



START Therapeutic Supports

Therapeutic Activities Toolkit

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The Center for START Services is a program of the University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability/UCED

Table of Contents

Positive Identity Building

Pick-Me-Up Bouquet	4
Warm Seat	5
Create Your Own Album Cover	6
If I Were Famous.....	7
Self-Esteem Coat of Arms	8
My Magic Wish.....	10

Health & Wellness

Yoga & Chair Yoga.....	12
Physical Fitness: Movement.....	13
Bean Bag Toss	14

Emotional Regulation

Knowing My Boiling Point.....	15
Stoplight System.....	17
Stress Ball.....	22
Emotional Charades.....	23
Circle of Security	24

Relaxation & Stress Reduction

Relax and Breathe.....	25
Guided Meditation	26
Relaxation Session.....	27
Sensory Room Activities.....	28

Creative Arts & Self-Expression

Poetry Slam	29
Draw Your Future	31
Masks of Emotions	32
Multi-Cultural Music Group.....	33
Talent Show	34

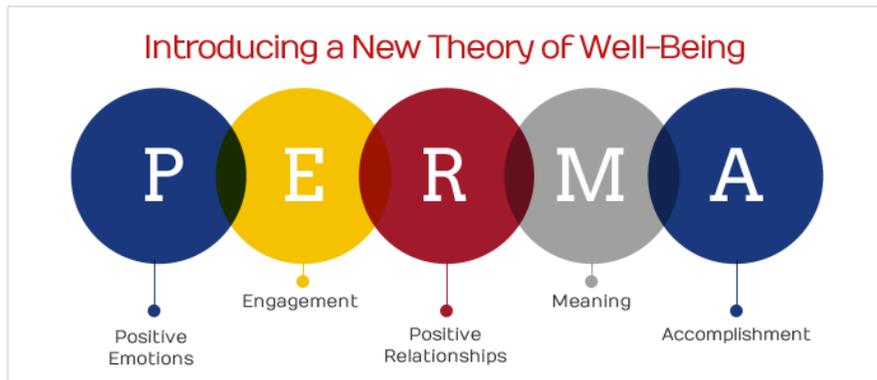
Community Skill Building & Positive Social Engagement

Therapeutic Jenga.....	35
Getting to Know You.....	37
Kind and Unkind	38
Meals on Wheels	39

START Therapeutic Activities: PERMA Focus

PERMA is an acronym for a model of well-being put forth by a pioneer in the field of positive psychology, Martin Seligman. According to Seligman, PERMA makes up five important building blocks of well-being and happiness:

- **Positive emotions** – feeling good
- **Engagement** – being completely absorbed in activities; being in “flow”
- **Relationships** – being authentically connected to others
- **Meaning** – purposeful existence and belonging
- **Accomplishment** – a sense of achievement and success



Positive psychology is based on the premise that that these five elements can help people experience a life of fulfillment, happiness, and meaning. Each of the five building blocks of happiness promote well-being, which is the mission of START therapeutic supports. There are several benefits of well-being including, but not limited to:

- Having more satisfying relationships
- Decreased likelihood of illness and improved physical health
- Longevity
- Fewer sleep problems
- Greater self-control, self-regulation and coping abilities
- Decreased risk for anxiety and depression

All therapeutic activities utilized as part of START Resource Center and In-Home Therapeutic Coaching services promote one or more of the five building blocks of positive psychology. In this guide, START teams will find a variety of activities that promote the well-being of therapeutic supports service recipients. For each activity, a description is provided along with needed materials, instructions and modifications. While all activities promote well-being, there are key areas of PERMA that are the primary focus of activities provided in this guide. A PERMA designation is given to each of them, outlining the focus areas. This is done to clearly demonstrate for facilitators how to assure that elements of PERMA are achieved during therapeutic interactions with guests and service users. It is also helpful for team leaders and directors as it allows for the development of specific recommendations that promote PERMA in the everyday lives of individuals served by the START program.

Pick-Me-Up Bouquet

Summary:

This activity promotes positive social interaction and encourages self-esteem building. At the completion of the activity, each guest will have their own flower printout filled with written compliments from participating guests and counselors.

Prep:

Print a *Pick Me Up Bouquet Worksheet* for each participant; Drawing supplies: pencils, crayons, markers, etc.

Activity Breakdown:

1. Open with a discussion about self-esteem and positive affirmations with guests, explains activity and importance
2. Hand out blank copies of "Pick-Me-Up Bouquet" and ask each guest to write their name in the center of the flower
3. Direct participants to pass their flower to the person on their left. Ask each participant to write a compliment about that person on one of the blank flower petals
4. When flower petals are filled in, ask participants to return the flower to person whose name is written in the center.

Discussion:

- Ask guests to share what they thought about the activity, if they were surprised by anything on their paper, if it was easy or difficult to give someone a compliment, how did it make you feel to receive a compliment.
- Reinforce the benefits and importance of the activity for self-esteem building, positive affirmations, appropriate compliments and positive interactions.

Modifications

- Participants can write, draw, or use any form of communication to express positivity toward other participants.
- This activity can be paused if a participant needs to take a break.
- This activity can be used during in-home supports with group home residents and/or family members. It can be used in group or one-on-one activities.

Warm Seat

Summary:

In this activity, each guest takes turns sitting in the "warm seat" in the middle of the living room while the rest of the guests and staff take turns giving this guest compliments positive affirmation. This is a good activity to use when guests do not know each other well and/or there is conflict.

Prep:

Staff should clear space in a common room and arrange an area large enough for all participants to sit comfortably in a circle. Place one chair, the "warm seat" in the center of the circle. Review modification considerations for guests with receptive or expressive language difficulties.

Activity Breakdown:

1. Direct guests to take a seat and explain what activity is and why we practice making others feel good about themselves.
2. Encourage guests to identify strengths in one another and complement for being funny, smart, kind, artistic, friendly, fun to be around, etc.
3. Once all participants around the circle have given a compliment to the guest in the "warm seat", encourage all participants to give them a round of applause and ask another guest to take a turn.

Discussion:

- Why do you think this important?
- How did it feel to sit in the "warm seat"?
- Encourage center staff to identify similarities between guests and point out when multiple guests receive similar compliments.

Modifications

- Sign or write compliments for guests with hearing impairments or verbal communication challenges. A tablet/iPad may be useful.
- For guests who cannot verbally communicate, a center counselor may state, "I saw that John smiled when you shared your craft materials and I think he appreciates your kindness toward him"
- If time is a factor, the group does not need go around the circle each time but be sure that each guest gets the same opportunity to receive compliments.
- This activity can be used during in-home supports with group home residents and/or family members. It can be used in group or one-on-one activities.

Create Your Own Album Cover

Summary:

This group is designed to give guests an opportunity to express individuality, explore ways they would want others to view them, to express hopes and dreams, and present themselves in an idyllic fashion. By creating their own album cover guests can explore their creativity and express themselves a unique way.

Prep:

Arts & crafts materials: Construction paper, old magazines, markers, safety-scissors, glue sticks, stickers, etc. Heavyweight 12x12 pieces of paper are idea for the album cover. Center counselors should create album covers of their own in advance to use as examples when explaining the activity.

Activity Breakdown:

1. Present examples of real and handmade album covers. Discuss how symbols, colors, and words can evoke certain feelings and emotions.
2. Pass out arts & crafts materials at a table large enough for all participants
3. Ask guests to think of the things that make them unique, what their hopes and dreams are, what their favorite activities are, etc.
4. Encourage guests to then try to represent those things with drawings, words, stickers, magazine clippings, etc. on their blank 12x12 album cover
5. Guests are also encouraged to present their album cover to other participants if they choose. Participants should celebrate the completion and presentation.
6. **Post-Activity:** Laminate each guest's album cover and put on display in center, guest room, etc.

Modifications

- Pre-cut or pre-glued items can be available for guests who have motor difficulties. Counselors should sit next to guests who may need additional support to assist with cutting and gluing.
- The amount of available materials should not be overwhelming to guests.
- This activity can be used during in-home supports and can be used in a group or one-on-one.

If I Were Famous

Summary

If I Were Famous is designed to promote community awareness and relationship building. Guests are asked to pretend that they have become famous and have an unlimited supply of money. They are then asked to describe how they would use their fame and fortune to help others. The activity is designed to improve self-esteem, promote an awareness of the needs of others, and increase socialization amongst group members.

Prep:

Arrange a space where guests and staff and sit comfortably together for up to 30 minutes.

Activity Breakdown:

Start out by asking guests to discuss ways that they can help their family and community today. Encourage discussion by suggesting things like, helping your family with chores, volunteering, or donating clothes and food to charity.

In the second phase of the activity, ask guests to imagine that they have suddenly become famous. Ask them to each decide what they would want to be famous for. Encourage guests to explore their own talents, traits, and interests that they are proud of.

Once guests identify what they would like to be famous for, tell them that their fame has brought them a great deal of fortune. Ask guests to think about how they could use their riches to help others. Encourage guests to explore the idea of helping others and relate these ideas to what they can do in everyday life to add to their community.

Modifications

- This activity is designed for guests who understand abstract concepts. For those guests that respond best to concrete activities and concepts, counselors can have a list of possible ways to “spend your million” that the guests can choose from.
- This activity can be used during in-home supports and can be used in a group or one-on-one.

Self-Esteem Coat of Arms

Summary:

Guests will create a “Coat of Arms” containing the positive things in their lives that help protect them against the negative. This activity increases self-esteem and creative self-expression while improving coping skills through positive visualization.

Prep:

Printed copies of *Blank Coat of Arms* for each participant, drawing supplies: pencils, crayons, markers, etc.

Activity Breakdown:

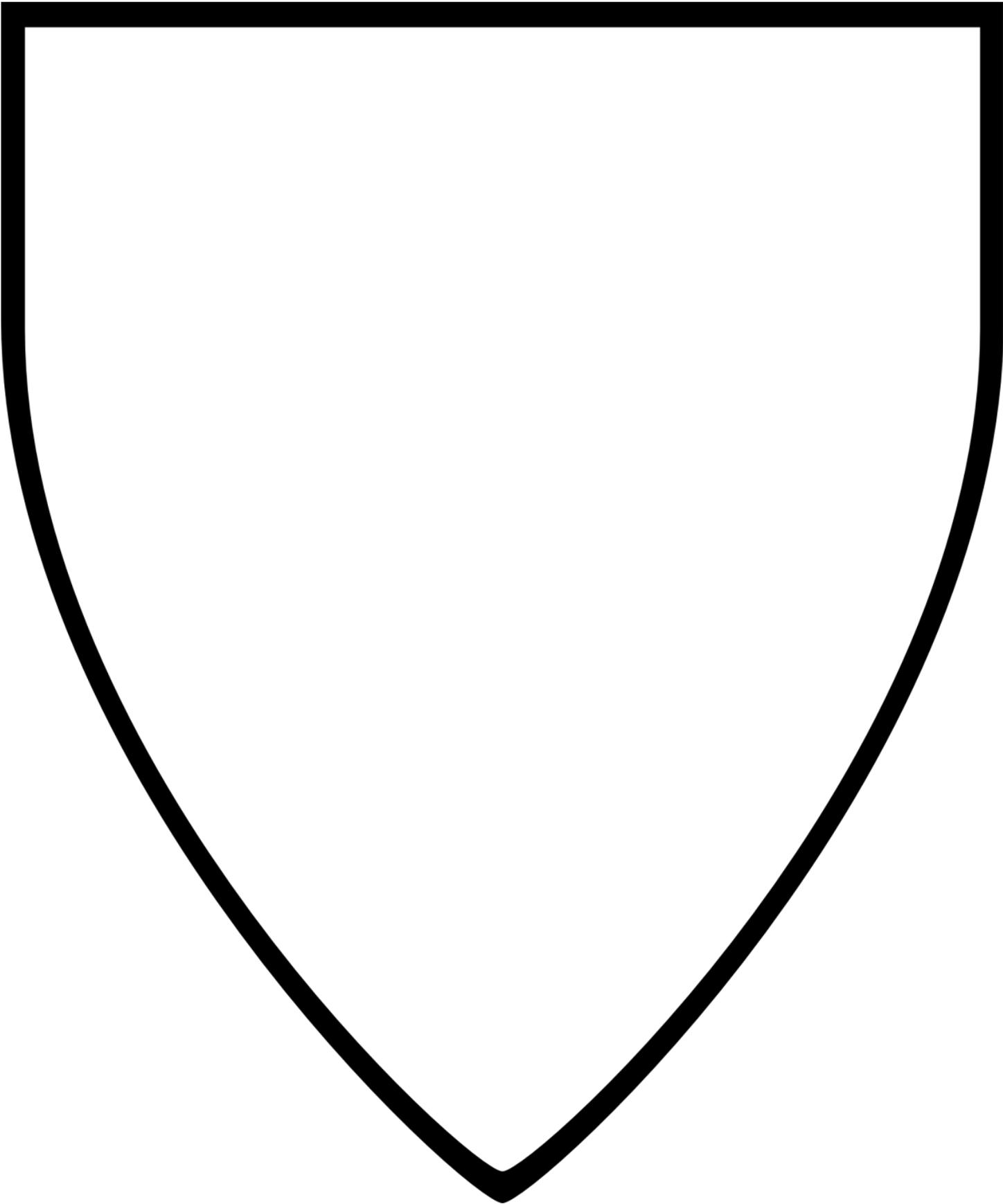
1. Pre-activity discussion: Explain what a shield is and how they can protect people. Discuss how remembering positive people and events in our lives and thinking of our positive traits can actually “shield” us from negative events.
2. Pass out the blank shields and ask guests to fill their shield with all of the positive things in their lives. Encourage them to include positive events, family, friends, pets, etc.
3. If guests have a hard time getting started, asking things like:
 - a. Tell me two things you like about yourself
 - b. Tell me one reason why you are a good friend
 - c. What are two things you do well

Discussion:

Ask each guest to present their shield to the group and explain to us what they chose to include on the shield. Celebrate each guest’s successful completion of the group activity.

Modifications:

- If guests need additional support with expressing these concepts, create some materials ahead of time (cut out pictures, words, photograph, etc.)
- Consider using scented markers, finger paints, and/or chalk to enhance the sensory experience.
- Can be done during in-home supports or in a 1-on-1 support situation.



My Magic Wish

Summary:

This activity is used to promote self-esteem and encourage creativity by asking participants to imagine themselves in a powerful position so that they can think about the things that they want and more easily consider their goals in relationship to their values.

Prep:

Printed copies of *My Magic Wish worksheet* for each participant; Drawing supplies: pencils, crayons, markers, etc.

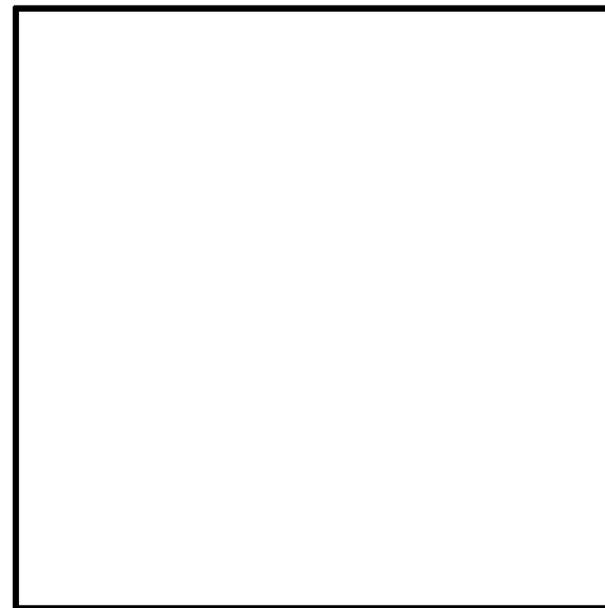
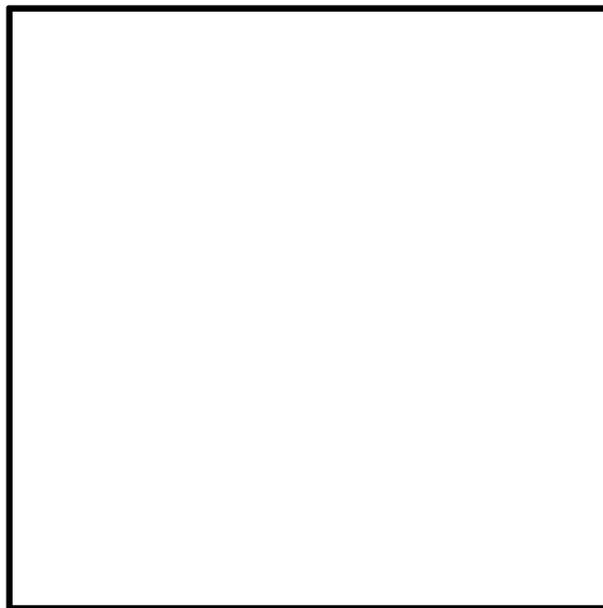
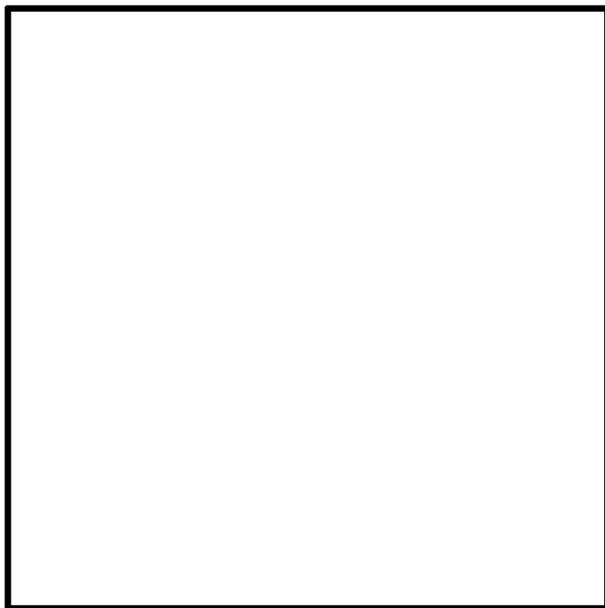
Activity Breakdown:

1. Begin by discussing self-esteem and how much fun it can be to imagine ourselves in a powerful position and think about our interests and our long-term goals.
2. **Script:** Today's word of the day is "self-esteem." It feels good to think about the things that make us unique and things that we are good at. In this activity, we're going to try to think about some of the things that we would do if there wasn't a thing standing in our way. We're going to imagine that a genie has granted three wishes to each one of us, and we can use each wish for anything that we want.
3. Hand out blank copies of "My Magic Wish." Pair counselors with guests (either 1:1 or 1:2) to assist those who need help and encourage small group dialogue. (Counselors should complete their own worksheet to use as a model during the creation and sharing phases of the activity.)
4. Encourage each participant to make three wishes and represent each wish with a drawing.
5. Once participants have drawn their wishes, ask each to think about why they chose their specific wishes and write down a few notes to use when they share with the rest of the group.
6. Using a round robin format invite counselors and guests to share what they have drawn and written.
7. Reiterate the benefits positive thinking and praise everyone for their participation. Whenever possible, try to connect each guests' signature strengths with their wishes.

Modifications:

- Additional questions about goal setting and personal values can be incorporated into this group, such as: This seems like an achievable wish, what things can you do to get to that wish? Or What does your wish say about what you like and value

If a Genie Gave you Three Wishes, What Would You Wish For?



Why did you choose these three things?

Yoga & Chair Yoga

Summary:

Yoga is stretching poses, yoga postures, breathing techniques, meditation, and ways to relax. Chair Yoga is modified for individuals who have difficulty with balance or who need extra assistance due to ambulation challenges.

Yoga practice benefits both your physical well-being and mental state. Some of the health benefits include lowering both your blood pressure and pulse rate, increasing blood circulation, cardiovascular endurance, increasing the immune system, and balancing metabolism. The mental health benefits of yoga include a strong mind-body connection and stress reduction. The practice of controlled breathing reduces anxiety, improves concentration, and increases attention and a feeling of calm. Yoga increases self-acceptance, self-control, social skills, and promotes a reduction in hostility

Prep:

Meditation CD, Meditation/visualization scripts, Yoga mats, Picture prompts for yoga poses (printed from computer), Poster board, Chairs. Assure that guests are dressed comfortably and in athletic attire. No shoes are needed for yoga but guests can choose to keep their shoes on if they prefer.

Activity Breakdown:

1. Yoga mats are laid upon the floor, music is started and a poster board with printed yoga poses is placed in the front of the room by staff. Chairs are also set out for those participating in the modified version, chair yoga
2. Guests are asked to remove shoes if they would like to feel more comfortable
3. Center counselors begin guiding guests through poses to help determine skill level and gauge which poses guests can perform safely and comfortable.
4. Center counselors reinforce calm and steady breathing and focus on its benefit
5. During yoga there is a brief meditative component where guests are asked to close their eyes, lay and relax, and focus on their breathing.
6. In conclusion, guests say "Namaste" to their instructor and each other. Namaste means "thank you" and honors the instructor and each other for experiencing the benefits of yoga together

Modifications

- If counselors are concerned about mobility or health related issues, they should consult the director and/or RN for advice.
- Guests can "free stretch" if they chose to. It may also be beneficial to use stretching bands, blocks or other modification tools to increase participation.
- This activity can be used during in-home supports and can be used in a group or one-on-one.

Physical Fitness: Movement

Summary:

Exercise sessions are designed to promote movement to improve physical fitness, release excess energy, encourage task completion, and provide an opportunity for guests to experience a variety of exercise activities that can be replication at home. Any exercise choices should keep the individual and any movement restrictions they may have in mind.

This activity is designed to improve coping, communication, social, and self-esteem skills. Successful participation in a variety of exercise activities is a way to increase fitness and encourage a healthy lifestyle.

Prep:

Necessary materials are based on exercises chosen. Examples of possible materials needed include but are not limited to: yoga mats, stretching bands, exercise videos, athletic clothing, including shoes, water bottles.

Activity Breakdown:

1. Prior to beginning the exercise session, discuss the healthy aspects of exercise with the guests: allows your body to move, decreases tension, burns calories, etc.
2. When appropriate, allow individuals to choose the type of exercise each engages in. Choice may not always be an option
3. Discuss what this exercise session will look like and what the guests can expect. For example: "We will walk around the track two times."
4. Be sure to praise people for all levels of participation
5. Once finished, praise individuals for their participation. Discuss how they feel (relaxed, tired, hot, calm, proud, etc...) and how exercise can be used as a coping activity. Review any ways that the WOD and/or individual goals were addressed during the session

Modifications

- If counselors are concerns about mobility or health related issues, they should consult the director and/or RN for advice.
- Any level of participation should be celebrated during this activity.
- This activity can be used during in-home supports and can be used in a group or one-on-one.

Bean Bag Toss

Summary:

This activity is designed to promote working as a team, social skills, and some degree of physical activity. This provides guests with the opportunity work cooperatively as a team, engage in friendly competition, and improve self-esteem.

Prep:

Supplies: beanbags, wooden platforms and enough space to play the game safely.

Activity Breakdown:

Beanbag toss is a lawn game in which players take turns throwing bean or corn filled bags at a slanted board with a hole in the far end. A beanbag in the hole scores 3 points, while one that lands on the board scores 1. Play continues with each side taking turns until someone reaches the score of 21. This activity is designed to promote positive interactions, improve gross motor skills, practice team work, and improve self-esteem.

1. Center counselors should set up game platforms and teams should be chosen
2. Guests should be dressed comfortably
3. Center counselors should demonstrate appropriate techniques for throwing the bean bags and allow for a practice round before keeping score
4. Center counselors should then encourage guests' attempts to learn a new skill and teach coping with trials
5. Center counselors should provide words of encouragement and praise for continued attempts
6. Center counselors should praise guests for team work and taking turns
7. Center counselors should be divided equally among teams to encourage a fair level of play

Modifications

- If counselors are concerned about mobility or health related issues, they should consult the director and/or RN for advice.
- Guests may choose to observe the game, practice and/or play non-competitively, or play on teams. Any level of participation should be celebrated during this activity and counselors should closely monitor level of competition.
- This activity can be used during in-home supports and can be used in a group or one-on-one.

Knowing My Boiling Point

Summary:

All people experience emotions and have different ways of expressing themselves. It is important for people to know what things make them feel happy, content/ok, and frustrated. To support guests in understanding their varying degrees of emotion (low, moderate or high levels) and situations that evoke certain emotions. To discuss strategies for coping with feelings of frustration and anger.

Prep:

Printed copies of *Emotions Thermometer Worksheet*; Drawing supplies: Crayons/markers (colors: blue, green, yellow, orange, and red), pencil/pen; Sample Emotions Thermometer

Activity Breakdown:

1. Using the sample emotions thermometer, explain that people experience different levels of emotions, and certain events trigger bigger reactions or emotional responses
2. Instruct each guest select a staff member to support them, choose drawing & writing materials, and grab one *emotions thermometer worksheet*
3. Encourage guests to color in the thermometer—starting with blue in the bottom tier, green in the 2nd tier, yellow in the 3rd tier, orange in the 4th tier, and red in the 5th tier
4. Starting with the 1st tier, have the guest identify situations that make them feel happy and list them inside, or next to, the blue shaded tier
5. In the 2nd tier, have the guest identify situations that make them feel content/OK and list them inside or next to the green shaded tier
6. In the 3rd tier, have the guest identify situations that annoy or irritate them, and list them inside or next to the yellow shaded tier
7. In the 4th tier, have the guest identify situations that make them mad, and list them next to or inside the orange shaded tier
8. In the 5th tier, have the guest identify situations that make them feel furious (out of control/boiling), and list them next to or inside the red shaded tier
9. Review each Emotions Thermometer as a group, emphasizing that people feel all levels of emotions at times. Our goal is to find the right coping skills to help people transition from having feelings of high frustration to feeling content or happy. Discuss with guests strategies for coping with feelings of frustration at each level

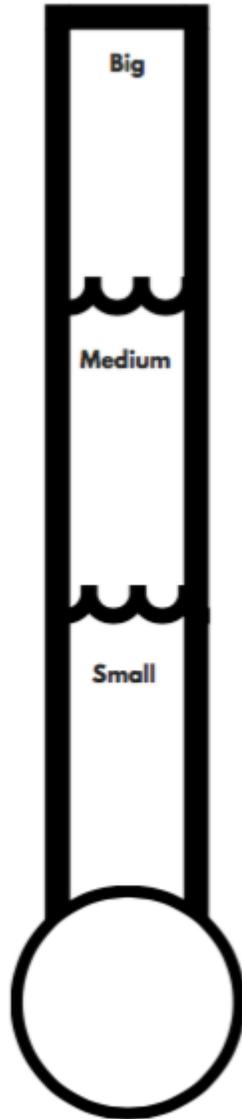
Modifications

Use scented markers to enhance the sensory experience for some guests. Use paint, rather than markers, to paint the tiers of the Temperature Gauge. To enhance the sensory experience for the guest, you can have them paint using their fingers as opposed to a paint brush. For guests who do not like writing, support them in drawing scenarios or cutting out pictures of scenarios that evoke the emotions as it relates to each tier in the Temperature Gauge.

My _____ Thermometer

What I look like

What I can do



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Stoplight System

Summary:

This activity invites participants to use a simple red, yellow, and green coloring system to communicate their level of distress and connect that distress with actions that they can take to feel good and remain safe. Spotlight support guests in (1) understanding their emotions, (2) communicating the intensity of their emotions on a simple scale, and (3) identifying activities that they can do to feel better when feeling distressed.

Prep

Printed copies of *Spotlight System worksheet* for each participant and at least one “sample” worksheet (print additional copies if group is large); **Red**, **green**, and **yellow** drawing supplies: colored pencils, crayons, markers, etc.; picture cards (optional – located in [START Online Resource Area](#)).

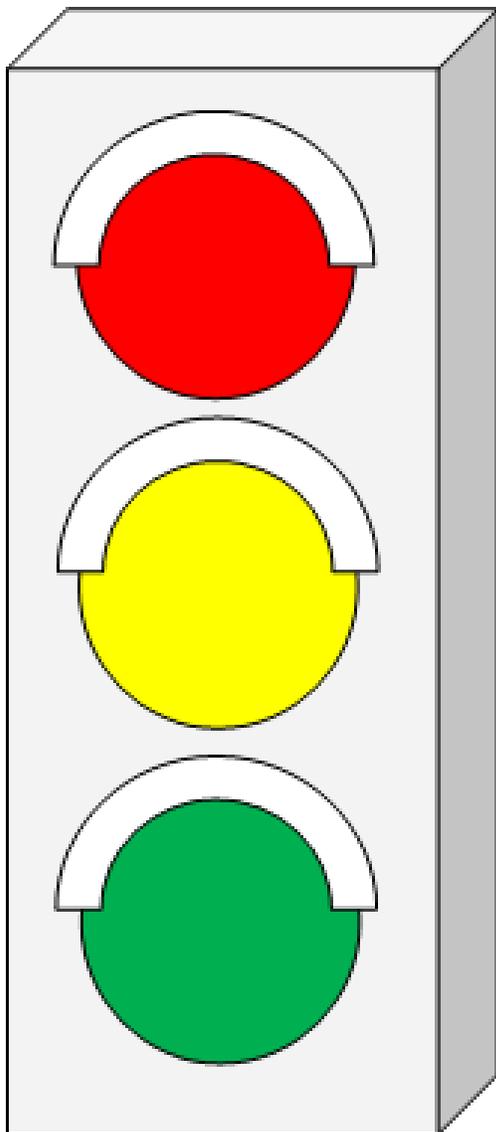
Activity Breakdown:

1. Using the sample stoplight system worksheet, explain to the group that people experience different levels of emotions. For each color, demonstrate what an emotion looks like. (Green = smiling and happy, Yellow = flat or slight scowl, worried, Red = crying or shouting, angry)
2. Ask each guest to pair with a staff member, grab a *stoplight system worksheet* and some drawing supplies of their choice.
3. Ask guests to color the red, yellow, and green lights of the stoplight. Then, encourage guests and counselors to discuss what green, yellow, and red emotions *looks like* for them.
4. As participants establish what their emotions look like, the counselors should encourage participants to name some activities that can match each emotion.
 - a. Green – I can do all activities, even activities that require me to calm and safe.
 - b. Yellow – I can do many things, I need to focus on fun things that are safe, that I enjoy, and that can help me calm down.
 - c. Red – I have two to three things that I need to do right now so that I can feel better, so I can keep myself and others safe.
5. Instruct participant describe the discussed activities through writing or drawing. Participants could also select a picture card (if printed) and paste it to their worksheet.
6. Once all participants have completed their worksheets, facilitate a discussion.

Modifications:

Consider using scented markers or paints to provide an added sensory experience to the activity.

The Stoplight System



Red—

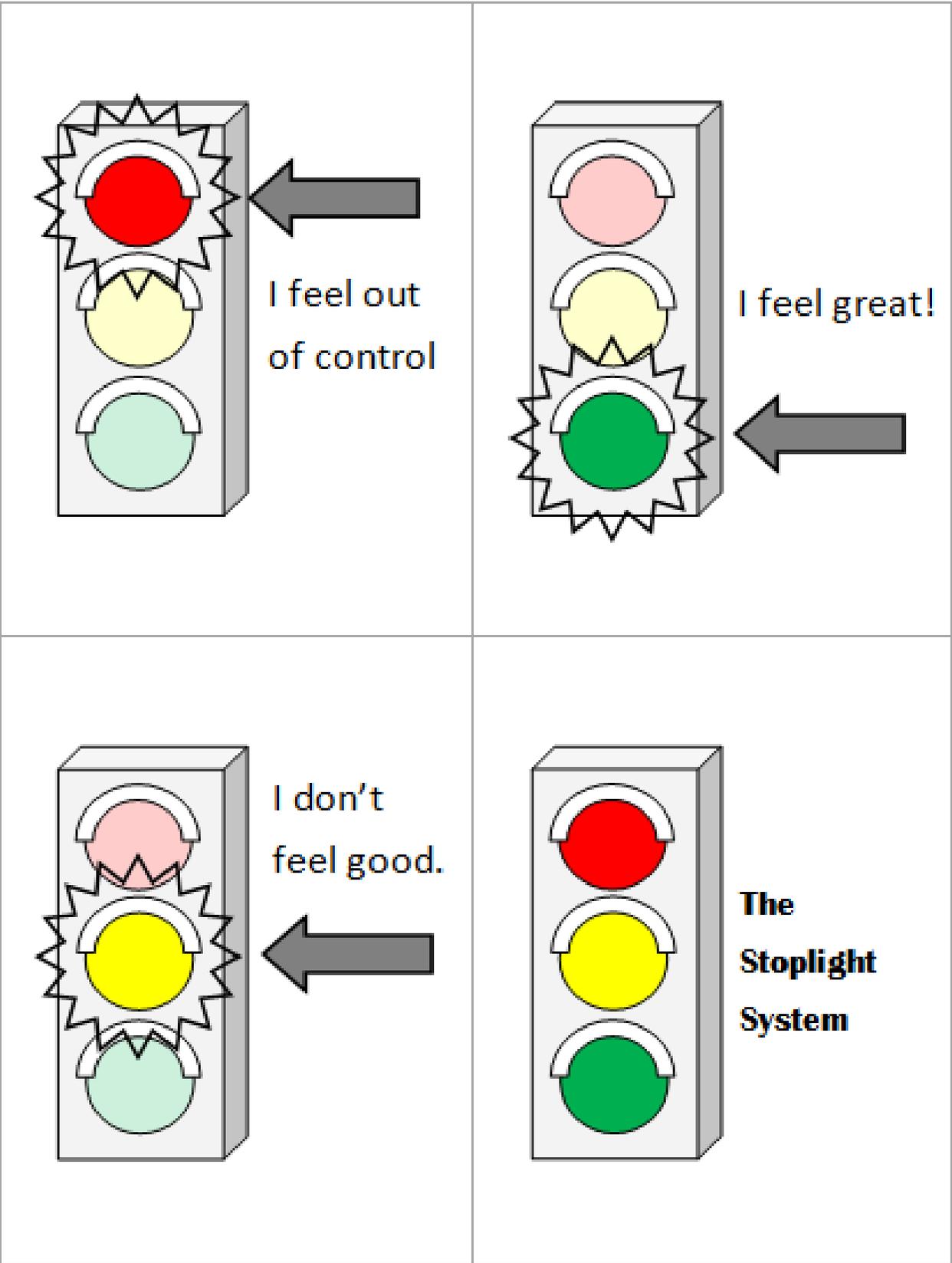
I feel out of control

Yellow—

I am starting to feel bad.

Green—

I feel good!



Take deep breaths.



Play UNO.



Go to the museum.



Discuss the consequences of actions.



Cook food.



Play basketball.



Recite a positive mantra.

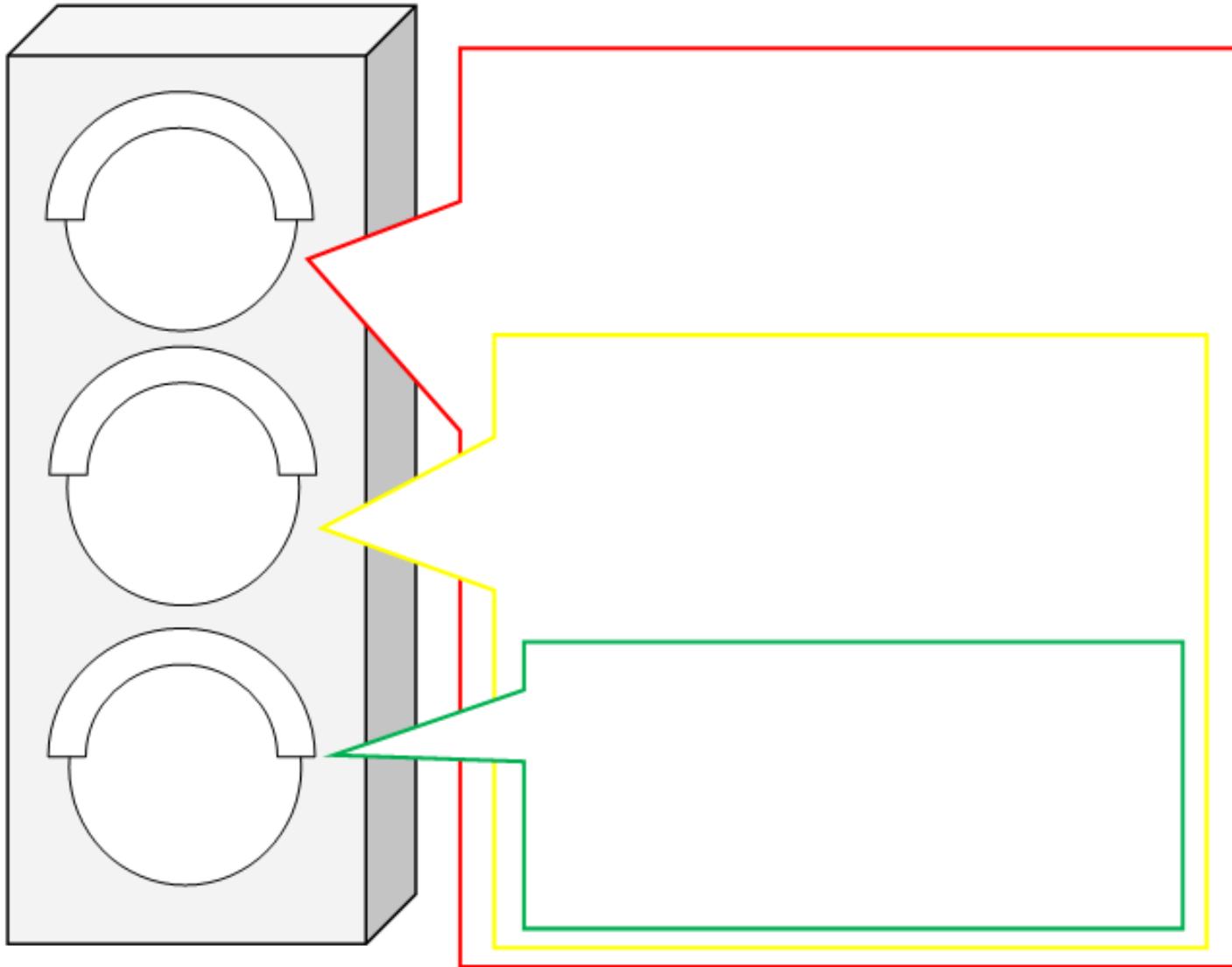


Use a quiet, safe place to relax.



The Stoplight System

What CAN I DO?



Stress Ball

Summary:

All people get stressed out, and it's important to have a way to cope with your stress. Some people find fidgeting with objects in their hands stress relieving. To provide the individual with a tool to support them in relieving stress and coping with difficult moments

Prep:

Bowl, cornstarch, balloons, funnel, spoon or scoop

Activity Breakdown:

1. Pour cornstarch into a bowl
2. Select one balloon and blow it up to approximately 4-5 inches in diameter
3. Do not tie off the balloon; rather, pinch the end of it and keep it full of air
4. Insert the funnel into the balloon while keeping the balloon pinched off, allowing no air to escape
5. Using the scoop or spoon, fill to the top of the funnel with cornstarch
6. Very slowly, let go of the balloon to allow the cornstarch to descend through the funnel into the balloon
7. Continue adding cornstarch to the funnel until the balloon is filled approximately 3 inches
8. Pull up tightly on the neck of the balloon, pinching out any additional air
9. Tie knot in balloon as close to the cornstarch as possible, leaving little to no air in the balloon
10. Squeeze or knead stress ball, and ask the participants if they like the feeling they get from squeezing or kneading the ball
11. Discuss situations in which the use of a stress ball would be beneficial

Emotional Charades

Summary:

Engage the guests in the game of charades to practice how to express their emotions appropriately. Facilitate self-expression, and to increase the guest's ability to identify and verbalize feelings.

Prep:

Materials: Large sheet of paper or writing board; Markers, Pencils, Small slips of paper, Container/hat

Activity Breakdown:

1. The facilitator should explain the purpose and goals of the group
2. Support the guests in brainstorming about a variety of feelings and record them on a sheet of paper or writing board. Encourage the group to think of twice as many feelings as there are participants in the activity
3. Provide each group member with a slip of paper and a pencil
4. Assign one or more feelings to each guest/staff participant to write on the slips of paper provided (one feeling per each slip of paper)
5. Have the all participants fold the slips of paper (one at a time) and place them into a container
6. One at a time, have the participants select a slip of paper from the container and act out the feeling. The participant acting out the feeling should not talk during the charade
7. As each participant acts out the feeling, have other participants guess the feeling being portrayed. The first member who correctly guesses the feeling takes the next turn
8. To stimulate discussion, ask the following questions:
 - a. What was difficult/easy about guessing what the participant was trying to portray?
 - b. What was difficult/easy about acting out the feeling?
 - c. What nonverbal gesture gave you the clue to the feeling?
 - d. Is your expressive style more verbal or nonverbal?

What is a typical nonverbal gesture you use, and what does it mean (e.g., shrugging of shoulders, holding your nose when something smells bad, or clenching your fists)?

Modifications

- Divide the participants into teams and designate one participant from each team to be the actor
- Have the chosen participant act out as many feelings within a three-minute time limit as possible
- As the actor portrays the feeling, have the actor's team guess the feeling. The actor will choose a new feeling each time a guess is correct, or the actor's team may pass if the feeling is difficult to portray or guess. The actor must eventually come back to the feelings that are skipped

Circle of Security

Summary:

This activity can be done as a magazine collage. Have participants cut out items that make them feel secure and comfortable. On one side of the sheet, items that represent feeling secure can be glued on, drawn or listed by the participants. Once complete, participants can discuss in group format, how these things make them feel secure and what other emotions may be attached to a sense of security. This presents a way to increase self-awareness and learn ways to identify positive emotions and ways to achieve them.

Prep:

Materials: Scenario cards/list; paper, drawing supplies (Pencils/markers/crayons)

Activity Breakdown:

1. The facilitator should bring all participants together in a quiet, calm area, and pass out paper
2. The facilitator should explain the activity using the sample collage
 - a. Have the participants draw or list inside the circle the people, places, things, or issues that contribute to them feeling secure
 - b. Have the participants draw or list outside the circle the people, places, things, or issues that contribute to feeling insecure. It may help to refer to the sample or have a sample list of items for the guest to pull from if needed/desired
3. Have the participants form a circle for sharing their "Circle of Security" worksheet and going around in the circle have each participate tell the group about what they created. (Only one guest speaks at a time.)
4. To stimulate discussion, you can ask:
 - a. How do these things make you feel? What emotions might you feel in response?
 - b. What is it about the secure items that make you feel that way?
 - c. How do the secure items affect your self-esteem, life, or the choices you make?

Relax and Breathe

Summary:

This activity promotes a positive emotional state by assisting guests in learning a calming and focusing technique that can be used when experiencing stress in other part of our lives. Items such as stress balls, bubbles and pinwheels are utilized to assist participants with recognizing their breathing rhythm and strength and to promote fun and enjoyment.

Prep:

Materials: Stress balls, Pin wheels, Bubbles

Activity Breakdown:

1. Guests can sit or stand in a comfortable, relaxed position.
2. There will be two parts to this exercise:
 - Breathing with stress balls
 1. Instruct participants to think of something that is calming to them
 2. Instruct participants to close their eyes if they would like
 3. Participants will take a deep breath through their noses and exhale through their mouths. They will squeeze the stress ball when inhaling and release when exhaling.
 4. Instructors will count to 3 slowly during inhale and exhale and participants will squeeze and release following this count.
 5. Participants will repeat 3 times.
 - Breathing with pinwheels or bubbles
 1. Instruct participants to breathe in through their noses. Show them how your chest rises when taking in a deep breath.
 2. Instruct participants to release their breath through their mouths and keep the pinwheel going as long as they can. Volunteers will count as the participant exhales.
 3. Repeat 3 times.
3. Ask guests; How did your body feel after you took some deep breaths? When do you think you can use this skill? Are there times in your life you can take deep breaths to help you calm down and focus?
4. High fives and praise for completing the activity should be given.

Guided Meditation

Summary

This activity is designed to promote relaxation and aid guests in learning skills to meditate. Guests are encouraged to clear/quiet their mind to trigger relaxation and ease stress and anxiety. This activity promotes relaxation, awareness and mindfulness.

Prep

Obtain guided meditation CD or script. A guided meditation CD can use a blend of nature sounds, musical mixtures and guided imagery. When using a script the center counselor should use a calming, soothing voice and speak slowly and clearly.

Activity Breakdown

1. Guests are given the choice which CD to listen to or script to use
2. Center counselor puts the CD on and asks the guests to get comfortable, so they can focus and relax
3. Guests follow instruction of the guiding voice
4. After instruction, center counselors begin a discussion with guests about how it feels to be relaxed

Relaxation Session

Summary

Relaxation sessions are designed to provide guests with structured time to focus on the relaxation of the mind and body. Center counselors will create a relaxing environment and provide specific instruction around relaxation skills.

Prep

Materials: relaxation CD and calming sensory materials or relaxation script

Activity Breakdown

1. Relaxation sessions are conducted in the sensory room. The room is to be set up prior to the guests entering – lighting off or low, relaxation cd playing, materials available
2. Invite all participating guests to the sensory room for the structured relaxation session
3. Have guests take a comfortable seat and introduce them to the activity. Discuss what will happen – the cd will play throughout the session, and a center counselor will read a script
4. Begin the reading of the script in a soft and calm tone. If/when necessary, center counselors provide gentle guidance and refocusing
5. Praise people for their focus and participation throughout the activity, but maintain a calm, soothing voice for all interactions
6. Discuss when relaxation sessions would be beneficial to use as a coping mechanism and how guests would be able to recreate a relaxing environment in their home
7. Once complete sit quietly for approximately 30 seconds and then gradually begin moving about. Allow guests time to get up and re-enter the other parts of the home

Sensory Room Activities

Summary

It is common for individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities to have sensory processing challenges and sensory sensitivity. This sensitivity can include all five senses. Guests can be sensitive to certain textures, weights, lights, sounds, etc. Sensory sensitivity can decrease a guest's threshold for stress and increase the likelihood that they may become upset when faced with a stressor. By engaging them in sensory activities (often called a sensory diet) regularly throughout their day, they will be more likely to handle stress effectively when it arises

Prep

Materials: Relaxation box containing relaxing sensory materials (including a beach ball)

Activity Breakdown

Deep breathing: Instruct guests to:

1. choose a calming manipulative. Guests are given the option of closing their eyes
2. take a deep breath in (like they are smelling the flowers) to the count of three
3. take a deep breath out (blowing out birthday candles) to the count of three
4. count to 5 slowly (with help of staff if needed)
5. repeat at least two more times
6. Select a stress ball/squishy/textured ball.
7. squeeze the ball two times and answer the following questions:
 - How does the deep breathing make you feel?
 - When is a good time to use deep breathing?

Toss the beach ball: Instruct participants to:

1. Sit in a circle (either on the floor or on bean bags)
2. Toss the beach ball to a participant. Use the following questions to engage guests in conversation about emotion identification and coping strategies:
 - What is something that is calming to you?
 - Name an emotion. What does that look like? (make the face)

Emotion identification: Instruct guests to:

1. Identify a manipulative (can use multiple manipulatives throughout the session and take turns switching in and out)
2. Answer each of the following questions and squeeze the manipulative three times and pass to the next guest to answer the same question: "Tell me something that makes you [*emotion*]?"
3. Emotions to include: angry, stressed, sad, happy, excited, nervous, disappointed, worried, irritated, calm

Poetry Slam

Summary

This exercise provides time for participants to prepare for the Poetry Slam, which is later performed as the evening activity. Poetry is a great way for people share something important about themselves with a group while building their self-esteem. It encourages guests to reflect on stories that are important to them and to develop ways of expressing those stories.

Prep

Printed copy of Poetry Slam Worksheet for each participant; Writing materials (Paper and pencil).

Activity Breakdown:

1. Briefly introduce the activity. **Script:** Tonight, we are all going to present a poem that each of us has created. This poem doesn't have to rhyme or even look like poetry. For some people this may be a joke that they made up, for others it will be a story that they want to tell about themselves. Everyone find a small group to work with as you begin to think about your poem. Counselors will help if anyone wants to write something down and need help with handwriting or spelling.
2. Ask guests and counselors to pair off into groups of twos or threes with pencils and sheets of paper to begin brainstorming material for the poetry slam.
3. All participants (counselors and guest) should work on writing a poem. Counselors should reassure guests whatever talent they bring to the poetry slam will be valued.
4. All participants, if they finish their poem within the allotted time, are encouraged to practice saying the poem out loud.

Modifications:

- Modifying lyrics of popular songs (rather than creating a poem from scratch) may be a useful way to loosen up participants who are intimidated by poetry.
- Use fill-in-the-blank templates to help people structure their poem/story.

My Story

My name is _____.

I grew up in _____.

I am really good at _____.

People like me because I'm _____.

I like myself because _____.

One of my favorite things to do is _____.

My favorite song is _____.

The thing that makes me happiest is _____.

Draw Your Future

Summary:

This activity is designed to promote creativity, begin the goal planning process, and allow guests to express their thoughts and feelings through creative outlets.

Prep:

Paper, Pens/pencils/markers

Activity Breakdown:

The Draw Your Future group is designed to assist guests in expressing their dreams and goals for the future and aid them in visualizing that future. This group should increase self-esteem, create discussion of future aspirations, provide a creative outlet, allow for the expression of goals in a nonverbal way, and create an environment of hope

Components of Draw Your Future:

1. Guests should gather around table
2. Center counselors should provide guests with markers, crayons, and colored pencils
3. Guests should be encouraged to discuss what they would like their future to be like
4. Center counselors should then encourage guests to draw where they will be in the future, what they will do, how they will look etc.
5. Center counselors should give words of continued encouragement and praise throughout the exercise
6. Guests should show the group their drawing and explain it
7. Center counselors should display the guests' work

Masks of Emotions

Summary:

This fun, artistic activity opens the door for creative self-expression of one's emotions while meeting kinesthetic/sensory-based needs. A visual guide can be created to walk the guest through each step of the activity.

Prep:

Materials: Paste: Flour & Water (and a Bowl to mix), Round balloons, Strips of newspaper, Acrylic paints, Sample of a finished mask

Activity Breakdown:

1. Share a sample mask and the purpose of the activity. Ask each guest to choose an emotion they want to portray on their mask. Discuss what emotion they chose to portray and how it is represented on the mask
2. Create the paste by mixing equal parts of flour and water (the mixture should not be runny)
3. Instruct each guest blow up a balloon and tie off (assist guests if needed)
4. Dip the newspaper strips into the paste/papier-mâché mixture and apply them to the balloon
5. Layer strips of newspaper on the balloon until one entire side is covered
6. Set the mask aside to dry. Drying time will vary based on the number of layers used
7. Once dry, pop the balloon, and paint the mask with acrylic paints
8. When the masks are fully completed, support the guest in sharing their masks in a group meeting later in the day/evening and ask how their mask represents their chosen emotion

Multi-Cultural Music Group

Summary:

This activity is designed to promote understanding of different cultures and allow guests to express their own culture through creative outlets. This provides guests with the opportunity to learn about other cultures, express their own culture, and express feelings.

Prep:

Music and information from the culture to be discussed
Instruments (such as drums, maracas, tambourines)

Activity Breakdown:

Cultural Music group is intended to expose guests to culturally specific music. Depending what culture has been selected that day, related music will be played. This group is designed to promote awareness of other culture's music, invoke feelings, promote discussions regarding other cultures as well as each individual's, and expose guests to new experiences

Components of Cultural Music group:

1. Guests should gather together to listen to music
2. Center counselors should present facts pertaining to the music of the day
3. Center counselors should play the music for guests, either via a CD or actually performing
 - a. If performing, center counselors should encourage guests to join in
4. Center counselors should discuss with guests the culture, type of music, and any interesting facts about the music
5. Guests should be encouraged to discuss the reasons why they liked or disliked the music, and any memories or feelings the music evoked

Talent Show

Summary:

The talent show is designed to build self-confidence, create group cohesion, provide an artistic outlet, and increase self-esteem. Each guest will choose a talent that they possess and practice this talent in preparation for the show. This activity is designed to promote creative expression, self-esteem, and group cohesion.

Prep:

The “Prep” portion of this exercise provides time for participants to prepare for the Talent Show performed as the evening activity. Helpful materials include karaoke machine, instruments, or music.

Script: *Tonight, we are all going to present a talent as part of our Friday night Talent Show. This talent can be anything! For some people this may be a song that they can sing well, for others it will be a cool thing that they nobody even knows they can do. James, for example, can meow exactly like a cat. So, as we get started, everyone look for a small group to work with as you begin to think about your talent. Counselors are here to help you!*

Activity Breakdown:

1. Invite all participants to a spacious room and arrange chairs in a semi-circle around the karaoke machine and/or stage.
2. The facilitator should welcome all participants to the talent show. **Script:** *Welcome everyone to the Friday Night talent show! I'm excited to see what everyone has to share with us this evening. Remember, for some people it takes a lot of courage to come up and share, so let's give everyone here a lot of support as they come to the stage and tell them how well they did after they finish.*
3. Each participant should be invited to take their turn performing their talent when they feel comfortable. Participants who are shy may benefit from seeing others demonstrate their talent before they take their turn. In many cases, a counselor may share a particular talent in order to demonstrate that the activity is safe and validating
4. When a participant's turn begins, everyone will welcome that person to the stage with either light clapping or the ASL sign for applause. While some participants may have a talent that requires a longer period of sharing (such as a song), others may have talents that they are able to perform quickly – be sure to invite the person to talk about their talent if they are able to demonstrate it quickly so that they can spend more time in the limelight.
5. As each person completes their performance, validate their contribution with praise and either light clapping or the ASL sign for applause.

Modifications

This activity is potentially very stimulating for people who have Autism and/or sensory processing disorders. Be sure to offer people who are easily overstimulated by loud noises the opportunity to use ear protection so that they can more comfortably engage with the group.

Therapeutic Jenga

Summary:

Build rapport with participants while engaging in Jenga

Prep:

Jenga game with therapeutic questions written on one side of each block (questions on next page). To support the participants in building rapport with one another, increasing empathy amongst the group, and building trust with disclosure of self to others.

Activity Breakdown:

1. Each player (including the facilitator and fellow staff members) removes one block from the stack of Jenga blocks without knocking the tower of blocks over. They will read the question on the block out loud and answer the question. At the conclusion of answering the questions, the person replaces the block on the top of the tower
2. If anyone is uncomfortable about answering any question on the block they selected, they can put the block on top of the tower without answering, but must take another block, answer, and stack that block on top of the tower
3. If a participant pulls a block she/he already answered, they also pull another block
4. The group plays until the tower falls and then celebrates all participation!

Modifications

- Based on the fine motor skills of the group, the game can be adaptive to pulling a block from a box/bin and answering the question on the block

What do you like to do in your free time?	Where is your favorite place?	How many times have you moved?
Who in your life do you admire most?	What is your favorite holiday?	What are your biggest strengths?
What is one thing you wish more people knew about you?	What makes you the most nervous?	What story does your family always tell about you?
What adult would you go to first if you had a serious problem?	Describe a nightmare that you can remember?	What do you think about being in therapy?

Getting to Know You

Summary:

Helps guest get to know one another by learning about interests/experiences/etc. Guests will learn appropriate conversational and friendship building skills.

Prep:

Writing utensils, paper

Select questions that you feel would best match the group:

1. Find someone who:
 - a. Had the same breakfast as you
 - b. Has the same shoe size (or hand size)
 - c. Has the same/a different religious belief
 - d. You haven't met yet, but would like to
 - e. Has the same favorite season
 - f. Has the same favorite sport
 - g. Has a pet
2. Find out from someone:
 - a. Where they were born
 - b. Where they live
 - c. A place they would like to visit
 - d. Their favorite memory
 - e. How many siblings they have
 - f. Their favorite vacation
 - g. Where they attend school

Activity Breakdown:

1. The facilitator explains the purpose: to get to know one another and practice asking others about their interests or experiences.
2. The facilitator asks a series of questions which can be written ahead of time on a large sheet of paper for the group to see, with accompanying pictures
3. The group interacts with one another and staff members to find out more about one another
4. There are multiple variations of this including but not limited to:
 - a. Two people can pair together and interview one another. At the conclusion of the time each person can present on what they learned about the other person
 - b. Each person must gather at least one fact about each person participating in the activity
5. Once questions are answered, guests present what they learned about their peers/staff members.

Modifications

- For visual learners, the series of questions can be modified to include pictures
- This activity can be turned into a bingo board game, and have the guests mingle with one another finding out information and as they check off the squares on the board game; whoever fills in five consecutive squares on the bingo board (horizontally, vertically, or diagonally) calls out bingo. As a group, the guests can review what they learned about their peers based on the bingo squares they checked off throughout the social encounter

Kind and Unkind

Summary:

This activity helps guests in identifying positive social interactions and encourages them to think about how to turn a social interaction that's not going well into a positive one. For visual learners, you can use visual vignettes of situations that a guest can describe what they think is going on in the vignette

Prep:

Materials: 2 poster boards—one titled "kind" and one titled "unkind", Markers, Paper, Scissors, Tape; Print and cut out kind and unkind statement cards and set out materials

Activity Breakdown:

1. Randomly present one of the kind or unkind statements to each group participant
2. Ask the participants to accurately place the statement on the corresponding Kind or Unkind board. As the guest place the unkind or kind statement on the board, have them share with the group what makes each statement kind or unkind
3. When all statements are attached to the boards, ask the group participants to restate the unkind statements, changing them to kind statements
 - a. Encourage discussion amongst the group as to which poster board (kind or unkind) they identify with more—which types of statements do they usually make?
 - b. Inquire what kinds of other kind or unkind statements the group has heard recently
4. As each unkind statement is transformed into a positive/kind statement, have the guests move the statements to the kind board
5. As a conclusion to the group, stimulate discussion on the advantages or disadvantages to making kind or unkind statements

Meals on Wheels

Summary:

Volunteer opportunity for guests and START counselors to be more involved in their community. Guests and START counselors deliver meals to those individuals in the community who are in need. Meals, including food and drinks, are picked up at a predetermined central location in coolers. START counselors follow a particular predetermined route with addresses of where to deliver meals. After delivering meals, coolers are returned to the central location.

Prep:

10-15 min. to review activity, expectations and scripts with guests prior to departure.

**The START program must have an already established linkage agreement with the local Meals on Wheels program.

Activity Breakdown:

1. Review and discuss purpose of activity and expectations with guests prior to leaving the center
2. Participants pick up meals/coolers from central location
3. During the drive to the recipients' location, conduct a "Social Rehearsal" – review 'script' with guests (walk up to individuals door and knock, greet individual receiving meals with introduction "meals on wheels, my name is _____, how is your day today)
4. Offer praise to guests. Return to van and prepare for next delivery
5. Continue steps 3 & 4 until route is complete then return to central location to return coolers
6. START counselors and guests process activity (How did guests feel helping others in need? Did guest enjoy participating in Meals on Wheels? What did guests think about the individuals receiving meals and their reaction? Do they feel it is important to volunteer and be involved in your community?) Get as much feedback from guests as possible