

Circle Up: Coping with Child Abuse

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TARGET POPULATION: *Victims of Child Abuse*

Note: *This activity is recommended for children who have experienced physical or emotional abuse. Children who have been sexually abused should not participate in this activity.*

AGE GROUP: *Upper Elementary (Grades 3-5)*

DEVELOPMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS: Children in this age group are going through major changes in their cognitive, social, emotional, and self-development. Cognitively, they are better at learning through guided participation through social interaction, using problem solving skills, and moving toward utilizing more concrete thinking skills. Socially, they place significance on interaction with their peers and are more prosocial. Emotionally, they are able to experience more complex emotions, identify emotions, and demonstrate better emotion regulation. They also have a multidimensional view of self and have more internal locus of control. Taken together, these changes are important to consider for this age group (Cholewa, 2016).

ASCA MINDSETS AND BEHAVIORS:

- 1. Category 2, Social Skills #2 - Create positive and supportive relationships with other students.*
- 2. Category 2, Social Skills #6 - Use effective collaboration and cooperation skills.*
- 3. Category 2, Self Management Skills #7 - Demonstrate effective coping skills when faced with a problem.*

OBJECTIVES:

OBJECTIVE 1: *Students will be able to identify three trusted individuals that they can go to for help if needed.*

OBJECTIVE 2: *Students will be able to identify three positive assets that they possess.*

OBJECTIVE 3: *Students will be able to identify two effective coping skills that they can use when they are facing emotional distress related to their abuse.*

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Laminated game squares and suggested layout (*Appendix A*)
- Charades list (*Appendix B*)
- Container (to randomly pull charade options from)
- Music and music player
- Timer
- Tape (optional - if you want to tape laminated game squares on floor)

- Check-Out sheet (*Appendix C*)

PROCEDURES:

Before the group comes into the classroom:

1. Recommended number of students should not exceed 4 (we are choosing to set the limit at 4 students because it would be difficult to fully address the objectives without each student having enough turns around the game board).
2. Determine how many turns each student will have based on time available and number of students (ideally that would be 3 turns).
3. Set up the game board by placing the laminated game squares on the ground in a circle. It is recommended that you tape the squares in place. For alternate layout options, see Modifications List (*Appendix D*).
4. Cut out charades activities to put into a jar or hat (see *Appendix B*).
5. Make sure age appropriate music is on the computer or player and ready to use.

When students arrive:

6. Provide a mini lesson on identifying trustworthy people, self-esteem building by identifying positive assets, and coping skills related to verbally processing the abusive experience and focusing on positive traits and abilities. Say: *We are having this group today because everyone here has been hurt by someone. This can be a scary experience and make us feel like we did something wrong. It can also be hard to figure out who to talk to or trust. Can anyone share with the group what makes an adult trustworthy? (Lead a discussion about trust and trustworthiness.) Sometimes talking to someone we trust can help us to understand and deal with our feelings. Another thing that can help us understand the feelings that we have is thinking about all the things we are good at. Coping skills are things you can do to make yourself feel better when you begin to feel unsafe or think about the scary and hurtful experiences that you all have had. This could include talking to a trusted adult who you feel like you can go to for help, and it could include thinking about all the things that you do well and what you like about yourself.*
7. Introduce the game. Say: *Today we are going to play a fun game called "Circle Up." This game will help us think about the people we trust and the things we like about ourselves so we can practice coping skills that can help us with our hurtful or scary experiences."*
8. Show the students the game squares and explain the activities that correspond with each one. Keep in mind that there are processing questions that should follow some of the activities as the children land on the squares (not after the activity is complete).
 - a. **"Get a compliment"** - the student chooses one person they would like a compliment from (1 square).

- i. Processing question to ask: *How does it feel to receive a compliment from your friend? Ask peer: How does it feel to give a compliment to your friend?*
 - b. **“Give a compliment”** - the student chooses one person to give a compliment to (1 square).
 - i. Processing question to ask: *How does it feel to give a compliment to your friend? Ask peer: How does it feel to receive a compliment from your friend?*
 - c. **“1 person you can go to for help”** - ask student to explain their choice (3 squares).
 - i. Processing question to ask: *In what ways can this person help you if you are in trouble or need to talk? What is something that you like about the person you can go to for help? What makes this person trustworthy?*
 - d. **“Tell us something you did well today”** (1 square).
 - i. Processing question to ask: *How does thinking about something you did well make you feel? Are there times or situations when you are not thinking positively about yourself? How does that make you feel? How can you change any negative thoughts into positive thoughts?*
 - e. **“1 thing you like about yourself”** (3 squares).
 - i. Processing question to ask: *How can thinking about what you like about yourself be helpful when you are feeling down or sad?*
 - f. **“1 favorite outdoor or indoor activity”** - ask student to explain their choice (1 square).
 - g. **“Play Charades”** - the student will pick out a sheet of paper from the jar or hat and act it out for their peers (1 square).
 - h. **“Group dance party”** - give students 30 seconds to have a dance party (1 square).
9. Explain how the rules work. Say: *The music will play and you can walk (or dance) around the laminated squares until the music stops. Once the music stops, you stop at the square in front of you. Only one person can be on each square. Then everyone will take a turn completing their activity square. Remember to keep your hands, feet, and bodies to yourself.* (Note: Only one student completes their activities at a time).
10. Check for understanding. Ask: *Does anyone have questions about this game or the activities?*
11. Start the music. Say: *Now let’s play “Circle Up.”*
12. Have students begin to walk (or dance) around the game squares until the music stops.
13. Each student takes a turn by performing the activity that they land on. Use the processing questions for the activities.

14. After the predetermined number of turns has been met or once there is 10 minutes left in the group, use the processing leads below to lead a group conversation about trust, peer support, self-esteem, and coping skills.

PROCESSING LEADS:

1. During the game, some of us shared a person they can go to for help/a person they trust. Let's make a list of some other people in the school or community that we can trust (i.e. school counselor, teacher, principal, coach, nurse, psychologist, doctor). We also discussed ways the people you talked about help you if you are in trouble or need to talk. Let's briefly summarize what some of those ways are (have students call out 3-5 ways).
2. During the game, some of us shared things they like about themselves. I want everyone to think of three things they like about themselves, and we will share them with each other. If you are having a hard time thinking of something, remember the compliments you or others received. I (the school counselor) can also help you think of something.
3. Can you think of a time when a friend at school made you feel better when you were having a bad day?
4. We have talked about two different coping skills (going to a trusted adult and thinking about the positive qualities about yourself). Can anyone share a different coping skill that they like to use when they feel sad or upset? (i.e. listening to music, playing a game, reading a book, playing with a cat/dog)
5. When you use some of these coping skills that we have discussed, how does that make you feel? Does it help with some of the negative feelings that you have?
6. During the game, some of us shared something they thought they did well today. What did it feel like to tell the rest of the group about this?
7. If you feel that you are in an unsafe place where someone could hurt you, what are some ways that you could seek help?

****Five minutes before students leave, have them fill out check-out sheet (*Appendix D*)**

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS: *Since black and hispanic children, children from low SES families, children from single parent homes, and children with parents who have lower education are more likely to experience child abuse (Turner et al., 2006), make sure to use inclusive language and pictures for charades. Also, since this activity takes place in a group setting, make sure to avoid any triggering topics or conversation to avoid PTSD for any of the students, especially those that are female, younger, African American, Hispanic, Native American, and those that have a lower SES, have prior psychological issues, have prior histories of trauma, and/or have a history of family dysfunction since these students are more likely to develop PTSD (Lawson, 2009).*

ADDITIONAL SESSIONS:

Objective: Students will be able to identify and practice three different mindfulness techniques to use when they are facing emotional distress related to their abuse.

Ideas: Counselor can do mindfulness exercises with students (such as breathing exercises and stretching) and explain how these techniques can be utilized when the student is feeling distressed.

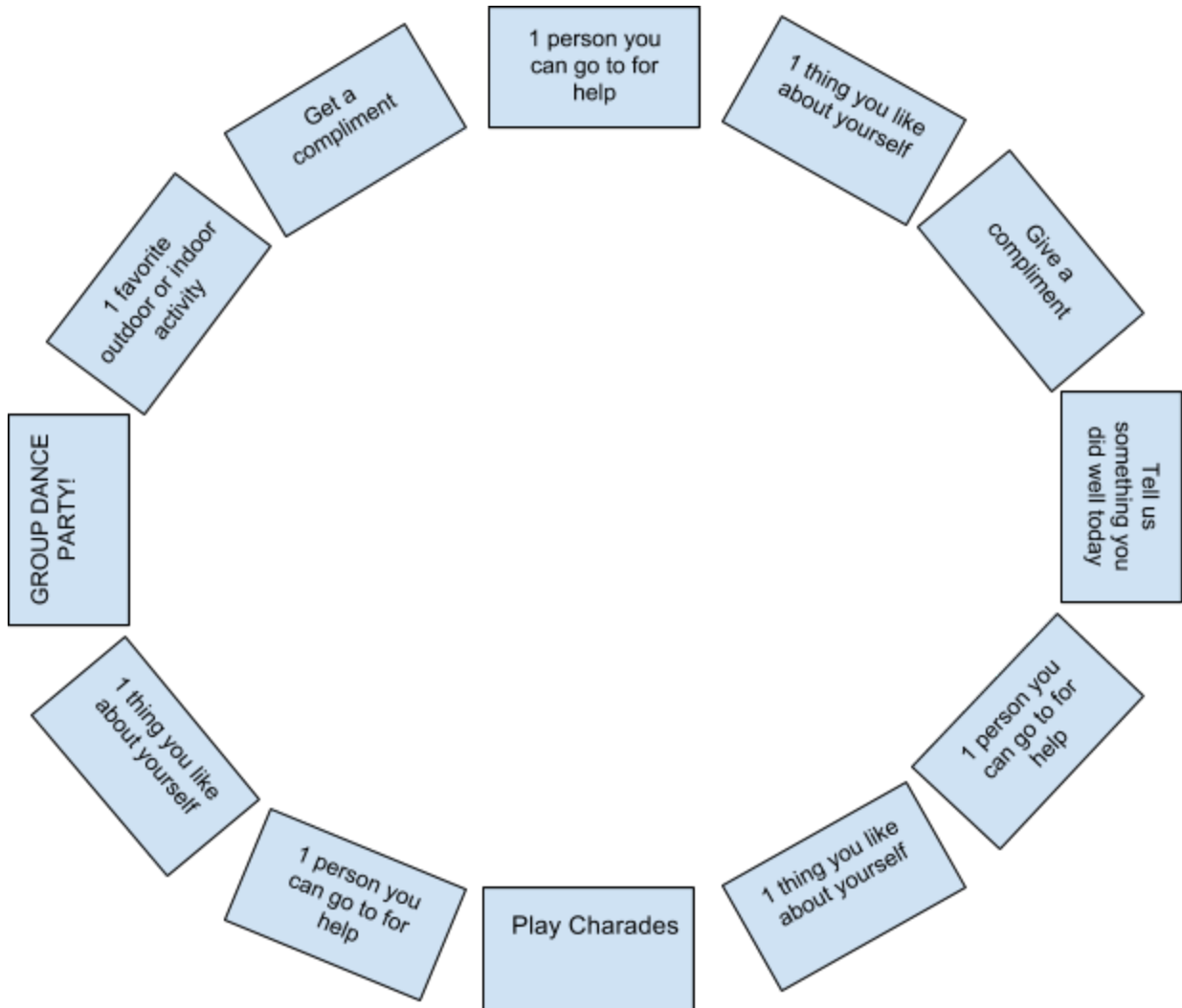
Objective: Students will be able to identify two coping skills from the book that they like and why they like it.

Ideas: Utilize bibliotherapy with the students by reading books related to child abuse and exploring different ways to cope with their trauma (i.e. *Healing Days: A Guide for Kids Who Have Experienced Trauma* by Susan Farber Straus)

References

- Cholewa, B. (2016). *Child and adolescent development* [Word document]. Handout for University of Virginia class EDHS 8340. Retrieved from <https://collab.itc.virginia.edu/portal/site/e73e9eaf-6e67-4ee1-9ffb-2d7d5aa54283/page/9da2a9eb-89fc-4d09-a231-1701dbb47707>
- Lawson, D. M. (2009). Understanding and treating children who experience interpersonal maltreatment: Empirical findings. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 87*(2), 204-215.
- Turner, H. A., Finkelhor, D., & Ormrod, R. (2006). The effect of lifetime victimization on the mental health of children and adolescents. *Social science & medicine, 62*(1), 13-27.

Appendix A



Appendix B

Charades

school nurse	brushing hair	excited	joy
teacher	driving a racecar	angry	fear
lion	lifting a heavy box	playing baseball	shark
elephant	running a race	sad	snake
bowling	rowing a boat	frustrated	dog
grandparent	school counselor	rabbit	principal

Modifications for Charades:

**Make sure you know who the child's abuser was - do not use them as a charade piece (example: if a child's parent was the abuser, do not use "parent" as a charade item)

**Have multiple emotion words on one piece of paper and have the child choose whatever emotion they would like to act out (example: "choose from: angry, happy, or sad")

**Feel free to add whatever else you would like to the charades game

Appendix C

Check-Out Sheet

1. Who are three people you can go to for help?
2. What are three things you like about yourself?
3. List two things you can do if you start feeling upset, angry, or sad about the scary and hurtful experience you have been through? *(answers can be something like: go to [the trusted adult] for help or think about my positive characteristics)*

Appendix D

Modifications

1. If there is not enough space in the counselor's office, utilize the cafeteria, gym, outdoors, or empty classroom. To maintain confidentiality, ensure that no one is utilizing that space.
2. You don't necessarily have to use music for the activity. You could have dice where students roll a number and move to different squares based on the number they roll.
3. Instead of having students only walk or dance around the squares, you could suggest a specific action for them to complete while moving from square to square (i.e. jump like a bunny to your next square, walk backwards, etc.)
4. Instead of putting game squares in a circle, lay squares randomly in the space provided and have students move to different squares every turn (could use music or dice)
5. You could position the game squares to be a "life sized" game board where there is a start and finish. Each student would begin on "start" and then they could roll the dice, move the number of spaces on the dice, and then complete the activity before the next person's turn.

