Creative and Therapeutic Approaches to Teaching Appropriate Behaviors

by Anne Welborn, MA, RBC

Why Fun is Important In Learning

- Is there any evidence to back up the notion that learning can and should be fun, or is this a deviation of our Protestant and Puritan heritage that declares that fun is the work of the devil and so anything worthwhile cannot be also fun?

Why Fun is Important In Learning (con’t)

- Neurologist and educator Judy Willis’s book “Research-Based Strategies to Ignite Student Learning: Insights from a Neurologist and Classroom Teacher” (ASCD, 2006) is one of many that have highlighted the learning benefits of fun.
Optimal brain activation occurs when subjects are in positive emotional states or when the material holds personal meaning, connects to their interests, is presented with elements of novelty, or evokes wonder. This is why attentiveness is so closely linked to positive emotional cueing and personal meaning. When there is connection to prior knowledge or positive emotional experience, new information passage through the limbic system will be enhanced. The thalamus will then “decide” to pay attention to the information.

What happens if students aren’t just bored, but afraid or hungry or in pain? They are not only ‘not having fun, but they are in varying states of discomfort and anxiety.” Laura Erlauer, in her book The Compatible Classroom (ASCD, 2003), explains that stress affects student attention as well and their learning:

Eric Jensen, another noted author in the field of brain-based learning, echoed this link between engagement, dopamine, and learning, but stressed that learning worked best when the activity was intrinsically meaningful to the individual. He notes in his book Teaching with the Brain in Mind (ASCD, 2005):
Fun means engagement, doing and learning what has meaning and purpose, and it means being challenged. Embracing this belief should have a profound effect on what and how we teach.

Fun implies that you are teaching the client to enjoy the behavior you are teaching so that they will want to learn. Fun in this sense is not entertainment or silliness. It is enjoyment of the learning process.

Activities need to be about more than fun in order to be effective. They can and should be planned to engage the client in direct, authentic fun lessons that focus on behavioral skills. In logical terms, fun by itself may be “necessary” (which I agree it is) but it is not “necessary and sufficient.” Perhaps we should call it something else, such as “focused fun,” or “skill-based fun.”

Connections, insights, participation, and engagement are ALL inspired by enjoyment.
Why Fun is Important In Learning (con’t)

- If done correctly, no explanation will be needed. Students should be taught to make connections and draw conclusions from what is done in the classroom to other subjects or lessons. Typically a “fun” lesson can be used as a “hook” to reel them in for a more technical lesson later. Once you have them on board, it is easier to engage them in more drill type activities if necessary.
- I have found over past few years that my clients often do not have the will to stick to difficult tasks like they used to. Then tend to give up on things that they perceive as ‘hard.” The fun gets them started and can be used at intervals to keep them going. Once they accomplish something they initially perceived as difficult they will feel a real sense of achievement.

Multi-Sensory Approach to Learning

- Studies have shown that we remember:
  - 20% of what you read
  - 30% of what you hear
  - 40% of what you see
  - 50% of what you say
  - 60% of what you do

- If we were to incorporate all of these methods (reading, listening, seeing, saying and doing) into the learning process, then you may surprisingly find that your retention levels rise above 90%.

Where to Find Fun Activities

- Pinterest
- Teachers Pay Teachers
- Face Book groups/pages
- You Tube
- Therapeutic activity books
- One Stop Counseling
- The Helpful Counselor
- Social Emotional Workshop
- Creative Therapy Store
- Self-Help Warehouse
- Specific websites:
  - autismteachingstrategies.com
  - kwowgba.com
  - positivelyautism.webby.com
  - practicalautismresources.com/printables
  - positivelyautism.weebly.com
  - autismteachingstrategies.com
  - kwowgba.com
  - positivelyautism.webby.com
  - practicalautismresources.com/printables
  - www.d2learn.com/BehaviorManagement/images
  - dx12.org/psychological-treatments
Where to Find Fun Activities (con’t)

Books:
1. Therapy Games: Creative Ways to Turn Popular Games into Activities That Build Self-Esteem, Teamwork, Communication Skills, Anger Management, Self-Discovery, and Coping Skills by Allana Jones
2. Therapeutic Interventions Using Non-Therapeutic Games: Behavior Basics for K-8 by Paula Cox and Farra Criswell
3. 104 Activities That Build: Self-Esteem, Teamwork, Communication, Anger Management, Self-Discovery, Coping Skills by Allana Jones
4. Ready-to-Use Social Skills Lessons & Activities for Grades 4-6 by Ruth Wellmann-Begin
5. Ready-to-Use Social Skills Lessons & Activities for Grades 7-12 by Ruth Wellmann-Begin
7. The CBT Art Activity Book: 100 Illustrated Handouts for Creative Therapeutic Work by Jennifer Guest
8. The Big Book of EVEN MORE Therapeutic Activity Ideas for Children and Teens: Inspiring Arts-Based Activities and Character Education Education by Lindsey Joiner
9. Impulse Control Activities & Worksheets for Elementary Students by Tonia Caselman
10. Impulse Control Activities and Worksheets for Middle School Students by Tonia Caselman & Joshua Carwell
11. Mindful Games: Sharing Mindfulness and Meditation with Children, Teens, and Families by Susan Kaiser Greenland
12. Creative Coping Skills for Children: Emotional Support through Arts and Craft Activities by Bonnie Thomas
13. More Creative Coping Skills for Children: Activities, Games, Stories, and Handouts to Help Children to Self-Regulate by Bonnie Thomas
14. Game Play: Therapeutic Use of Childhood Games by Charles E. Schaefer and Steven E. Reid
15. Children’s Use of Board Games in Psychotherapy by Jill Bellison
16. Therapeutic Activities for Children and Teens Cope with Health Issues by Robyn Hart
17. The Autism Activities Handbook by Catherine Pascuas
18. Everyday Games for Sensory Processing Disorder: 100 Playful Activities to Empower Children with Sensory Disorders by Barbara Sher
19. Games and Activities for Exploring Feelings with Children: Giving Children the Confidence to Navigate Emotions and Friendships by Vanessa Rogers
21. 101 Relaxation Games for Children: Finding a Little Peace and Quiet in Between by Allison Bartl and Klaus Puth
Goals of Session and/BSP
Age Appropriate vs Development Appropriate
Perfection—able to count or read?
Client's Interest
Length of Session
Multi-Sensory?
Number of Participants
Environment of Activity or Session
Dining Issues
Motor Skills

Types of Activities
- Handouts
- Board games
- Card games
- Puzzles
- Singing songs, musical instruments
- Physical activities/Sports
- Arts and Crafts
- Community Activities

Therapeutic Use of Games
- Sorry
- Monopoly
- Candy Land
- Uno
- Connect Four
- Jenga
- Trouble
- Scrabble/Words with Friends
**Therapeutic Use of Games (con’t)**
- Pick Up Sticks
- Operation
- Checkers
- Deck of Playing Cards
- Yahtzee
- Mr./Mrs. Potato Head
- Simon

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**Create Your Own Games**
- HeadBanz
- Pictionary
- Checkers
- Jenga
- Uno
- Beach Ball
- Puzzles
- Family Feud
- Jeopardy

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**Craft/Art Activities**
- Collage
- Acronym of Name
- Adult Coloring Books
- Mandellas
- Positive Self-Talk Cards
- Coping Skills Cards
- Self-Affirmation Rocks
- Before You Talk Flower
Craft/Art Activities (con't)
- Fidget spinners
- I AM .......
- Pudding Finger Paint
- Self-Esteem Bracelets
- Edible Slime
- Anger Tool Belt
- Coping Skill Fortune Teller

Therapeutic Books--Children
- My Mouth Is A Volcano
- What Were You Thinking
- Wilma Jean the Worry Machine
- Personal Space Camp
- Lying Up a Storm
- Soda Pop Head
- Making Friends is an Art
- The Color Monster
- Many, many more

Therapeutic Books--Children
- Cinderella
- The Pout Pout Fish
- Pinocchio
- Charlotte’s Web
- Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
- The Adventures of Tom Sawyer
- The Boy Who Cried Wolf
**Therapeutic Books--Adolescence**
- The Feelings Book
- Harry Potter Series
- The Hobbit
- Anne of Green Gables series
- Nancy Drew Series
- Chicken Noodles Soup for the Teenage Age Soul Series
- Hardy Boys Series
- It's Kinda Funny
- The Outsiders
- Bud, not Buddy

**Movies**
- Inside Out
- The Wizard of Oz
- Stand and Deliver
- A Mile in His Shoes
- Monsters Inc.
- Frozen
- Harry Potter
- Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Event

**Use Songs to Teach**
- Shake It Off---Taylor Swift
- Don't Worry, Be Happy---Bobby McFarrin
- Let It Go---Frozen
- Hakuna Matata---Lion King
- Happy---Pharrell
- Friend Like Me---Aladdin
- A Spoon Full of Sugar---Mary Poppins
- Why Should I Worry---Oliver & Company
Adapt Songs to Teach

- If You are Happy and You Know It
  If you are mad and you know it, take a break
  If you are mad and you know it, take a breath

- Old McDonald Had a Farm
  (Client Name) had a meltdown, oh, oh, oh, oh
  And when she got mad, she used her coping skills, oh, oh, oh, oh
  With a break, break here and a breath, breath there
  There a break, here a break, Everywhere a break, break
  When (Client Name) got mad, she used her coping skills, oh, oh, oh, oh

- Mary Had a Little Lamb
  Mary had a big, big fit
  B i g ,  b i g ,  f i t ,  b i g ,  b i g  f i t
  M a r y  h a d  b i g ,  b i t  f i t
  S h e  w a s  m e a n  a n d  c r u e l
  And everything that Mary said
  Mary said, Mary said
  Everything that Mary said
  She was mean and cruel.
  She was reminded to take a break
  Take a break, take a break
  She was reminded to take a break
  Which was in her quiet place
  She used her coping skills in her quiet place
  Breath e and count, breathe and count
  It made her calm and relaxed
  To use her coping skills

Adapt Songs to Teach (con’t)

- Pudding Paint
- Make scented playdough
- DIY Sensory Boards
- Edible stress balls
- Spider Races
- Tic Tac Toe Pool Noodle

Sensory Activities
Sensory Activities (con’t)

- Edible Slime
- Play Foam
- Scented Rice
- Scent Moon Sand
- Consider issues of PICA or dining issues
- Recipes/directions found on Pinterest

Applications

- Everyday Social Skills
- Middle School Confidential Be Confident in Who You Are $2.99
- Middle School Confidential: Real Friends vs. The Other Kind $1.99
- Bookabi (iPad only) free
  Create your own books in 2D and 3D; comes with backgrounds, characters, objects, and stickers; you can use your own photos and type in your own text; in-app purchases for additional items
- Story Patch (iPad only) $2.99
  Ability to create your own books; comes with 800+ illustrations; can change characters' facial expressions, body position, skin/hair color, and more; can import photos into the story; can e-mail a PDF of the story
- Now We're Talking free
  Conversation starters in speech bubbles; geared towards children/teenagers; tips for how to start/maintain/end conversations

Other Ideas to Consider

- Social Stories
- Community activities-bowling, eating out, movies, putt-putt, museums, ball games, etc.
- Journaling—creative prompts, mediums
- Random Acts of Kindness
- Use of household items; toys
- Use your creativity, ideas are limitless
Organization

- Daily vs Weekly
- By topic
- Bins, Baskets
- 3-Ring Notebooks
- Project Protectors
- Sandwich baggies

Discussion/Comments

- If you need any assistance or ideas in the future, please feel free to contact me at anne@michianabst.com