Sandtray Circles: Messages About Me

Goals: increasing self-awareness and ability to express feelings, identifying negative thoughts and messages and replacing with positive affirmations, building social support

Supplies: Sand tray, miniatures, colored pens, paper and scissors (or pre-cut papers for banners)

Instructions-- Ask the client to:
--Choose a miniature to represent themselves; place in the center of the sand tray
--Choose a miniature to represent each important person in his or her life (family, friends, teachers, etc.)
--State something that each person might say to him or her
    --This statement will give you information about client’s perception about how others view him or her. These statements may be positive or negative.
--Therapist writes the statements down on small banners and places them next to each chair.
To further empower the client, you may ask the client to choose the color for each statement
--Ask client to identify how each statement makes him or her feel, and write that feeling next to the statement. Ask the client to choose the color for each feeling
--Finally, for each negative statement, ask the client to think of a positive statement that each person might say instead.
--Discuss client’s feelings/reactions to the activity, and discuss self-talk.

Activity adapted from “Sandtray Circles” by Paris Goodyear-Brown, 2005
Body Language Role Plays

**Goals:** increasing self-awareness, self-efficacy, and skills to increase peer relations and support.

People with low self-esteem often expect others to reject them. This role play helps children become more aware of the messages they send through their body language, and teach them how to invite positive interactions that could help them gain more peer support.

**Instructions:**
--In group therapy, choose some members of the group to be “actors” and some members be the audience. Take the actors aside and give them specific types of body language to act out in front of the group. In individual therapy, the therapist will be the first actor and the client will be the audience.
Ask the “audience members” to answer the following questions:
1) If you had never met these people (or this person) before, what would you think about them?
2) What would you think this person might be thinking or feeling?
3) How easy do you think it would be to go up and talk to this person?
4) If you were just meeting this person, do you think it would be somebody you would want to be friends with?
Have the group members switch roles, repeating the same body language in order to give all of the group members a chance. Repeat the exercise using different body language. This activity is most effective if the first round involves negative body language, and then is followed by positive body language.
Video Message to Your Family

Goals: Self-expression, empowerment, self-efficacy, building family/social support
Many children have a difficult time expressing their feelings to their family and others. This activity gives children a chance to plan and practice expressing themselves in the safety of the therapeutic session, and then empowers them to be able to convey this message to their family through video.

Instructions:
--Instruct client to write down a message to their family. It can be in the form of a poem, a song, or simply a script
--Video record the client saying the message
--Watch the video with the client and discuss how it feels to hear their message
--If the client feels comfortable doing so, invite family members into session to watch the recorded message with the client
Transport Yourself- Collage Activity

Goals: Self-expression, goal-setting, instilling hope, building positive feelings

Supplies: Photo of client (taken in a prior session), printed in multiple copies/variety of sizes; magazines with photos of various places, people, and things that may interest client; scissors, glue sticks, paper

Instructions:
--Prior to doing this activity, take a photo of client in a previous session. Print the photo in a variety of sizes for this activity
--Invite client to look through the magazines and choose pictures or drawings that represent something they like, including things they are good at, places they want to go or things they want to do in the future.
--Cut out the pictures and glue them onto paper. You can put them all on one page, or use multiple pages if desired and create a book.
--Cut out the photos of client and have client glue them onto the magazine pictures.
--Ask client to imagine themselves going to the places and doing the things in the pictures. Ask them to identify feelings and thoughts they would have while doing those things. To help client identify social support, you may ask them if there is anyone they would like to bring with them on their “adventure.”
--After the client has finished the project, invite him or her to create a title for the book or page (such as “My Adventures,” “My Magical Places,” or “My future travels.”)

Variation: For clients who like to draw, this activity can be done with drawings rather than magazine pictures.
**Who’s in My Corner?**

**Goals:** Identifying and building social support
Many children with low self-esteem feel like they don’t have anyone who likes them, supports them, or is interested in them. This activity is designed to help them challenge negative beliefs and perceptions, and to identify and seek out positive role models and sources of social support.

**Instructions:**
--Ask the client to identify people in their life who are (or might be) supportive of them. If the child cannot think of anyone (or only lists a few), ask him or her, “If you accomplished something really wonderful, who do you know that might be happy for you?”
--Make a list of everyone the child can identify as a support. The list should include family members, teachers and school personnel, peers (if applicable), and the therapist.
--Go back down the list and ask the child, “If you had a problem, which of these people could you go to for help?” Go down the list and have the client put a check (or a star) next to the people he or she could go to for help.
--Discuss the list with the client, noting how many people the client has for support. Having the list on paper provides the client with tangible proof that there is are supportive people available for him or her.
--For anyone on the list to whom you have access, you can help the child go to that person and ask them the two questions. This can not only further validate the fact that the client has that person for support, but it can help the person become aware that they are a source of support for the client.
My Special Stone

Goals: Appreciating uniqueness, accepting differences, and addressing challenges and adversity

Supplies: Polished and unpolished rocks of various shapes and sizes

Instructions: Present a basket of stones to your individual client or group. Have each client choose a stone that they like and hold onto it.
Talk to your client or group about what stones go through to get polished. Note that if a rock stays in place, it often stays rough and grey, but stones that go through a lot - the ones that roll down riverbeds or endure rain or sandstorms -- get more polished with each new experience they go through. These changes don’t happen overnight, though. It takes time for the stones to build up their luster and unique markings.
Have your client look at the stone they chose and discuss their feelings about the stone as well as their own experiences with adversity. Examples of discussion questions are:

--What words would you use to describe your stone? What about it made you choose it?
--Does the stone have any marks or cracks? How do you think they got there? Do they make the stone seem “flawed,” or do they make the stone more special and unique?
--What do you think the stone went through to get to this point?
--Have you ever been through something difficult? Do you think the experience changed you at all? In what way? Do you think it’s possible for someone to get stronger after having gone through something like that? Does it happen right away or does it take time?
Exercise to Enhance Gratitude

- Make a gratitude list
- Keep a gratitude journal
- Write thank-you notes, or send a letter or card to someone you appreciate
- When children are given a gift, help them think of the steps the giver went through to get it for them. Remind them that the person was thinking of them while they were picking it out. For instance: “Your Aunt Sue went looking for a gift she thought would be perfect for you, and this is what she picked. She thought of you while she drove to the store, and looked through all the things they had to find just the right one. She must have known how much you liked to read, because she picked out this wonderful book for you.”
- Address gratitude in family sessions by having each family member say one thing they are grateful for
- When good things happen, ask the child to think of the people (including themselves) that made it possible along the way, and how each of them helped make it happen
- Teach parents to recognize and reinforce their child when they notice them showing gratitude. For example, you could say “I noticed you thanked your brother for helping you with your homework. That was very nice of you to show him that you appreciated his help.”
- Use technology: Have your child use a camera or video recorder to take photos or videos of things they are grateful for. Then you can share some enjoyable quality time viewing their creative results together. (Many thanks to Todd Jensen for this wonderful suggestion!)
- Add a spirit of giving to a child’s wish lists by having them also make a list of things they can do to help others. Thinking of things that other people may appreciate can also contribute to a sense of gratitude.