

Chapter 9:

Opening and Closing Activities

Opening Activities

Directive: Write your name on a large piece of paper and illustrate or decorate it.

Recommended Population: Everyone in a new group situation.

Intention:

- To build relationships and introduce group members
- To establish safety and trust and a level of comfort
- To facilitate self expression and stimulate sensory awareness
- To emphasize freedom in group therapy with a 'safe' starting activity

Metaphor:

- First impressions of: space, client, therapist, group
- Opening, a book, a door, etc.,

Therapeutic Precautions:

It is important to accept and honour all art and verbal communications. There is no wrong way to present oneself. As a therapist it is important to work starting where the client is.

Alternative Ideas:

Tell a story about your name and/ or nickname. Think about the stories told about your name, who are you named after, and the meaning.

Create individual mandalas around a large sheet of paper placed on the table and then draw connecting lines and fill in the spaces.

Draw yourself as an animal. Speak about the qualities you like about this animal.

“Telephone” or “Password”

Directive: This is not an art therapy activity, but it can be used to illustrate the importance of confidentiality in an art therapy group. This is a group activity where one group member whispers into the person’s ear beside them a sentence. Then that person passes it on until it goes around the circle and the last person says it out loud.

Recommended Population: Groups of children and young teens

Intention:

- To illustrate the importance of confidentiality
- To demonstrate the problems of distortion when a discussion is taken out of context and passes into the zone of gossip
- To focus on the importance of listening and the difficulty of accurate listening
- To realize the significance of first person contact

- To recognize the importance of being understood.

Materials and Method:

The sentence is passed around via whispering in the ear of the person beside you. The last person in the circle says the sentence out loud and it is compared with the starting statement. Try the same exercise and go the other way around the group. Allow a different individual to start the telephone game. Have the therapist start the game with a positive or funny statement.

Metaphor:

If it goes around accurately then it is an opportunity to compliment the group on their exceptional listening skills. If it is distorted then one can speak to the problems of distortion when information is passed from one to another.

Therapeutic Precautions:

It is not advised for groups where someone may have a speech impediment, or for groups with intimacy problems in regards to whispering in someone's ear. Someone may make a rude or derogatory comment that others feel uncomfortable passing on.

Animal, Plant and Machine or Tool

Directive: This activity can be done after an opening circle when each group member has introduced themselves and perhaps told a story about his or her name. This is a symbolic group feedback exercise in which each group member draws the name of another group member and the task is "to portray the person whose name they have drawn as some kind of plant, animal and machine" (Moon, 1992, p. 83).

All of the images are put up on the display boards and group members may wonder which images represent themselves. There can be some very interesting dialogue regarding perceptions and symbolic choices. It does need to be made clear that it is another's perception of you and not necessarily how you see yourself. This is a very interesting exercise for the beginning of a school year with training art therapists. Doing an activity like this after an opening circle can facilitate students getting connected and leads naturally into a discussion on interpretation

and symbolic representation on the importance of listening and the dangers of making assumptions.

Exploration:

- Have all the art up and let anyone identify if they feel that certain images are about them. If so the explore the associations to the symbols.
- Let the artist describe the qualities they noticed that lead to the choice of symbols.
- Let the group offer up who they think it might be.

Carousel

Although Sadie Dreiker (1994) writes about carousel in her book *Cows can be Purple*, this activity has been used and adapted by many people in many different variations.

Directive: When I introduce this activity I like to say something at the beginning like, “We are all going to work on these pieces of art together. You will get to start and finish one piece, but everyone else will contribute. As we go around the table, when I say ‘change’ you will move to the next piece and look at what needs to be added”.

Recommended Population: It can be introduced to groups of any age and it is a good team building activity. However, I would caution using it with children who might be attached to the images they make and upset by others “ruining” them. Disabled or elderly individuals might require the paper being passed to them instead of moving around the table.

Intention:

- To encourage creativity and playfulness
- To act as a dis-inhibitor by allowing individuals to participate in making art without worrying about the end product
- To reduce anxiety about art making
- To strengthen group connections
- To encourage creativity

Materials and Method:

- Paper, paints and brushes, pastels, markers, chalks

Set up the table with a sheet of paper for each group member. It can be any number from six to twelve. Place paints, brushes and drawing materials in the middle like a banquet. As this is a fast moving activity, it is great to have many sets of materials around the table so everyone can choose quickly what they will use for each different piece of paper.

Everyone is going to wait and start painting or drawing at the same time. They paint for a minute or so, and then the facilitator says, 'change' and they move one place around the table, similar to the Mad Hatter's Tea Party. This goes on until everyone is back to where they started. I like to give people a minute or so to finish anything they like on the piece they started. It is like having a conversation where you have an opportunity to respond. Then put all of the images up and look at the art together. Possible question: "Are there stories or images that you like or don't like?"

Exploration:

- It can be a great exercise to emphasize the importance of the individual's own interpretation of their art because images or marks may be easily misunderstood.
- Generally, in a shared activity of this nature the individual's personal boundaries are not so rigid.

Metaphor:

- Creating a family or party together
- Inclusiveness - everyone contributes together
- We are all parts of a whole
- "How did you feel adding to another's work?"

Therapeutic Precautions:

Strong feelings about boundaries may emerge. It is important to discuss in the beginning about how people feel about having other's drawing on their work. Sometimes it is beneficial to decide in the beginning whether or not this will be allowed.

Alternatives:

- a) Try with different materials and sizes of paper
- b) Vary lengths of time depending on group dynamics
- c) Have a theme at the beginning: making a garden or creating clowns
- d) Fold up people or creatures

Personal picture frames and Carousel Animals: A Group Activity

This is a large mural project introduced by Judith Siano (July, 2004) at a KATI workshop. Monica Carpendale facilitated a variation at the CATA conference in Oct. 2004 as a tribute to Shirley Riley and other mentors.

Directive:

- Judith Siano (2004) introduced a variation of carousel using paper folded into 3 sections of varying sizes – biggest at the bottom where participants draw/paint legs of any kind of creature, animal or person. It can be real, fantasy or science fiction. Don't paint the background. Then participants look around and move to another page with legs that they are attracted to and paint/draw the torso. Then after looking around, they move to another sheet of paper and paint/draw a head. Later the figures are cut out and placed on to a mural sheet as if in a group portrait. The mural also has a series of steps to be created.
 - Hint: Start with the legs because that is where there will be the least anxiety and self-criticism. Then the next part becomes a response to what has already been created. It is a metaphor for social construction.
- Start with a large piece of black paper from a roll of building paper. Put it up on the wall (preferably) or it can be done on tables or the floor.
- Hand out small pieces of paper (squares 4" x 4" approximately) and have participants draw an image spontaneously with oil pastels. Then have the participants choose a piece of coloured construction paper as a "frame" on which to place the first drawing.

Ask the participants to write associations to the image on the coloured paper.

- Next have the participants take turns sharing the image and speaking the words and associations and placing the coloured paper and image on the black paper with tacks. Ask everyone to look at the whole placement on the black paper before the next person chooses to place the image and share associations. When everyone has placed his or her image, each person chooses an oil or chalk pastel to make a frame around the paper image.
- Then ask the person on the outside edge draw a line of connection to the image on the far opposite edge. This line of connection is from the frame to the frame and is not to cross over other images or frames. Then have everyone draw lines of connections to each other's frames. Don't cross over frames - just attach to them.
- Next have all the participants choose another colour to fill in the spaces between the lines without covering up the lines. Depending on the number of participants you might suggest that if everyone fills in at least five spaces it will soon be all filled up.
- Later, either in the same day workshop or at the end of the week, the images and associations are removed and then fold up carousel creatures are placed in the positions of the images like a group portrait and photographed. Group members can also take the position they had placed the creature in, and copy it for the group photograph.

This activity is a good way for participants or students to get to know each other at the beginning of a school year or at the beginning of a workshop. It provides an opportunity for personal expression within the group context and it also emphasizes the importance of respecting boundaries. Be aware that participants may have concerns regarding personal boundaries and respect. They may have difficulties

regarding connections and intimacy and where to situate themselves in the group. The silliness of placing the fold up animals in a group portrait functions quickly to reduce anxiety and increase permission for playfulness.

Anger thermometers

Directive: Have individuals draw a thermometer and write in the words that mean for them how anger can get hotter and hotter. Have them show where they are right now on the thermometer. This is not an art therapy activity; however it can be useful as a springboard into discussion about issues of anger.

Recommended Population: children and young teens

Intention:

- To explore different ideas and concepts regarding anger
- To release anger
- To develop self awareness about the development of anger

Materials and Method:

- Pastels & markers with paper

Metaphor:

- To determine the progression of anger and the idea that anger can rise and get hotter, but it can also subside and go down
- Metaphor of anger as a fever

Exploration:

- What words do you use when you are angry?
- How do you look when...?
- What helps to cool your anger down?
- Size, intensity, language use
- What starts the anger up?

- How, and why does it intensify?

Therapeutic Precautions:

Be prepared as it may escalate or solicit painful or aggressive disclosures.

Alternatives:

Cartoons: Drawing instant replay cartoons to illustrate how the anger gets started. Introduce the use of spoken word and thought balloons.

Anger volcano: Make a clay volcano and put in baking soda and then pour in vinegar and red paint. It will bubble over. Talk about releasing anger. Use a tray or pie plate to provide a base and container for the metaphoric flow of anger.

I packed my bag to Paris or Timbuktu....

Directive: I packed my bag to Timbuktu and in it I put _____ (things that make me angry). Variation on “I packed my bags to Paris”.

This is a group activity that might be used in an opening circle. Each member of the group will say what makes them angry, but first they must say what each person before them said sequentially in the circle, and then add theirs at the end.

Recommended Population: groups, children, preteens, and young adolescents

Intention:

- To release angry feelings
- To develop listening skills
- To remember what others have said
- Get support for expressing anger appropriately

Materials and Method:

A group gathers in a circle. One person starts by saying the opening phrase and adding what makes them angry. The second person says what the first person says and adds their cause of anger. This pattern continues around the group until the bag is full. At this point the group needs to decide if they will take the bag to Timbuktu or dispose of it differently. You can go several times around the group if people are able to remember what has been put in the bag. Disposal of the bag is very important.

Metaphor:

- To have your concerns heard, witnessed, repeated and reflected back.
- To provide group support - group discussion regarding the disposal of the bag is important.

- To give permission to give expression to pet peeves or major issues.
- To release angry feelings.
- To provide support and humour.

Therapeutic Precautions:

It is important to not allow just names, but rather to focus on the behaviour that makes one angry. For example, not just putting Sally or Tom in the bag, but focus on naming the behaviours “When Sally pinches me ...”, or “When Tom won’t play with me ...”.

Alternatives:

- Choose other focuses i.e.) put your strengths in the bag
- As a name game – one could add something that you like to do.

Closing Activities

Symbolic Gifts

Directive: Each group member draws, in a carousel, a symbolic “gift”, for the person named on the separate pieces of paper they have received.

Recommended Population: Groups.

Intention:

- To gain a sense of closure and summation
- To emphasize strengths
- To promote object constancy

Metaphor:

- To say goodbye and give a symbolic gift
- To honour group members and to leave graciously.

Therapeutic Precautions:

Some clients may have strong feelings towards the therapist around closing. Some may be very negative and some positive.

Heart Cards: Cut out large hearts and decorate them with the name of each person in felts or coloured glitter using glue to write with. Pass around hearts and each group member writes something positive.

Fortune cookies: Take a bag of fortune cookies and write new fortunes to insert.

Thank you poems: Write a list poem where every line starts with thank you for ...

Art Review

An art review can be used in closing or, periodically, to review the art therapy process. This is a unique aspect of art therapy as there is a visual record of work done through the process. Taking the time to put up the art and look at all the work can be an integrative part of the therapeutic process. The essential feature of art reviews is to look through all of the client's, or student's artwork. It can be looked at individually, or hung up like an art show. There are many ways to do this but it is very important to experience and witness the multitude of ways to do an art review. It is an integral part of the therapeutic relationship between the client, the art and the therapist.

Explorations (some ideas)

- To look at the art chronologically and discuss the essence and associated insights;
- To look at images that one likes or doesn't like;
- To consider the use of colour and see how it changes through the artwork;
- To consider the styles used and the evolution through the process;
- To discuss artwork that perhaps hadn't been debriefed;
- To consider the key symbols and the relationship between images.