate their energy through anticipation and the suspenseful build up and release of energy.

Therapeutic value

This is a great game to focus the participants’ energy and to learn to control their impulses, to be still, and to have an opportunity to release their energy by being chased back to the start by the wolf.

Issues to be aware of

Many participants will ‘sneak’ up to the wolf and not play the game according to the number of steps the wolf yells out. While this can be fun and entertaining, participants may also need to be reminded of the rules if this happens and perhaps sit out if they can’t contain their energy within the game.

Spy treasure

Directions

• This game is a variation of ‘What’s the time Mr/Mrs/Ms Wolf?’ but is played to music.

• In this version there is a guard with their back to the group who is protecting precious treasure (can be any object handy to represent the treasure – a ball, wrapped up piece of cloth etc.) placed just behind them.

• The rest of the participants are spies whose role it is to steal the treasure.

• Participants creep up to the treasure as the music is played, making good ‘creepy’ shapes.

• Every time the guard looks around the spies have to freeze in a ‘creepy’ position so they are ‘not seen’ (the facilitator working the music needs to co-ordinate the stopping of the music to the looking around of the guard, or vice versa).

• The guard looks around to see if anyone needs to be sent back to the start for moving or for not being in a good ‘creepy shape’. If caught moving, the ‘spy’ goes back to the start again.

• This continues until a ‘spy’ is able to steal the treasure and run back to the start while being chased by the guard. This person then becomes the next ‘guard’ to keep watch over the ‘jewels’.

When to use

When the group is unsettled and their energy is all over the place in order to bring them back into focus in a fun and contained manner.

Therapeutic value

This game helps participants to practise controlling their impulses, being still, and tolerating suspense and anticipation. It also encourages expression and creativity through making ‘creepy’ positions.

Issues to be aware of

The treasure can be a piece of wrapped up material or object that is soft and won’t get broken or hurt participants. Some participants may object to going back to the start and many will try to avoid going right back to the beginning.
Ship ahoy!

Directions
- Participants line up in the centre of a room, large enough for the running aspect of this game.
- The facilitator gives the following commands to which participants respond by doing specific actions. These are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Captain’s aboard”</td>
<td>Stand to attention and salute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Climb the rigging”</td>
<td>Climbing action on the spot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Scrub the deck”</td>
<td>Squat down and pretend to scrub the deck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Man overboard”</td>
<td>Stretch tall and looking out to sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Captain’s best friend coming”</td>
<td>Wave hand and shout “hello!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Hoist the main sail”</td>
<td>One fist over another like pulling up a sail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Port”</td>
<td>Run to the right of the room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Starboard”</td>
<td>Run to the left of the room</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The last participant to respond or a participant who demonstrates the wrong action is ‘out’. The participant who is ‘out’ is expected to sit quietly.
- Allow winner to give commands.
- Play several games as time allows.

When to use
When the group needs to channel a lot of excessive energy in a contained way.

Therapeutic value
The stop/start nature of this energetic game engages participants and helps them to contain and suspend their energy by listening to instructions and performing the actions prescribed. It is a fun way to teach participants to control their impulses and to help them take ‘out of control’ energy into a focused and still position.

Issues to be aware of
Ground rules need to be established to ensure that this game is physically safe for all, (e.g. no physical contact). Facilitators can give out positive affirmations for those going out graciously and perhaps involve them as judges to keep them engaged and avoid ‘acting out’ their frustration about going out.

Shop ‘til you drop!

This game is a modernisation of ‘Ship ahoy!’

Directions
- On each wall place a sign e.g. McDonalds, Target, ToyWorld, and Video Ezy.
- Introduce other instructions such as “going to the ATM”, “slipping on a banana skin”, “going down the escalator”, or any other creative idea you can think of.
- When the facilitator calls out a name (e.g. “Target”, all participants must run to that sign or “slipping on a banana skin” all participants must pretend to slip over).
- The last person to complete the instruction goes out.
- This continues until the last participant is left.
- This game can increase in tempo by calling out instructions in quick succession and stopping after having called out maybe four of five instructions at a time.

When to use
This is a high energy game, which will leave participants panting. It is a great way of exhausting excess energy.

Therapeutic value
The physicality and familiarity of ‘going shopping’ in this game is very engaging. By not sending people out too quickly you can match and then alter the energy of particularly rowdy groups. It invites creativity by introducing or asking for suggestions for new instructions. It is a terrific way of releasing excess energy in preparation for a future activity which requires a capacity to be calm and open to reflection.

Issues to be aware of
The level of participants’ physical health and ability needs to be assessed as this game is extremely active. Clear ground rules need to be set up around not pushing or shoving others.
Musical statues

**Directions**
- Participants move around to music and ‘freeze’ when the music stops.
- The last person to have stopped moving is called ‘out’ by the facilitators.
- This proceeds until one person is left.

**Variation #1: Numbers challenge**
- Facilitators call out a number when the music stops and the participants must get into groups of this number (e.g. groups of three).
- The odd ones out sit down and the game continues until you are left with only two people who are the winners.

**Variation #2: Group challenge**
- Call out a number when the music stops and the participants must get into groups of this number.
- Facilitators then add a task for this group (e.g. “Make the shape of the letter ‘G’, “make the shape of a flower/boat/ plane”, “stand on one leg and support each other”, “have one member of the group not touching the ground”, etc).

**Variation #3: Object challenge**
- When the music stops the facilitator can call out different instructions such as “run and touch something the colour green”, “touch somebody who has blue eyes,” etc.

**When to use**
‘Freeze’ games can be used when the group is unsettled in order to bring back focus and concentration. They can also be used for mixing up a group who don’t know each other or to break up cliques.

**Therapeutic value**
These games involve the ability to stop and freeze, which allows participants to master their sense of control over their own bodies and energies. It allows participants to get a sense of the differences between stillness and activity and helps them to integrate a sense of self-mastery over their own body. These games help the participant to develop the capacity to listen, control their own impulses, develop their attention span to focus, and concentrate even while they are engaged in play. Some of the variations provide opportunities for group challenges, working together, coming up with outcomes quickly, creativity, excitement, belonging, anticipation, as well as physical challenges.

**Issues to be aware of**
The tempo of this game needs to be up-beat and fun to keep participants involved and engaged in a playful way.

Yoga freeze

**Directions**
- Simple positions of tree, triangle, dog, crab, boat, and pencil are demonstrated to the group by the facilitator.
- Play music as participants move around in different directions e.g. “move sideways”, “move backward”, and “move different body parts to the music”.
- When the music stops, call out one of the ‘yoga freeze’ shapes. The last person into this position is out of the game.
- You can raise the tempo of the game by adding additional instructions to the freeze, i.e. calling out, “crab”, then quickly “dog”, then back again.
- Continue game until you have a winner.

**When to use**
Suitable to use when the group is unsettled, when they need lots of changes quickly, when participants are ‘ungrounded’ or not listening.

**Therapeutic value**
This game assists participants to listen, to stop moving, to make a shape with their body, and to hold this position. It helps participants develop impulse control, strength, balance, and to channel energy in an appropriate manner while still encouraging listening and engaging skills. The physicality and familiarity of moving/stoppping in this game is very engaging. Participants enjoy the physical challenge and anticipation of what move is going to be called out next. By doing these positions their energy will be released in a positive way and the group will then be ready to engage again in another activity which requires their capacity to be calm and open to reflection.

**Issues to be aware of**
If the group just needs to continue to release energy this game can be played without the need for someone to go out in order to keep engaging all participants. Participants’ physical ability to engage in such a physical game needs to be considered.
Partner games

Building relationships – awareness of others

These games can be used to explore relationships with another, and as a metaphor for relationships in our lives. They can be used to generate discussions around relationships and the issues that can arise; for example, what it feels like to be ‘pushed away’, to ‘stand up for myself’, to ‘be mirrored’, or to ‘be threatened by someone else’s anger’.
Sumo wrestlers

Directions

• Participants stand back to back in a line in the middle of the space.

• They need to keep hips in contact and backs together, and bend legs almost like sitting so that their weight pushes into or leans against each other (this position can be practised against a wall first).

• The idea is to push each other to the opposite end of the room, or resist each other's pushing using lower leg and torso strength, keeping everything else in contact.

Variation

The same activity can be played shoulder to shoulder, with participants facing each other with their shoulders and necks locked, pushing through their legs to get their partner over the line, keeping contact with their shoulders, and without using their arms.

When to use

This game is good to introduce building assertiveness and for participants to learn to stand up for themselves or stand their ground.

Therapeutic value

This game engages participants' bodies through the torso, and utilises the element of strength and weight. It is a good way for participants to practice saying “no” and stand their ground through their bodies before they try to do this verbally, discussing themes of what it means to say “no.” ‘Being pushed around’, ‘pushing back’, or ‘pushing others around’ can be explored following this activity.

Issues to be aware of

Ground rules need to be in place to keep this activity safe for all participants. No hands or arms are to be used and only the weight through the torso can be engaged. Participants with aggressive tendencies can be partnered with another appropriately sized and appropriately confident participant, or if concerned, with the facilitator.

Mirroring

Directions

• Divide participants into partners.

• One partner is the leader, and the other is the follower.

• Leader starts off with small movements just with the arms, and the partner follows exactly, like an image reflected in a mirror.

• Swap roles.

• Swap roles again and introduce elements of moving away from one another, and moving towards each other, still mirroring movements.

• Introduce elements of slow/fast into movements.

• Can use fun music to bring out a sense of play between partners.

• After partners have got the hang of leading and following, introduce the idea that there is no leader and no follower, but the pairs are trying to move as one in synchronicity.

• Can also ‘perform’ these duets (depending on the comfort level of the participants) by dividing half the group of pairs, with one half being the ‘audience’ and the other half improvising their duets to music.

• The facilitator can generate a discussion by asking the ‘performers’ what they enjoyed about doing the activity, and then asking the ‘audience’ for positive feedback about what they enjoyed watching.

• Swap over ‘performing’ and ‘audience’ roles.

When to use

When group members have difficulty in being aware of others, or to introduce concepts of leading and following, peer pressure and friendships.

Therapeutic value

This activity involves being aware of others, tuning in to someone else, and moving in synchrony. Each participant gets a chance to be the leader, to be seen, to be in charge of the movement activity. Each participant also gets a chance to follow another. This activity involves concentration, focus, and an ability to work with another person. It is a good indicator for facilitators in observing participants' ability to be in tune with or aware of others, or being able to empathise or 'meet' with others. This exercise can be used to generate discussion around questions like:

– What is it like when other people attend to following your movements?
– What is it like when they don’t get it right?
– Did you prefer leading or following?
– Which did you find easier/harder?
– Which style do participants prefer in real life?
– How does leading and following show up in their relationships?

Issues to be aware of

Facilitators need to be sensitive to issues that may arise within discussions and tuning in to the comfort level of some participants in having eye contact with, and mirroring their partners. Non-verbal activities such as these can stir powerful, sometimes even cognitively inaccessible feelings in participants, which reflection and discussion can help locate and integrate.
Movement conversation

Directions
• This game can be undertaken with the whole group in a circle or in pairs.
• Find a movement and ‘throw’ it to a partner.
• The partner ‘catches’ the movement, and allows it to transform in their body, then throws it back again.
• Using different body parts they can act out movements such as cradling, eating, shaking, etc.
• Participants are encouraged not to stay with traditional ‘ball game’ type movements of kicking and throwing but to use other body parts and other types of movements.
• Can also do this activity in a circle, passing movements around the circle.

When to use
When exploring communication, creativity, and expression. Also when group members feel safe enough to explore other forms of interacting (non-verbal) without becoming over-anxious (e.g. becoming overly silly or constrained).

Therapeutic value
This game provides a non-verbal way of exploring communication, extending movement range, giving, receiving, sharing, creativity and engaging with another through a conversation in movement. This game can generate discussion around the following:
– What happens, for example, if people ‘throw us their anger’?
– What happens when people are gentle with us?
– What we do with other people’s energy in our interactions?
– Some interactions may be pleasant, others difficult and challenging. How do we cope with these in real life?
– Did we transform the energy? Did we react to the energy? Did we ignore it?

Issues to be aware of
There may be some resistance to using creative and non-verbal expression. Some participants may feel embarrassed or threatened by mediums of communicating that are not language bound, so facilitators may need to build up to using activities that are more expressively playful and out of participants’ comfort zones.

Tree exercise

Directions
• Participants find a partner.
• Each partner stands as strong as they can, while their partner attempts to push them just enough to see how much they will fall off-balance before they can come back to balance in their centre again.
• Swap roles.
• In the next round, the person standing is instructed to visualise they are a tree with roots going down from below their feet deep, deep into the ground.
• They keep imagining this while their partner tries to push them off-balance again.
• Swap roles.
• Talk about the differences in each stage and whether they felt stronger the second time around when they were visualising.

When to use
When participants are ‘ungrounded’, not present, or over-excited and all over the place. When exploring themes of how we can support others and ourselves.

Therapeutic value
This is an immediate experiential exercise that can inform participants about their experiences of whether they feel stronger with a visualisation technique. The activity itself brings participants into their bodies and into the present. It can open up discussions around how we support ourselves and nurture ourselves, where our roots are, where our sunshine and water (nurturing) comes from.

Issues to be aware of
When partners attempt to push each other over it is through their torsos only and is only a gentle push. This needs to be demonstrated by facilitators and immediately attended to if participants are observed to be too rough or inappropriate.
Partners ball game

**Directions**
- Participants stand in a circle and are paired up with the person standing opposite them.
- Each pair has a ball to throw to each other.
- The idea is to throw the ball between partners as many times as possible without dropping it, or hitting the other balls being thrown across the circle by the other pairs.
- A point is scored if the ball is dropped, but it is the pair with the smallest number of points that wins.

**When to use**
When the group seems out of sorts with one another as a means of gently refocusing them as a group.

**Therapeutic value**
This activity is an exercise in working well with their partner through attunement and mis-attunement. Each participant not only needs to be aware of their partner, but they also need to be aware of all the other dynamics occurring around them. As they build up their rhythm the group can establish micro as well as macro levels of attending and responding to others. This provides a wonderful metaphor for exploring couple, familial, peer, class, work and friendship relationships and dynamics.

**Issues to be aware of**
Use soft balls so as to avoid any one being hurt and the facilitator needs to be available to step in to make up even numbers.

Four corners

**Directions**
- Participants are divided up into pairs, and each takes a corner. This can be marked out with witches hats or shoes in a square shape with one in the middle. A triangle may be marked out also, depending on number of participants. Ten people are needed to play ‘corners’ in a square shape or eight people to play in a triangular shape.
- One pair stands in the middle.
- Pairs have to link arms or hold hands.
- When the facilitator claps, pairs have to change corners, and the pair in the middle has to find a corner to go to.
- This is done without the pairs speaking to one another.
- The pair that misses out on finding a corner goes into the middle.

This continues for as long as is appropriate.

**When to use**
This is a good game for working together with a partner, making decisions with a partner and reading nonverbal cues.

**Therapeutic value**
This is a good game for working with a partner and communicating non-verbally in exploring themes of leading and following. This is also a good game for facilitators to observe how participants work with each other, whether they lead their partner, or passively allow their partner to lead them. This game can be a wonderful and fun illustration of ‘attachment theory’¹⁰ and what happens when pairs do not ‘read’ or ‘attune’ well to the other, whether they ‘invade’ the space of the other or whether they each pull in different directions. It also demonstrates how good working relationships tend to produce an ability to respond intuitively and survive well in the game.

**Issues to be aware of**
This game can have a more sophisticated allegorical application for older participants but for younger children is played as an example of good teamwork.

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Feelings games

These games are designed to help generate an enhanced exploration of different feeling states, what they may look like on our faces and where they might be held in our bodies. These games are also designed to allow safe expression of these feelings through creativity and role-playing.
Character walking

Directions
• The facilitator gives directions to participants to walk around with different body parts leading them, e.g. their chin, chest, nose, hips, knees or ankles.
• Participants are directed to discover what types of characters are created by using these different body shapes (e.g. a person who acts cool, like a bully, or like a timid mouse, etc).
• The facilitator asks participants to call out the types of feelings these characters might be feeling.

When to use
To introduce participants to the idea that feelings are held in our bodies and that we can tell a lot about ourselves and each other through our body posture; e.g. if someone is afraid, nervous, or confident.

Therapeutic value
This kind of exercise can introduce participants to understanding what kind of feelings they may be holding in their body and how much insight they already have about different body postures and feelings. It can generate discussions around what physical expressions represent various feelings – happy, tough, defiant, angry, sad, depressed, etc. It can also help to identify what feelings are and how they are reflected and held in the body. Feedback from other group members can also help identify what they think different participants’ body postures are conveying. This can be checked out with the participant if this is the message they want to, or really are conveying (e.g. the observer may state “your body looks angry”, and the participant may answer “actually, inside I feel scared”).

Issues to be aware of
Creating safety in the group to allow for discourses around vulnerabilities that participants may be feeling inside but hiding behind the veneer of a ‘tough guy’ or ‘I don’t care’ body stance.

Pump up the volume

Directions
• Participants are asked to act out different emotions from a range from one to six, with one being the least expression of the emotion, and six being the biggest and most intense expression of the emotion.
• Can use feelings such as ‘happy’, ‘angry’, ‘sad’, and ‘fear’.
• Can lead group from one through to six, then back down to one again and then to neutral, shaking out each emotion, encouraging participants to intensify the feelings as the volume is turned up.
• Talk to group about what intensity they felt comfortable with.

When to use
When exploring feelings with participants and there is a need to channel some of these feelings and express them physically.

Therapeutic value
This is an experiential activity that can connect participants to their feelings and help them start to understand them through their own responses. It helps participants to consider which feelings they can access more easily and which ones they have permission to express. It can provide a safe space to explore the expression of all feelings and has a built in containing element in the volume control. As the volume goes up the participant experiences their feelings as they become more intense. But as the facilitator calls out numbers to turn the volume of their experience down, the participant can have a sense that feelings aren’t out of control but can be turned up or down, and that they can have a sense of regulation over them. It can proceed to a discussion of when and why the volume of responses should be turned up or down.

Issues to be aware of
This activity needs a space large enough for it to be safe and ground rules need to be in place; e.g. when exploring anger, it has to be in the participant’s own space, and not directed at each other, including no physical contact with others or hurting themselves. Participants can face a wall if they need an object to speak to/yell at.
Charades

Directions

• The facilitator asks for a volunteer to act out a feeling.
• A participant picks a card with a feeling on it and without showing it to the rest of the group begins to act it out.
• The participant acts out their feeling, with the rest of the group guessing what feeling is being played out.
• The participant who guesses correctly has the next go at picking a card and acting it out, and so on until all participants have had a go.
• Feelings can include anger, frustration, sadness, worry, fear, anxiety, excitement, jealousy, etc.

When to use
When exploring feelings with the group and understanding the participants’ understanding of the difference between feelings and the expression of them.

Therapeutic value
This game can help participants to identify feelings, to each have an opportunity to express them, and to identify different feelings in others through non-verbal cues. It also assists facilitators in assessing how conversant particular participants or the group as a whole is with a broad range of feelings. Should this activity present a struggle for many group members, this provides the facilitator with a good starting point for introducing, explaining and exploring the subtleties of a wide range of emotions and their application to life.

Issues to be aware of
Facilitators may need to give assistance to those who struggle to both understand and then act out their feelings. Also, never assume that all group members are literate, it is useful to both whisper and give the volunteer the card to read.

Angry animals

Directions

• Participants are asked to move around like a particular animal (e.g. dog, cat, bird, eagle, elephant, kangaroo, tiger, lion, dinosaur, snake, or bee).
• Ask participants each time to tell the group what feelings each animal may have.
• Ask participants to think of an angry animal that reminds them of a situation or the last time when they were angry and act this out.
• Participants are asked to draw this animal showing how its face and entire body looks when it is angry.
• Each participant then shows and explains their picture of an angry animal.

When to use
When exploring feelings with the group and what each participant’s unique experience and understanding of what anger is.

Therapeutic value
The value of acting out different types of animals is that it gives participants the freedom to express different types of feelings through fantasy rather than themselves. In this way participants don’t have to identify with their own strong feelings but can talk about an ‘angry dog who barks’ without having to identify with their own anger and actions. This is a safe way to introduce exploring strong feelings such as anger. The facilitator is also given an insight into how participants construct and enact their experiences of anger. Some may act out a smiling cat and call this angry. This incongruence may tell facilitators something about the participant’s denial, subjugation, fear, experience or misunderstanding of anger.

Issues to be aware of
Strict ground rules need to be established with this game – no touching others or physical contact, as some participants can get over-excited when exploring certain feelings.
Feelings statues

Directions

• This is a variation of the ‘Musical statues’ game (page 45).
• When the music stops, the facilitator calls out a scenario that the participants then ‘freeze’ in the action of expressing, such as:
  – opening Christmas presents
  – someone is picking on your little brother/sister
  – winning at school sports
  – you are just about to sit a test that you haven’t studied for
  – a friend is moving away from school
  – patting a puppy dog
  – eating a favourite food
  – biting into an apple and finding a worm.
• Facilitators can ask participants what feeling is associated with each ‘freeze’ scenario.

When to use
When exploring feelings with a group. It can enhance the creative and dramatic expression of the group.

Therapeutic value
This is a great way for participants to connect with their feelings and express them in a fun way that is safe and non-confronting. It also gives them a fun way to play with different scenarios and extend their imaginative capacities as well as their expressive range. You may wish to increase the potential emotional intensity of this game by including scenarios that access deeper feelings, e.g. ‘losing your best friend’, ‘seeing someone you care about being hurt’, etc. This is best done, however, with some specific therapeutic purpose in mind.

Issues to be aware of
Some participants will struggle to lose their inhibitions in this activity and may need encouragement as well as permission to be daring and expansive in their enactments. Facilitator involvement in acting out scenarios can assist in encouraging participants to engage and express themselves also.
Trust games

These games can enhance the group forming and identification, and can also be used to explore issues of trust for the group. Some of the partner games attend to issues of trust in relationships. Through trust activities the group can also develop an understanding of the importance of their personal space.
Trust exercise

Directions
• Participants form a tight circle.
• Facilitator shows participants how to shape their body so that they put one foot forward, bend their knees, and put their hands up in front of them with their palms up. Facilitator asks participants to rock back and forward from their front foot to their back foot, moving their weight from back to front in order to practice how to keep others safe within this activity before it actually starts.
• Facilitator asks for a volunteer to go in the middle, or can demonstrate this role first.
• Person in the middle is instructed to remain straight like a plank of wood, keeping their body upright, feet on the one spot, with arms crossed in front of chest, eyes closed (optional) and giving their weight over to the group.
• Participants around the circle have one foot forward, and one foot back to distribute their weight as they take the weight of the person in the middle, with their hands held up to catch them gently, and not pushing them.
• The group gently moves their hands to support the person in the middle and rocks them around the circle.
• Participants swap places with the person in the middle and it continues until each member has had a turn.

Variation
The same activity performed with groups of three participants, with the weight of one participant taken by two people, with one person standing behind and one person standing in front of participant in middle, with both taking their weight and rocking them gently back and forth.

When to use
This is a good activity to use when creating group trust and cohesion. Group needs to have formed to the extent that it will be a positive and safe experience for participants. This activity is useful when exploring issues of trust, support, giving and receiving, and responsibility for others.

Therapeutic value
This activity is used to encourage group cohesiveness, and trust, as well as letting go and surrendering to others. It also involves taking responsibility for others. It provides facilitators with a good sense of participants’ ability to be able to ‘be there’ for others, and being able to trust others. This can generate a discussion on what is support and how we can offer that to others, also how we can receive support from others, or how we try to ‘hold on’ within ourselves. This activity may need to be repeated a few times to get participants used to and trust having their weight taken by others.

Issues to be aware of
Some group members may not want to have a turn at participating in the middle of the circle, especially if they have had negative or hurtful experiences in the past. Participants can be gently encouraged but should never be pushed into participating in an activity such as this.
Cat and mouse

**Directions**
- Participants form a circle
- The facilitator asks for two volunteers - one to be the mouse and the other to be the cat. Both go in the middle of the circle.
- The cat is blindfolded and attempts to find the mouse. Every time the cat calls “meow, meow”, the mouse must say “squeak, squeak.”
- The cat tries to tag the mouse, with the rest of the group keeping the form of the circle to contain the space and keep them physically safe.

**When to use**
When exploring trust, safety, and working together as a group.

**Therapeutic value**
This game involves group members keeping others safe, protected, and maintaining awareness of others. It can also prompt discussions around when participants do feel ‘safe’ and ‘unsafe’, and whom the people are in their lives that make them feel ‘safe’ or ‘unsafe’.

**Issues to be aware of**
Whenever opening up the depth of discussion be prepared to hear and respond honestly and responsibly to what may be disclosed (see page 10 for notes on confidentiality and disclosure). Make sure the participant volunteering to be the ‘cat’ is comfortable wearing a blindfold.

Blindfold walk

**Directions**
- In pairs, one person is blindfolded and the other is the leader.
- The leader leads the blindfolded partner around the room, giving them different materials to touch, things to smell (e.g. chewing gum still in its wrapper, oranges), whilst keeping them safe from other pairs and other objects in the space.
- Swap roles, discuss which role you enjoyed (or did not enjoy) and why, whether you felt safe or not, and what you needed to feel safe.

**Variation**
Partners can agree on a special call or sound that is their call alone to use. Instead of being led around the room the blindfolded partner has to listen for their sound and follow this around the room.

**When to use**
To develop trust, safety and learning how to responsibly lead and to follow.

**Therapeutic value**
This game helps to develop rapport between partners, and involves learning how to rely on others and identify what ‘being responsible for others’ entails. It offers facilitators a chance to observe participants’ level of awareness of others. It can open up discussions around what it takes for us to be safe, whether we felt safe with our partner, and what we may have needed to feel safer.

**Issues to be aware of**
Blindfold games may bring up anxiety, fear, or panic in some participants who may have had a traumatic background. These types of games may need to be avoided if any history of abuse is known. If not, clear instructions need to be given at the outset that at any point if the blindfolded person feels uncomfortable or unsafe they can take off their blindfold. Facilitators need to be ready to read any cues of discomfort amongst participants and step in as needed.
Partner balance

Directions

Variation #1
- Participants find a partner to work with who is a similar size.
- Partners are requested to stand back to back with their arms linked, pushing their backs together.
- Partners are directed to push into each other’s backs and attempt to sit down still maintaining contact through their backs.
- Partners are directed to stand up still sitting back to back and with arms linked, pushing their weight into each other’s backs to assist each other.
- Facilitators may need to assist participants to find the counter-balance needed with partners to accomplish this task.

Variation #2
- Partners stand together facing with their feet together and holding hands.
- Partners start to let their weight move back while lengthening their arms until they are straight, and partners are balancing in a ‘V’ shape, still looking at each other.
- If partners have accomplished this then they can attempt to let go of one hand, and turn their bodies to the side, holding one hand and still in a ‘V’ shape, but facing out.

The aim is to attempt to sit down with both partners’ arms remaining linked

Therapeutic value

These activities can be used to develop trust between partners and assist them to learn how to work together to achieve a balance they could not sustain on their own. It can generate discussion around the benefits of collaborating, and whether it is difficult or easy to give our weight to others, how we can trust each other when there is no leader or follower but having to work together to achieve something greater.

Issues to be aware of

It is important for facilitators to demonstrate to participants how to keep their bodies straight like a plank of wood, by keeping their tummies tucked, rather than a ‘banana’ shape which can make it difficult for pairs to hold these balances. Some participants may want to give up easily on this exercise if it doesn’t happen easily. Many participants need encouragement and acknowledgment to continue trying and are often pleasantly surprised when they achieve mastery over the balances with their partner.

Puppet sculpture

Directions

- In partners, one person is the ‘mover/puppeteer’, and one person is the ‘puppet’.
- Let the puppeteer move parts of the puppet’s body e.g. arms, head, legs, knees, chin, hands.
- The puppet tries to stay neutral and allow the puppeteer to ‘sculpt’ them.
- Puppets hold positions and the rest of the group can brainstorm what this posture looks like to them, i.e. feelings, characters, etc.

When to use

This game can be used when exploring themes of trust, power, and control, peer pressure and how we are influence by the media.

Therapeutic value

This exercise can help the group to explore issues of trust, taking responsibility, their sense of control and power over others, feeling manipulated, out of control etc. It can generate discussion around these issues and can lead into questions around dependency on others. The reciprocal nature of puppeteering is interesting as the puppet has no movement without the puppeteer but the puppeteer is not a puppeteer without a puppet. The audience (when the rest of the group watches) can also add dimensions to this reciprocal relationship that the puppeteer/puppet cannot themselves perhaps see, as well as provide triggers that the audience can reflect on within themselves.

Issues to be aware of

Partners need to be gentle and respectful with one another in order to keep this game safe.
Games are a great way to introduce the theme of what is ‘appropriate’ personal space and to tangibly engage in this concept in a way that participants can understand through their own experiences. Personal space is a complex concept to understand and can be impacted upon by any number of developmental traumas or attachment difficulties. Personal space varies greatly between cultures and specific groups so exploring it in a fun way can open up discussions around people’s preferences and levels of comfort with regards to their own personal space.

Linked with this is the concept of boundaries – where do I end and you begin? These games are a good way to explore these issues in a safe way. It also creates an opportunity for facilitators to make observations and introduce sensitive interventions with regards to the level of comfort and understanding that participants have about their own boundary issues and sense of self, especially if these boundaries have been violated.
Filling the space

**Directions**
- Participants walk around the room, with the instruction to keep the same amount of space between everyone, and to fill up every gap in the room, so when “freeze” is called, there is equal distance between all.
- Facilitators can mark out an increasingly smaller space for participants to move within where they can still keep an equi-distance between all (e.g. the facilitator may mark out the space by four chairs).

**When to use**
When exploring the idea of personal space and through discussing post-game when it started to become uncomfortable for different people. It also opens up conversation about how much personal space different people need or feel comfortable with.

**Therapeutic value**
This is a good game through which to introduce the concept of personal space in a concrete way so that participants can experience for themselves their own reactions when people get too close. This particular activity also requires an awareness of others through balancing both distance and connectedness in order to maintain the equitable distance between all in the group space.

**Issues to be aware of**
As the space decreases some participants may feel discomfort. Ensure that with any activity focusing on personal space all participants are empowered to say “stop” when they feel unsafe and can choose to sit out of an activity.

Human traffic jam

**Directions**
- Participants are instructed to pick two people in the group without telling anyone their choices.
- Participants walk around the space trying to stay an equal distance between these two people.
- Everyone does this at once.

**When to use**
When exploring personal space with the group.

**Therapeutic value**
This game introduces the concept of personal space in a fun way. It can allow for a discussion as to why people made the choices they did and what qualities the two people possess that make them feel drawn towards them and safe to be near them. This can expand into a broader discussion about who makes each participant feel safe and why.

**Issues to be aware of**
This game can get quite chaotic, especially if all participants have chosen one or two people in particular – it can become a human traffic jam!

Personal space circle

**Directions**
- Participants are instructed to spread around the parameters of the room.
- A participant is asked to volunteer to start in the middle of the space.
- Instructions are for the rest of the participants to walk slowly towards the person in the middle.
- When the person in the middle starts to feel uncomfortable they can put their hand up and say “stop”.
- The person in the middle can ask individual group members to come closer or to back further away.
- Facilitators ask the person in the middle if there is anyone in their life they would allow closer in, and if there is anyone they can think of that they would not have in the room.
- Each participant is given a turn.

**When to use**
When there are issues in the group regarding abuse or violations of boundaries. When participants don’t seem to have an appropriate understanding of their own space and the space of others.

**Therapeutic value**
This is a good exercise to gauge participants’ understanding of their own boundaries, and to empower them to let people in and out of their own space, as well as to define their boundaries. This can be extremely empowering for participants who have never had the power to control their own space, especially where there has been abuse.

**Issues to be aware of**
Participants can either allow the group to come so close to them that there is no sense of their own personal space, or they can be very vigilant about keeping a huge space around them. It is an interesting exercise to do. Participants’ reactions to being asked to step closer or further away can also inform facilitators about where participants are in terms of attachment styles and engaging with others. In no way is this a diagnostic tool, but another exercise that can reveal a lot of information about the way a participant organises their conceptual world around the question of who they are.
Relaxation games

The following games can be introduced to groups in order to provide them with an experience of relaxation in the session, of being able to safely enter a state of rest whilst in the company of others, and to promote well-being throughout the rest of the participants’ day.
Dead fish

Directions

- Participants are asked to lie down in a comfortable position and keep completely still.
- Participants are asked to become relaxed and floppy like a ‘dead fish’.
- For particularly rowdy groups, participants may be told that at any stage during the session, the facilitator may call out “dead fish”.
- The facilitator attends to each participant and checks these ‘dead fish’ for signs of movement, floppiness in arms and legs (by lifting them and letting them drop down again) or giggling, etc.
- The participant who is the most still and most convincing ‘dead fish’ is the winner.

When to use

This is a good activity to use as a wind down after an active session or to create stillness if the group is beginning to be chaotic. In one particularly difficult to contain group of children this game was used often. To increase its power we wrote the name of the winner of each ‘dead fish’ game on a raffle ticket, which was placed in a special box. At the conclusion of the ten-week group a winner was pulled from the box. The winner was given a special prize.

Therapeutic value

This game assists participants to develop stillness and relaxation in their bodies and quietens the energy of the group. It also provides participants (and facilitators!) ‘time out’ with no expectations of performance. It can create a relaxing environment for participants and facilitators. Checking the floppiness of each participant (e.g. facilitator picking up a participants arm) allows for a discussion and feedback directly to participants about letting go fully and relaxing their bodies and indicates difficulties participants may face in allowing their muscle tension to release.

Issues to be aware of

Relaxation music can be played to help the participants if they are having difficulties being still. Using this game repetitively can result in participants becoming still quickly, and can be a great tool for quietening down the energy of the group.
Body relaxation

Directions
• Ask participants to lie on the floor on their backs, with their arms off their bodies and their palms facing upward.
• Facilitator names different body parts from the feet upwards and asks participants to squeeze that part of their body very tightly, take a big breath in, and let go of the tension in that part of their body as they breathe out.
• Do this firstly for toes, then knees, thighs, buttocks, tummies, shoulders, elbows, fists, neck, face, and then the whole body all at once.

When to use
At the end of a session or when the participants need to let go of some tension in their bodies. There may be a special relaxation time allowed in the session or this may be taught as part of the aims of the group.

Therapeutic value
Teaching participants to relax is very beneficial for all. This type of technique can be used at home and gives participants some ‘time-out’ in their day where they don’t have to think, act, or perform, they can ‘just be’. This is a useful skill in assisting participants to manage their stress as well as increasing body awareness and when and why they may hold tension within. It also teaches participants to use their breath as a way into relaxing, and simple techniques they can do if feeling tense.

Issues to be aware of
Some participants will struggle to physically understand how to release tension in their bodies and facilitators may need to assist these group members. Sometimes the offer of blindfolds can assist participants who struggle to keep their eyes closed and fail to settle with the added visual stimulation of their surroundings. Facilitators need to be mindful that participants who have a history of abuse or trauma may struggle with this activity, opening their eyes and holding their body in a hyper-vigilant manner. In fact it may prove too threatening to close their eyes, or feel safe while lying on the floor. This may leave them feeling too vulnerable and they can be given permission to sit and quietly draw or watch the rest of the group. Facilitators should always be sensitive to signals and reactions that may arise in response to this exercise, being mindful of not pushing participants into what they might feel for them is a compromising and potentially unsafe space.
Rag dolls and tin soldiers

Directions
• Facilitators ask participants to lie down on their backs with their arms by their sides and their legs uncrossed.

• Firstly they instruct participants to become like a ‘tin soldier’, and put as much rigidity in their body as they can.

• Facilitators should be able to go around the group and lift participants from their feet to determine how rigidly they are holding themselves.

• Facilitators then ask participants to become like a ‘floppy rag doll’ and let all the tension in their body go.

• Facilitators should be able to go around and lift a limb and drop it without any resistance from the participant. Participants may find it harder to relax than tense, but it is good practice for them.

When to use
To help participants to understand the difference between tensing and relaxing their bodies.

Therapeutic value
This is a good game to assist participants who have trouble releasing the tension in their bodies in a fun way, and it gives them a direct kinaesthetic experience (see page 17 for description of ‘kinaesthetic’) of the difference between tensing and relaxing their muscles. Facilitators can also ask participants what the difference is in their breathing with the ‘rag doll’ and ‘tin soldier’ to help participants begin to understand the connections with their breathing and the results of holding and releasing tension.

Issues to be aware of
Many participants who live in constant fear or tension can be hyper-vigilant, a state that is reflected in constantly tensed muscles. Participants may need physical assistance to understand the difference between tensing and releasing their muscles, and emotional assistance in building enough trust to allow themselves to release control. (Please refer to notes regarding participants with a history of trauma and abuse in the ‘Body relaxation’ game on page 62).
Group closure games

Every group benefits from a ritual closing. It is important for participants as it signals that the group is coming to an end, allowing them to ready themselves to go back into their daily life, and to put a full stop or closure either for the session or for the whole program.

Rituals to mark the end of a session can include activities such as relaxation, giving out rewards or stickers, or filling in a reflection sheet about the session. Ending a group program can include rituals of certificates, acknowledging each participant’s special contributions and gifts, specific games or ‘transitional objects’ (see page 11) such as gifts made within the group, or farewell notes to other members in the group.
Huh!

**Directions**
- The group stands in a circle around an object in the middle.
- Participants are instructed to stand up straight with their hands by their sides, standing evenly on both feet, with all eyes on the object in the middle.
- Everyone focuses on the object, and the facilitator waits for the tension to build, making sure everyone is still, quiet, and looking at the object.
- Instructions are to keep looking at the object until the facilitator calls out “huh”, and at the same time jumps into a position with his/her hands up and knees bent.
- The group’s goal is to try and do the ‘huh’ and actions exactly at the same time as the facilitator without looking at him/her.

**Variation**
Participants make the shape of a little ball, and wait until the facilitator calls “huh”, then they jump into a big shape and hold it, then lower themselves down again into their small shape.

**When to use**
This game is a good way to end a session, to bring the energy into focus, and to ready the participants to finish the group with a ‘huh!’ full stop ritual. It can be a good way to practise being still, with a release of energy at the end.

**Therapeutic value**
This game involves energy building, focus, suspense building, stillness, anticipation and release of energy. It brings the energy of the group into focus and involves being still and listening to others. It helps participants to sustain their anticipation until the right moment and learn to control their own impulses.

**Issues to be aware of**
Participants can be nominated as the leader of the ‘huh’ as they become familiar with the game. Facilitators need to make it clear that there will be no ‘huh’ until all eyes are on the object and hands are at their sides and they are very still in order to let the tension build.
Pass the parcel

This is a traditional game played at parties but used with a slight variation.

Directions
- On pieces of paper, write out different qualities; e.g. give to someone who is good at sports; give to someone who has a nice smile; give to someone who is a good listener, etc.
- Make up the parcel with these instructions and optional lollies/stickers inside.
- It is optional if you want to put a lolly in each layer of wrapping for both people involved.
- We have utilised the St. Luke’s stickers (see the ‘resources’ list on page 80 for details), which have qualities written on them (e.g. “I am brave”) to be used as the gift, or you can find other special stickers/objects to use.
- Pass the parcel around and when the music stops, the person who has the parcel unwraps it, then gets to read the directions on the piece of paper, and gives it to the person in the group they think possess these qualities.
- There is no specific big prize at the end of the wrapping, but again this is optional.

When to use
This game can be utilised to explore ‘giving’ and ‘receiving’ compliments, giving participants an opportunity to acknowledge qualities they admire and respect in each other, and to enhance self-esteem and confidence in group members. It can be used as a special ending game to offer special compliments and prizes to each group member.

Therapeutic value
This game is conducive to creating positive feelings in a group and helps participants practice giving and receiving compliments which could open up a discussion of which one is easier/harder and why.

Issues to be aware of
Facilitators may have to specify that once a participant has received a compliment, then group members need to be chosen that haven’t yet received one, so that nobody is left out. To ensure that each participant receives a compliment, the number of participants need to be counted beforehand and the same number of wrappings need to be included to make sure that no one misses out.

Dice game

Directions
- The group keeps an object (we have found a large square cushioned dice is useful for this game) in the air for as long as they can (ideally a carton, or something light, but not a ball).
- Count out loud how many times the group can keep it off the ground, and get the whole group to call out the number together.
- Try and beat the groups best number every week.
- The object needs to be volleyed with arms up and not caught and thrown up again.
- Participants can touch the object twice but then it has to pass on to another player.

When to use
This is a great game to play as a ritual opening or closing game to encourage group building and working together for a common goal as well as creating a sense of group cohesion.

Therapeutic value
This game brings the group together and creates a sense of group achievement as well as setting a goal to better each week. It fosters group togetherness and team spirit without any winners or losers. It enables a group focus, encourages group identification, participation and working together. Competition between group members is also diminished. Another important dimension to this game is the continuity created by tracking the group’s shared goal each week. This game fosters pleasure and a sense of achievement when they beat their own score each week, and is a good way to include shy members of the group.

Issues to be aware of
Facilitators need to allocate a certain number of ‘goes’ with the soft dice, otherwise this game can go on and on. Three ‘goes’ is a good number to start with.
Graffiti sheets

Directions

• Graffiti sheets are a ritualised way of writing messages to each group member so they have a personalised note from everyone to take away with them. There are a number of variations as to how this can be done.

Variation #1

• Facilitators prepare a large piece of paper with each participant’s name on it.

• Each participant writes an individual message on each group member’s (including the facilitator’s) piece of paper.

• Graffiti sheets are then given out to each member at the end of the group program.

Variation #2

• Pieces of paper are cut into special shapes e.g. heart, star, or circle.

• Each group member writes a special message to every other member in the group on a separate shaped piece.

• Envelopes are provided to put messages in, and are presented to each member at the end of the group.

Note: This variation is more private than the graffiti sheet as it allows for personalised messages that no one else will read.

When to use

As a final group closing activity.

Therapeutic value

This activity provides a way for participants to say goodbye and a forum for them to show their appreciation, to receive words of encouragement, or just to acknowledge that they have shared this experience together. The notes also form a ‘transitional object’ (see page 11) that the participant can take with them as an extension and connection to the group after it has finished. These farewell notes can serve as a powerful reminder of what hopefully has been a very positive and fruitful experience for group members.

Issues to be aware of

Participants sometimes want to write notes anonymously. Clear rules need to be laid out that these notes are to be positive. If you suspect group members may not honour this, then variation #1 of this activity is best used. Facilitators can then monitor the graffiti sheets’ contents.
Training games for professionals

Using games in larger groups and in training

When dealing with groups from thirty to sixty people or more we have found these specific games/activities work well in warming-up and engaging an audience of professionals. Many of these games/activities are also suitable for non-professional (client) groups where you may, for instance, have a combined parent/child/teacher group and have a large number of people to work with.

Our reasons (as professionals) for avoiding the use of games or other more creative types of activities in training is usually to do with not wanting to appear to lessen the professional tone of the proceedings. Whilst this may be appropriate in some instances, there are times when the participation in something other than the lecture/listener format of training can be very powerful. For the more jaded professional who has attended countless professional development/training or team building events, the use of an activity that is not frightening, but does move them out of their comfort zone, can be just the remedy for reinvigorating their interest.

In addition, utilising mediums other than those exclusively didactic can be much more rewarding and effective in imparting a message or creating an environment within which to learn. Much of the training we provide to other professionals is experiential. This is in an endeavour to integrate knowledge with practice. It is also because we want to bypass the cognitive filtering processes we all engage in to confirm what it is we already ‘think we know’ to allow access to new ways of experiencing and thus thinking, feeling and responding within our therapeutic work. Games are aimed at arousing pleasure and having fun and can sometimes over ride participant resistance when unexpectedly they find themselves laughing and enjoying an activity.

Many of the games already mentioned within this booklet could be adapted (and in some instances have been) for use in professional training. The following games have, however, all been used within professional training conducted by the RCH Mental Health Service members of the Community Group Program and as such we feel able to recommend them as activities that have worked well in connecting with, re-energising and shifting the mood of professional audiences.
Ice breakers

The following games are intended to quickly create an atmosphere of intimacy and openness for exchange in the group.
Bingo bee

**Directions**

- Rule a piece of A4 paper into nine squares.
- In each square write (for example):
  - the name of somebody who speaks more than two languages.
  - the name of somebody who has worked in the same job for more than ten years.
  - the name of somebody who has moved here from interstate.
  - the name of somebody who still has his or her favourite teddy bear from childhood, etc.
- Each person must go around the room and find someone who fits the criteria of each question until they have successfully filled in each square with a name.
- They should try and get nine different names.
- The first person to fill in the squares accurately and calls out “bingo!” is the winner.

**When to use**

This game can be used as an ice breaker or when the facilitator feels the group has been shy in connecting and wishes to facilitate an activity where participants are given a reason to ask questions of other participants in a structured but fun way. Facilitators should think about what questions might be relevant to ask the group and how that might assist in the theme or topic being used in the training.

**Issues to be aware of**

Depending on who the participants are, facilitators may need to be careful not to frame any questions that seem intrusive or may inadvertently hit upon any issues that a group may have conflict over. That is, when running training for a group who already know each other, facilitators may want to avoid anything controversial that brings up unresolved group issues (unless indeed that is what the group is there to address!).

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Sixty second sell

**Directions**

- Facilitators set the context by explaining that participants are going to ‘role-play’ going for a job interview and have sixty seconds to convince the person opposite them to employ you.
- Facilitators decide what information is to be shared on the basis of the goals of the training.
- Have the groups (no more than twenty participants in each grouping) line up in two rows sitting in chairs opposite one another.
- One row of participants role-play an applicant ‘selling themselves’ in an interview to the person sitting opposite.
- The other row of participants role-play an ‘employer’ sitting and listening to the ‘hard sell’ of the person sitting opposite them.
- Each person is allowed sixty seconds to tell the person sitting opposite them information about him or herself.
- After sixty seconds the facilitator calls out “change” and the whole group moves along one chair and starts the process again.
- This continues until everyone has had a chance to role-play both the applicant for the job and the person who listens to the applicant.

**When to use**

This is an excellent large group activity that can be used to create intimacy by breaking up the big group into pairs in order to build some specific connections. It is a great warm-up to any sort of activity where you want the audience to engage in small group or a whole of audience discussion. This game provides an opportunity to gain interesting information about other people very quickly and may even reveal aspects about a person who you already know (e.g. things you didn’t know that they had done in their careers). This game can be quite exhilarating as well as exhausting due to its frenetic pace.

**Issues to be aware of**

Some participants will find the request to talk about themselves confronting or may actively resist joining into the spirit of this activity.
Name game

Directions

- Participants are asked to form a circle.
- Using a koosh (soft) ball, ask participants to throw the ball to another person. Everyone should have a name tag.
- The person who the ball is thrown to introduces him or herself and gives three answers to questions asked by the facilitators to the entire group. These questions might include:
  - When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?
  - What is the one thing you want to get from this training?
  - What was your favourite toy/game as a child?
  - What organisation are you from and what is your role?
  - Who is your favourite band/individual singer or musician and why?
  - When you grew up who made you feel special and how did they do this?
- After the ball has moved around the entire circle you can introduce a few more balls in order to create a frenzy of throwing with the rule that you must first call out the name of the person you are throwing a ball to.
- This elevates the mood of the group (largely because throwing multiple balls means invariably there will be chaos and with chaos comes laughter), before moving onto the next part of your training agenda.

When to use

At the commencement of training (after preliminary opening remarks etc.), as an ice breaker or information sharing exercise. Select questions that fit well with the theme of your training, e.g. in a professional development one-day workshop we ran on the ‘Cycle of Violence and Dynamics of Bullying’ we used this exercise and asked the group “Who was the bully at your school when growing up?” We were given an interesting array of responses from “the teacher” through to “I was.” These candid responses set a very intimate tone to the day and led to a very successful training event. The formation of the circle, the nature of the questions and the information shared can accelerate the connection of the group and thus open up opportunities to explore issues with potentially greater depth.

Issues to be aware of

This activity works best in groups of no more than twenty people otherwise it loses its capacity to be an intimate space for sharing and becomes so lengthy that it loses people’s interest. As this is a game where you stand in a circle you need to be aware of not standing too long and asking participants to keep their responses brief. Facilitators need to lay the groundwork with participants about their need for self-care when undertaking any training that deals with complex and sensitive therapeutic issues. This activity can open up the potential for making personal disclosures, so facilitators need to feel confident enough to deal with and appropriately manage any disclosures.
Life is like a box of chocolates ...

Directions

• Provide the training group with a box of assorted chocolates (enough so that each participant has a variety to chose from).

• Ask each participant to select one chocolate that best represents him or her.

• Each participant takes a turn in telling the group why they selected the chocolate they did and what the chocolate has in common with themselves (e.g. “I selected the strawberry centre as I seem hard on the outside but inside I am very soft”).

Variation

We have also used this activity in larger client groups (parents and their adolescent children).

• The parent first selects an object (we usually use a wide variety of plastic animals) to represent themselves and one for their child and explains why.

• The parent is then asked to select an object to represent what they would like themselves and their child to be. Seldom have we had a parent pick the same object as they did the first time as most feel they are not ‘good enough’ and want to change.

• The young person repeats this process for themselves and their parents. This has proven to be a very emotionally charged but transformative activity.

When to use

This activity can be used as a starter for a smaller group training (fifteen or so participants), as a warm up activity or simply as a juncture for the group to stop and perhaps share something more personal about themselves with the group.

Issues to be aware of

Not everybody likes chocolates. (No really!) You may like to use a bag of mixed lollies, or maybe some other potential representational objects such as toy cars, plastic animals or characters out of a popular TV show. The intention of this activity is to use an object that the participant can safely project some aspect of their personality onto and then share with the group. Sometimes two or more members of the group may wish to select the same object (for similar or maybe very different reasons). Apart from the chocolates (which participants get to eat), facilitators may ask participants to keep the object in the middle of the circle and only pick it up when it is their turn.
Time lines

Directions

• Explain to the group that you wish them to line up in a certain order; e.g. ‘those who have worked as a counsellor or a teacher etc. for the shortest amount of time at the front’, in order through to ‘the person who has worked in this area for the longest amount of time at the back’. Another example is something more generalised like ‘those who have travelled to many different countries at the front through to those who haven’t travelled at all at the back’.

• You may wish to create a different tone to the time line by asking the audience, for example, to line themselves up in order of ‘those who feel most confident in their skills to work with domestic violence through to those who feel very unskilled in this area’, etc.

• The facilitator can ask different people in the time line questions about where they placed themselves in the time line and why.

Variation

• This activity can also be used in a circle formation with participants moving into the centre of the circle stating something about themselves; for example, “I like working with children”.

• Any other participant who shares this statement also moves into the circle and places themselves in proximity to the person depending on how much they relate to what the person in the middle has stated.

• Participants can also move outside the circle and to the outer extremes of the room if they disagree with the person or cannot relate at all.

• This variation can be used to facilitate a sense of intimacy, shared experiences and affiliations; for example, a participant may share a personal statement “I am a mother”, or “I have lost both my parents”, etc.

When to use

The purpose of this activity is to get people up and moving and talking to one another. In order to make an accurate time line you have to talk to other people and this is a fun and non-threatening way of getting people talking. It is an activity that can be used early into training or to liven up the room if people have been required to sit for an extended period of time.

Issues to be aware of

If you choose to use time lines that consist of information that may be emotionally and professionally revealing ensure you have thought through what and why you want this information shared publicly. Some people may feel happy enough to talk amongst the group individually in order to find their place in the line but feel less confident or comfortable in discussing their place in the line when the whole group is listening. In these circumstances you may choose to just let the process of connecting occur through setting up, rather than reflecting on it as a whole group, once the line is formed. Conversely facilitators may choose to explore with the group what it was like for participants to try and find their place in the line/circle, and ask for people to volunteer their reflections on whether the process actually shifted their perception of where they first thought their place might be.
Energy boosters

These activities can be used to lift the energy of the audience if they are finding it difficult to concentrate, if it is late in the day or following lunch. These games also help to change the energy after delivering some dense theoretical literature that may take participants time to digest and assimilate.
Farmyard

Directions

- Facilitators write the name of one farm animal (four to six different sorts) on separate pieces of paper.
- Either place on chairs or hand out to participants as they first enter the room.
- Make sure the names of the animals are passed around in equal numbers (i.e. six pigs, six dogs, six sheep etc).
- Explain to the audience that they are about to be told a story about a farmyard and whenever the name of the animal they have been given is mentioned they must stand up and loudly make the noise of their animal.
- Whenever the word ‘farmyard’ is mentioned, all members of the audience must stand up and loudly make the noise of their animal.
- Having ‘minties’ or some other types of lollies can act as a useful incentive in rewarding and involving all members of the audience.
- Either read out an already prepared story about a farmyard and its animals or make one up as you go along (we have found parodying well known celebrities, politicians or some recent media event using the farmyard as a metaphor works well).
- Facilitators should try a mention all animals’ names equally so everyone gets involved.

Variation: ‘Chants’
This variation evolved from a professional training facilitated around the theme of collaboration.

Directions

PART 1

- Divide the trainees into sub-groups (for example, by organisation, professional background, region, client base or any particular grouping that complements the goals of the training) depending on the type of training you are running. Trainees may or may not have had prior contact with other members in their sub-group.
- Ask each sub-group to come up with their own unique chant/war cry that they can repeat easily and that gives voice to their group identity.
- Each sub-group is given time to develop and rehearse their chant/war cry (approximately five minutes)
- Each sub-group then performs their chant/war cry for the rest of the trainees.

PART 2

- A story is read out to the audience. This story is created by the facilitator prior to the training event, and can include fictitious, current media or events relevant to the training. The story can be humorous and is limited only by facilitators’ creativity and wit!
- The aim is to make multiple references throughout the story to each of the sub-groups that have been created for the training (See Part 1).
- Sub-groups are directed to stand up and perform their chant/war cry each time their name is read out in the story. The story gets a little disrupted while each chant is performed!
- A ‘wild card’ word is designated in the story as the cue for everyone to stand up and simultaneously perform their chant/war cry. The ‘wild card’ word can be changed each time to capture the theme of the training. (For example, ‘collaboration’ could be used as a ‘wild card’ in a training exploring collaboration).

Note: Part 2 of this variation can be used directly following Part 1 or can be utilised later in the training event as a break in formal activities or as a group energiser.

When to use
When first beginning with a large audience, if the training is running over a few hours or for the day. It acts as a great ice breaker and elevates the mood of the group/audience immediately. The more localised the storyline, the greater the fun.

Issues to be aware of
This game involves a certain level of risk, particularly in professional groups where the audience may frown upon engaging in such frivolity. Choose the audience wisely and be aware that if you don’t feel confident enough to pull this off, don’t risk it. Conversely, our experience has been that the element of surprise involved (the fact that you would even engage the whole audience in a game as well as give them lollies!) has done wonders in gaining the interest and energy of the training group.

The therapeutic use of games in groupwork © RCH MHS 2006
Streets and lanes

Directions
- Two people need to volunteer – one to be the ‘chaser’ and one to be ‘chased’.
- The rest of the participants need to stand and facing the front of the room, create four or five parallel lines.
- These people are to stand far enough apart so that their hands just touch the tip of the person next to them when their hands are outstretched.
- When you call out “streets” all participants should stretch out their hands to make four or five parallel rows.
- When you call out “lanes” all participants should move from facing the front of the room with their hands outstretched to facing the side of the room (all in the same direction so again four or five parallel lines are created but the lines are now facing the side).
- The chaser and the one being chased must negotiate their way through the constantly changing ‘streets’ and ‘lanes’ (as they move from one to the other with the person being chased attempting to avoid being caught).
- These two people cannot break through the boundaries of the outstretched hands but must change direction as the “streets” or “lanes” signal is called out.
- Ask for different volunteers or swap the roles of ‘chaser’ and being ‘chased’ as needed.

When to use
This is a great activity to elevate the energy levels within a large group (professionals or clients) as all can participate and it requires members of the group to get up and move about. This is probably best suited to a group that meets over a period of time rather than in a one-off training. It requires at least eighteen people for it to work effectively and the facilitator can assist or hinder the process of being caught by calling out the change of direction whenever the two running become too close or too far away.

Issues to be aware of
This game is probably best suited to non-professional audiences or a professional group you may have worked with other a period of time. It requires a certain level of fitness and would be a game you introduce if you are confident that you will have volunteers who are happy to run about. As this is a large group activity you also need to be aware of having an adequate amount of space within which to safely play this activity.

Treasure chest

Directions
- Break the larger group into groups of five. Each group is situated in equal distance from the scorer who stands at the front or in the middle of the room. Each group elects a runner.
- The group leader makes up a list of about twenty items (time permitting) that can be easily obtained within the room, or that the participants already have on them.
- The facilitator calls out a list of items, e.g. sock, shoelace, or book.
- Each group then supplies an item to the runner, who then takes it to the game scorer (the same or another group leader) as quickly as they can.
- The first runner to reach the scorer wins a point.
- The leader continues through the list, and the team at the end of the game with the most points, are the winners.

Variation
To spice up this game the facilitator/scorer can instruct one group member to make a noise e.g. a cow, chicken, and judge the best performance.

When to use
To break up a heavy session, or to refocus the group after a break in training, to introduce bonding within a small group, working together as a team, observing how participants negotiate roles of leadership, communication, competition and team spirit. This game can be utilised to explore themes of working together and discuss the participants’ experiences. This game also generates inter-group competitiveness and can be dissected later and provide the fodder for small or larger group discussion (e.g. “What role did I take in the group?”, “Is it the role I wanted?”, “How competitive was it?”).

Issues to be aware of
It is best not to use anything breakable and if naming something in the room make sure there is enough for each group (e.g. three groups = three rubbish bins).
Exploring themes

The following games are examples of how a game can generate large or small group discussions around relevant themes presented in the training. They also encourage participants’ personal response to the material through experimental learning.
Attunement chopsticks

Directions
- Everyone is asked to find a partner.
- Using chopsticks (or clean ice-cream sticks or pencils), place the tip of each end between your and your partner’s index finger so that the chopstick is held lengthwise between you.
- Do this with both the left hand (your left to their right) and right hand index finger so you both have two chopsticks balanced between you.
- Instruct one partner to take the lead.
- The other partner is to follow their lead so the chopsticks remain balanced and do not fall.
- After a few minutes ask the partners to change their lead.
- You may choose to debrief this activity after trying it with two people before moving onto the more difficult ‘four people’ configuration.
- Now each pair finds another couple and attempts to form a circle with the chopsticks balanced between all four people (from person to person not across from one another).
- Have one to two people at a time take the lead.

When to use
This is a similar activity to the ‘mirroring game’ (page 47) and the ‘four corners game’ (page 49) and operates as a tangible illustration of ‘attachment theory’\(^1\) and what can happen within reciprocal (and non-reciprocal) relationships. It can be used as a means of getting the audience in touch with the delicate nuances inherent in the couple (as well as parent/child) relationship and then the additional pressures of remaining attuned when more players enter the sphere (as is the case within families and in groups).

Issues to be aware of
This activity works best in smaller groups as this provides the opportunity for a large group discussion around how different participants managed the task, what difficulties presented themselves and how this activity could relate to different participants’ understanding of ‘attachment theory’, ‘system theory’\(^2\) etc. When this activity is used with larger numbers, breaking up into smaller groups for the post-activity discussion would be preferable.

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Graffiti sheets

Directions
- Place a large piece of paper (butchers paper or larger) on a wall.
- Provide participants/audience members with much smaller pieces of paper on which to anonymously write one or two words to describe how they feel about coming to this training, what goals they have for the day, or any other pieces of information you may wish to extract from your audience.
- Carry around a box that participants can discretely place their written feedback in.
- Facilitators can then either just blu-tack or glue the written responses onto the larger piece of paper already on the wall (hopefully this can be done whilst another activity is taking place or during the break).
- When the graffiti sheet is ready (facilitators can either put the words up randomly or cluster them in themes) participants can have an opportunity to look at the wide range of responses and if they wish, respond to these in a group discussion.

When to use
This activity could have a wide range of applications and could really be used at any point in the proceedings. It would be a great way to start the day, or could be used as a different way of furthering a topic covered sometime during the training or even as a closure activity. It also can be used specifically in training events that are about building partnerships/collaborations, for team building days or for inter/intra agency work. It has the capacity to give the audience permission to say the negative things that they may be feeling and letting the audience know that the facilitators are then able to both hear and acknowledge the less than positive issues present in the group. Depending on what comes out in this graffiti material you may need to shift the direction of the training in a way that better suits your audience.

Issues to be aware of
When asking for anonymous feedback you are asking for honest (good and bad) feedback. You are also protecting people’s right to say what they feel without being attacked. Facilitators need to be aware of when to discuss the issues or feelings raised in the graffiti sheets (because this is in fact what the purpose of the training is) or when to ask participants to ‘just look over’ the range of responses. Facilitators can acknowledge the diversity of opinions and responses but then proceed to explore ways in which to move the training forward.

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\(^1\) See page 80 for excellent reference books regarding attachment theory.
\(^2\) Texts available describing ‘systems theory’ are plentiful, most particularly in the areas of social work and family therapy.
House of cards

**Directions**

- Depending on the number of participants (larger numbers may require only a small number of participants being involved whilst a larger group watches), split the group into three smaller groups.

- Pick one group who will be doing the activity, one group who will watch the group doing the activity and one group (who will be told secretly that they will be watching the group who is designated as the ‘group that watches the activity’ group) will sit back and observe.

- The activity group is to be given a pack of cards; preferably the St. Luke’s strength cards/bear cards (see the ‘Resources’ list on page 80 for details), or something that is somewhat larger and thicker than a normal pack of cards.

- The activity group is instructed to work together to build a house of cards within a particular time limit.

- The group designated as the ‘watchers’ are instructed to watch the dynamics that play out in the activity group as they negotiate how to build their house of cards.

- Meanwhile the third group quietly watches what occurs amongst the ‘watchers’ when they watch and when it is time for them to give their feedback.

- After the ‘activity’ group completes their task they are asked to comment on the process. Example questions for discussion are: how they found the activity, what roles they found themselves taking within the group, how they found the process of negotiating with others and whether they were conscious of or comfortable/uncomfortable with being watched etc.

- The group of ‘watchers’ are then asked to give their comments on the activity group (without the activity group commenting) and when they have finished the activity group can respond.

- Finally the ‘secret watchers’ can give their feedback on what it was like to watch the watchers and if they have any comments on the process or dynamics observed between those ‘watching’ and ‘being watched’.

**When to use**

This activity is best suited to training that is interested in group, organisational or relationship dynamics, and we have not used it in training audiences of more than twenty to thirty people. It is a powerful way of illustrating ‘role’, ‘group’ and ‘organisational’ theory and gives a ‘hands on’ experience of the evocative dynamics that occur when engaged in tasks with others. This activity can be used to explore what it is like to be observed (as are clients when they enter individual, couple, family or group therapy), what it is like to give and receive feedback, how or why we do things, and how others perceive what we do and why.

**Issues to be aware of**

Use this activity with some level of caution and with a capacity to provide debriefing to participants if required. It is a powerful learning tool that can provide a wonderful basis for teasing out the complexities of working with others, observing others and observing self in relation to others. As intended, it can also reveal areas of conflict and tension, which is useful in providing material for discussion but may leave particular individuals feeling exposed if this material is not attended to well by facilitators.

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13 A good basic text on organisational theory is Morgan, G. (1997) Images of Organization, Sage, USA.
Concluding comments

Playing games can be a serious business. Sensitivity around engaging, redirecting and channelling a group’s energy is a skill that is developed over time, and often through trial and error. This manual endeavours to place at your disposal a ‘tool kit’ of therapeutic games which will prove invaluable in assisting you to determine which games work when, how, and why!

Our hope is that this becomes a handy resource, feeds your imagination and inspires a greater understanding of the therapeutic intent and possible outcomes available through wise game selection. Additionally, we believe this can then both enhance and complement the themes that are being explored within the group process, no matter what type of therapeutic approach is being used.

Successfully running therapeutic groups, as with living life, requires a level of malleability, inventiveness as well as intuitiveness in order to effectively steer one’s course and guides one’s decisions.

Playfulness, humour, and spontaneity can provide the rich threads that enliven and embolden our landscapes. ‘The therapeutic use of games in groupwork’ engages with these rich threads, and can amplify and powerfully access many spheres of a person’s individual as well as relational functioning, thus opening up pathways that can positively effect change.

Further information
Telephone  (03) 9345 6011
Web  www.rch.org.au/mhs/services
then select ‘Community Group Program’
Resources

St. Luke’s resources include ‘strength cards’, ‘bear cards’ and stickers and a whole variety of other materials that you can incorporate into therapeutic groupwork and training. Go to their website for more information at: www.innovativeresources.org

ACER – Australian Council for Educational Research
www.acer.edu.au

RCH MHS CGP Feeling is Thinking (FiST) Groupwork Manual.

Peoplemaking Resources

Further reading

**Play**


**Group Work**


**Early Childhood Development**


