

## Attachment-Centered Play Therapy Activity Toolkit

*Selected from Clair Mellenthin workshop*

Youtube: Clair Mellenthin channel

[www.clairmellenthin.com](http://www.clairmellenthin.com)

### **Baby Powder Handprints**

Purpose:

Allows parents with opportunity for emotional involvement. Parents can reflect on their level of attunement with their child and their style of attachment.

Gives opportunity for parents to practice sharing positives of their child.

Materials:   Lotion (alcohol free)  
                  Baby powder or corn starch (fragrance free)  
                  Black construction paper

Activity Instructions:

Encourage parent to start massaging their child's hand and spread lotion on. Continue lathering more lotion and massaging as the parent answers the following questions.

Sample Questions

- Tell me about your favorite memory of these little, chubby baby hands  
*Happiness, fulfillment*
- What is your favorite memory about these little, messy toddler hands  
*Proud, respond to child's shared memories*
- What are your favorite things these big kid hands can do now  
*Reaffirm and validate child*

\*This activity requires the parent and child to have established trust. Touch must be safe before any stories can be shared.

## **Feeling Monster Box**

Purpose:

To enable the family to be able to share their emotions and reflect upon what emotions they are feeding.

### **Native American Folktale**

*There were once two wolves, one called Peace and the other Anger. They were constantly at war with one another. "Who wins?" the grandson asks as his grandfather is telling the story. "It depends on who we feed." The grandfather replies.*

Materials:    Empty Kleenex Box  
                  Paint, stickers etc.  
                  Egg carton (empty)  
                  Emotions chart

Instructions:

1. As a family choose an emotion that everyone in the family feels
2. Create/ decorate / paint a monster
3. Through the week, when anyone in the family feels this emotion, feed the monster. Write down the event and put it in the tissue box.

## **The Balloon Bounce Game**

(from Liana Lowenstein)

Purpose:

- To build self-esteem, respect and positive self-talk of each family member
- Enhance relationship where each member validates the other person's personal resiliency, resourcefulness, and improve communication
- Allows family members to see each other outside their current roles

Materials:    Sharpie  
                    Balloons

Instructions:

Blow up the balloons and write a question (see sample questions) on each balloon

Have everyone get in a circle and begin throwing two balloons in the air at the same time

If a balloon touches the ground, everyone will take turns to answer that question

Continue to add remaining balloons in until all the questions have been answered by everyone

Sample Questions:

- What is something you are proud you can do?
- Tell about a time you were able to do something difficult
- Tell about a time you felt proud of yourself
- Tell about a time you were nice to someone
- Tell about a time that you helped yourself feel better
- Say something nice to someone else in the room

## **The Walled-Off Heart Intervention**

(from Holly Willard)

Purpose:

Practicing the trauma narrative. Recognize and respect that our child needs to protect self and understands and honors the history and experience of child.

Materials: Paper & markers  
OR  
Sandtray, cookie cutter hearts

“When you were a baby, you had a pure little heart. It didn’t know pain, fear, worry of disappointment.

As you grow up, you had to build a wall around your heart to protect it.

Can you tell me about a time when you had to build a wall around your heart?

Do you think that instead of building a wall, can we build a bridge?

You can control this draw-bridge, when you want to allow people in you can put down this bridge.”

## **Tangled Up In Knots**

Purpose:

To illustrate that there are anxious family systems. A secure and healthy family is connected but also maintains autonomy

Materials: None needed

Instructions:

- Family stands in a circle facing each other
- Everyone puts their hands in the middle of the circle and grabs someone else's hand
- Once everyone is holding hands (very tangled up) explore what this feels like
- Now as a family they must untangle themselves without letting go of each other's hands
- When the family has untangled, what does it feel like now to have space but still be connected

## **Shaving Cream Feelings**

(Holly Willard)

### Purpose:

To give words to describe experience. What is seen at the surface is not what you may feel inside. We have to find what we feel and it is important to talk about it, express it and bring it out.

Materials: Shaving Cream  
Food coloring  
Bowls  
Spoons  
Paintbrushes  
Big Poster Paper

### Instructions:

Add a couple drops of different color dye into bowls. Then add shaving cream to each bowl. If you look at the surface, it looks so clean and white. But when we mix it, we can see that it is not the same as what we first saw. Now using these beautiful colors make a drawing on this big poster paper of a time you felt (grief/ sadness etc.).

## **You Are Special**

Purpose:

To re-frame negative self-talk

Materials: *You Are Special* (a book by Max Lucado)

A doll or a cut out of a doll

Dots and stars stickers

Instructions:

Read the book, *You are Special* to your child. Afterwards begin to cover the doll with the stickers-

“What would be some star stickers” of brilliant things you have done?

“Have there been times you felt really rubbish?” When the child shares a dot experience, parents rephrase it to change the statement to a star so the child no longer internalizes this.

## **Family Self-Esteem Mandala**

Purpose:

To encourage family unity as they explore what it means to be a family.

Materials: Elmer's Glue  
White paper plate  
Various colors of tissue paper squares  
Scissors

Instructions:

- Write down words of encouragement and inspiration on the squares of tissue paper
- Work together to create a mandala using these squares (fold, twist, scrunch up the squares). The mandala represents your family- *where they want to go/ who they want to become*
- Explore with the family their interpretation on the mandala and its importance in their healing journey



## **Spaghetti Towers**

Purpose:

Improve nonverbal and verbal communication between family members.

*Building the structure can also allow families to think about their home/ family, what helps the family stay anchored, and stand firm. .*

Materials: Marshmallows  
Spaghetti

Instructions:

Work together to build the tallest tower out of just marshmallows and spaghetti

The first time you do this, you cannot talk to one another

Now build the tower the second time, but this time you are allowed to talk

\*A good activity to do at the beginning of sessions

## **Measuring with Licorice**

Purpose:

A playful way to teach appropriate touch and nurture and how to ask for permission.

Materials: Candy that is long (Licorice OR Fruit by the Foot)

Instructions:

Invite parents to “measure” different parts of the child’s body using the licorice- an example would be how big their smile is, the length of their foot etc. Parent then feeds the licorice to their child.

## **Feeling Charades & Reverse Charades**

Purpose:

For families to be able to identify feelings and facial expressions together.

Materials:   Index cards  
                  Markers  
                  Glue  
                  Magazines

Instructions:

Invite the family to create feeling cards. Cut out different facial expressions from old magazines and stick it on the cards. Identify what emotion is expressed and write the emotion at the back of the card.

## **Communication Blocks**

(from Paris-Goodyear-Brown)

Purpose:

To show that all people process and receive information differently. We all have different perspectives and communicate differently.

Materials: Variety of blocks- make sure each person has the exact number of shapes and sizes

Instructions:

- Ask the family to sit in a circle with their backs to one another. Each person will have their own set of blocks, identical to one another. One person will be the director at a time.
- One person directs the family how to build a tower using all of the blocks. They are not allowed to look at one another, and the director can only use his words to give direction.
- Explore how watch of the block towers can be different even though they heard the same verbal message. Explore how miscommunication occurs in families.

## **Nurturing Spoons Intervention**

(from Jackie S. Gerstein)

### Purpose:

To reflect on how we give and receive nurture to one another. We need to help one another, but also respect each other.

### Materials:

- 3ft long 1/4" wooden dowel, with a spoon taped on one end, and a piece of colored duct tape on the other end
- M&M's or Skittles
- Bowl

### Instructions:

- Have the family form a circle. Give each family member a "spoon". Place a bowl of candy in the middle.
- Family members need to try and eat the candy using their spoons. The goal is to eat 2 spoonfuls using only 1 hand on the taped area of the spoon
- "The only way that we can eat the candy is if we feed each other"

## **Baby Memories**

(Evangeline Munns)

Purpose:

To remember that nurture remains important even as children grow up. And reflect on what nurture means and its positive impact.

Materials: None needed

Instructions:

- Form an inner circle standing and facing each other.
- Form an outer circle standing and facing inner circle
- Whisper to the person in front of you what you would have like to hear/ what you heard as a little baby
- When done, move to the next person and whisper the same sentence of something new
- Reverse circles and repeat
- “Often as we grow older, those words of doting and affirmation we speak so freely to babies are no longer spoken. After children reach a certain age, we forget to nurture”

## **Love Circle**

(Evangeline Munns)

Purpose:

Explore what it feels like to be praised. And explore potential struggles when the positive comments don't fit our self-image or attachment wounds.

Materials: None needed

Instructions:

- Family forms a circle. One person chooses to sit in the middle of the circle.
- The person faces each person, who will say a positive thing about them. The person in the middle does not speak.
- Take turns until everyone has been in the middle and received positive comments.