

**SOCIALIZATION GAMES FOR
PERSONS
WITH DISABILITIES**

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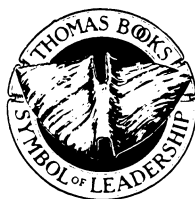
Structured Group Activities for
Social and Interpersonal Development

By

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PREFACE

The purpose of *Socialization Games for Persons with Disabilities* is to provide professional and support personnel with a practical framework for encouraging positive social behavior. Although the socialization game approach was conceived of as a technique for working on institutional living areas for persons with mental retardation and severe behavior problems, the approach has been used with different populations in an array of programmatic environments. Since the publication of *Socialization Games for Mentally Retarded Adolescents and Adults* (1980), hundreds of games have been introduced for therapeutic use. Games have been used effectively with children, adolescents and adults with a range of functional abilities and limitations. Settings have included vocational, rehabilitation, educational, residential and treatment programs. Thus, teachers, social workers, counselors, psychologists, vocational and rehabilitation specialists and recreation therapists, as well as direct support staff, will find this book relevant to the social development of persons they serve.

The design of the book lends itself to the implementation of a socialization program. The first section introduces the socialization game approach. It provides an overview of the development of our approach, then, a rationale for the use of socialization games and a discussion of their design. As our approach requires a group format, section two outlines specific considerations one should take into account when forming a group. The third section is devoted to group leadership. It focuses on desirable characteristics of a group leader and examines the goals and tasks of group leadership. The fourth section describes three types of group programs designed to focus on basic social skill development, work adjustment and conflict resolution. The last section includes a game assessment scheme that analyzes, along several dimensions, over 100 socialization games that are presented in this section. The assessment scheme will assist leaders in selecting games that are appropriate for members of their particular group.

We want to emphasize that it is not our intention to provide readers with a packaged approach to a socialization program. We hope that our concepts and ideas will blend usefully with the reader's own creative ideas and plans. Through such collaboration, we can realize more innovative and practical ways of providing critical programming in the areas of socialization and social skill development.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the significant contribution that numerous individuals have made to assist us with the completion of this revision. First and foremost, we would like to thank our mentor and friend, Barbara Edmonson, for her persistent encouragement and support of our efforts throughout the project. Barb revitalized the game approach and us in the process. We also wish to recognize our secretary, Barbara Lewis, who spent countless hours preparing and revising our manuscript drafts. Finally, we would like to express our sincere appreciation to the many individuals who have cooperated with and contributed to the development of our games. Beginning with the unique contributions of the game group at Forest Cottage and continuing with countless other participants in many different game programs, we have learned much about designing games that work. Feedback and suggestions for modifications from group members have been essential to the development of new games. We have also continued to be affirmed, by persons of all ages and abilities, that socialization games provide a fun and interesting approach to learning more about ourselves and developing positive relationships with others.

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**SOCIALIZATION GAMES FOR
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SECTION 1

THE SOCIALIZATION GAME APPROACH

BACKGROUND

The socialization game approach evolved over a two-year period of work on two security areas of a state-operated developmental center for persons with mental retardation. Most of the thirty women who lived in these areas were functioning in the moderate range of mental retardation; others, in the severe range. Almost all of the women had adequate levels of self-care skills, but were characterized by high levels of aggressive and destructive behavior. Because of their severe difficulties in getting along with others they were, for the most part, excluded from programming and were confined to their living areas around the clock. Threats, insults, screaming, fighting, biting, and the destruction of property were frequent occurrences. Distrustful of interpersonal contact, many of the residents spent much of their time isolated in the corners of their living area or lying on their beds. Positive social interaction between the residents was rare. Occasions for positive group social interaction were seldomly provided.

Conditions on the living area contributed to the atomistic behavior. Many of the women had long histories of institutionalization characterized by deprivation, punishment and abuse. Overworked and undertrained aides lacked the motivation, knowledge, or the technical support to implement habilitative activities. A primary goal of the aides was to maintain control. They attempted this by keeping residents apart and isolated and by severe punishment for transgressions. A frequent punishment was to take a prized possession from a resident who may have broken a rule, or acted out. This would result in an outburst of rage, and a whole cycle of behavioral contagion would be set in motion. The punished resident would displace her anger onto someone lower in the pecking order and the displacement response would continue until virtually every resident was involved in verbal or physical conflict. Some of the aides would show favoritism towards a resident, showering her

with special privileges. As material resources were scarce, this special treatment often resulted in the favored residents being attacked by their peers. A strategy for an attempt at control was to use the most feared resident at the top of the dominance hierarchy as an “enforcer,” with the privilege of punishing others. Because the residents of these areas were being managed through isolation, intimidation, and punishment, little warmth and few attachments existed between them. Lack of interpersonal trust pervaded the environment.

As a special project, to strengthen and supplement an innovational behavioral program (Edmonson, Moxley & Nevil, 1980; Moxley, Nevil & Edmonson, 1980; Edmonson, Nevil & Moxley, 1980; Nevil & Edmonson, 1980) we planned the socialization game activities with a goal of shaping positive interaction between peers, and with a secondary goal of improving the interactions between the direct care staff and the residents. In part, this involved changing the negative valences that each person represented to the others into positive values. The methods we used via the games were basically those of desensitization, and of developing or strengthening social reinforcers such as attention and praise that could be used as contingencies for positive interpersonal behavior. Also, because of their years of depersonalization, games were used to make residents aware of their own attitudes and attributes in addition to those of others. Through trial of the games we invented, we discovered what was characteristic of the most successful, and it became continually easier to design additional activities.

Since our initial socialization game program, the therapeutic use of games has dramatically expanded. Our games have been used programatically in vocational, school, and residential settings to focus on specific vocational or habilitation goals. We have also used games within individual and group counseling sessions to improve relationships among family members, peers, and caregivers. Numerous educators and practitioners have similarly expanded the application of the socialization game approach. *Game Play (1986)* was “the first state-of-the-art work” that focused on the psychological significance of using games with children and adolescents. The book featured sections on therapeutic socialization games for use with adolescents in group therapy; juveniles with delinquent behavior, and persons with mental retardation. More recently, Shapiro (1993) in *The Book of Psychotherapeutic Games* noted that hundreds of therapeutic games have been published since the mid 1980s. The popularity of the games appears to be due to many factors, includ-

ing that they are easily learned, can be used by a wide range of professionals and paraprofessionals, and can be adapted to address most any need in any setting.

WHY USE THE GAMES?

We have found that socialization games are effective at holding the interest and attention of participants while they expand or try out a new behavioral repertoire. The laughter, the action, and the recognition that group members receive provide sufficient incentive to enable most individuals to learn skills ranging from basic group behaviors such as sitting and turn-taking to more complex group interactions such as interpersonal problem-solving and peer/team support.

The games are especially useful in promoting peer interdependence when the leader, after giving a demonstration, encourages the members to direct or to help one another in subsequent trials. Certain games are designed to require mutual assistance from the participants.

Socialization games are designed to enable all group members to feel like winners. In the games, players can be coached to better performance levels without their feeling they have failed at something. The warm and enthusiastic game leader, by focusing on the players' strengths and successes, helps to desensitize members to critical feedback and build self-confidence. There are no right or wrong responses, but only different or more effective ways to play. Playing the games can have a positive carryover effect on the interactions that group members have with others outside of the group. Generalization is, of course, more likely when other support people join the leader and the group members in the games. Through playing the games, the support people become more aware of socialization goals and their importance.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GAMES

As is more fully described in Section 5, the games focus on five socialization goal areas. The most basic set of games, interpersonal distance "Learning to be Close to Others," encourages group members to interact within close proximity. This socialization area is important in helping people with behavior problems learn to tolerate closeness to people whom they have not trusted in the past. In one of these games,

“Blow Round,” participants sit closely together around a table in order to keep a ping pong ball from being blown off the table by others.

Another set of games has the goal of self-awareness or “Learning About Myself.” In these games group members learn to identify their own feelings; learn how they feel about others’ actions; and are encouraged to make independent choices and decisions. As an example, “I Feel Really Good About” requires participants to decide whether they feel good or bad in reaction to different situations.

A third set of games has the goal of social awareness or “Learning About Others.” Several of these games, for example, require participants to learn about physical characteristics and personal preferences of others.

A fourth set of games focuses on prosocial behavior or “Learning to Get Along With Others” such as sharing, cooperation, helping, and mutual problem-solving. For example, in “I Have a Problem—How Can You Help?” participants are presented with a group member’s problem and asked to suggest ways to help.

The fifth set of games, social competency or “Learning About Being A Part of My Community” focuses on how to engage in rule-governed and appropriate social behaviors, and to solve problems. Games in this category teach participants how to greet others, deal with anger, ask for help, and dress in a socially normative manner. “Something’s Wrong with Those Clothes” teaches participants to discriminate problems with clothing. Participants then suggest ways of making the clothing look “OK”. Some games in this category are used to develop problem-solving for members who have the necessary communicative and cognitive ability. Games such as “The Problem Box” involve members in considering problems that may occur in their environments—such as having something stolen, something lost, or something that needs repair. In some settings a member may have problems with money, loss of a job, or jealousy over a friend. Some of these games encourage members to think of alternative ways of resolving the problems.

The games lend themselves to many situations and purposes. After one has identified a socialization goal area, one can seek specific games in the scheme on pages 52–70. Games can be modified to fit particular persons or groups, or new games invented. While many of our games overlap goal areas, a primary goal should be evident in their design.

Group members may have special needs such as difficulty sitting still, paying attention, tolerating closeness of peers or controlling impulses. Some may have information processing problems which interfere with

their ability to understand verbal directions. They may be hesitant to try something new, perhaps, because their failures have been emphasized more than their successes. Our socialization games, therefore, have been designed in terms of the following criteria:

Simplicity. Verbal explanations are minimized. Procedures are often communicated through modeling and imitation.

Novelty. Games frequently employ props, e.g., a timer, or stimulus cards, that can be used by group members, and which introduce an element of novelty.

Short Duration. Games move at a quick pace which tends to prevent satiation and sustain attention.

Participation. Many of the games promote active participation of all group members, throughout the session. For example, if two members are participating in a game in the middle of the group circle, other members have roles that may include counting, directing, voting or expressing an opinion about what is going on in the middle.

Turn-Taking. Each game includes a turn-taking procedure so that each member has an opportunity for individual participation during the session. This reduces competition over who is to have the next turn.

Success And Recognition. Social recognition is provided by the leader and other members for attempts to participate, for following the rules, completing steps of the activity, trying new strategies, and helping other members; thus, a participant has many opportunities to feel successful.

Cost. Games are designed to keep material cost and leader preparation time to a minimum. Many games require no materials. Most materials can be found among household or personal articles as with "Helping My Friend Find His/Her Stuff" or are easily made according to the directions in the game instructions.

Each game description includes the title, the goal area, the materials needed, the procedure, and the method for participant selection. The games are organized according to the group life phase (see Section 3; Tasks of the Group Leader) and the socialization goal area to which they pertain. Under the heading, Materials Needed, instructions are provided for any stimulus materials. Game procedures are simply stated and often include recommendations to guide the leader. With certain games there are additional suggestions for adapting or modifying the procedures. Since the games are relatively generic, leaders may want to make adaptations specific to member's ethnic, cultural and religious practices. For example, "I Know Something About You," "If I Were You"

or “Signal If You Know” II may be easily modified to include examples of member practices (i.e., person was born in a different country, speaks a different language, wears different types of clothing, etc.).

The games can be used over and over again with different outcomes. Repetition seems to enhance effectiveness and interest value. As members become more familiar with the procedure, they can concentrate less on the rules and more on varying the outcome or their responses. Most games can be modified so the level of skill required to succeed can be gradually increased or adapted to fit the skill level of group members. Some of the games indicate advanced levels or second versions that require more skill. Most games can be easily adapted by the game leader to reduce or increase the level of difficulty. In the game “Find the Person” a simplified adaptation might require a participant to identify which of two persons has the object shown on the stimulus card. In an advanced version, members might be asked to classify or identify everyone in the group who has the object shown on the card. The leader may regard games as models or examples, and can experiment with modifications that address the socialization needs and interests of the group members.

RELEVANT POPULATIONS AND PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTS

The socialization games can be used with children, adolescents and adults in a variety of programs and environments. Although the games were initially designed for persons with moderate to severe mental retardation and challenging behaviors residing in a state-operated developmental center, they have been used successfully with persons of varying functional abilities and limitations in schools, vocational and psychiatric rehabilitation facilities, family homes, and a variety of group residential settings. The objectives and methods of the games are useful for improving personal and social adjustment, promoting inclusion and acceptance of differences and expanding recreational and leisure options.

Reference to the Game Assessment Scheme on pages (52–70) will suggest the relevance of particular games to certain groups. Furthermore, the classification system should help a program specialist identify some areas of habilitation need. After trial of the game designed for those areas, the group or game leader may think of modifications or new games that would be relevant.

SECTION 2

ORGANIZATIONAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL REQUIREMENTS

A socialization game program involves the use of a group format. Thus, when developing a game program the group leader should be aware of factors that influence the behavior of a group. This section refers to important variables of group organization and physical environment that can effect group cohesiveness and behavior.

GROUP ORGANIZATION

Group organization is important to the outcome of the game program, as the group's organization will influence the ability of members to form interpersonal ties and to work cooperatively within the group.

Although there is limited research literature on the development of cohesion among group members with mental retardation or other disabilities, field trials of our games have shown an increase in friendly interactions and a decrease in unfriendly behavior consequent to the group experience (Han, 1980). Variables of group organization include: (1) the composition of the group; (2) the size of the group; (3) the basic rules for participation in the group; (4) the zones of participation in the group; (5) the length of a group session; and (6) the use of a time-limited group program. These are discussed below.

Composition

The question of *who* participates in a socialization game group may not be an option for a group leader whose clientele consists of persons grouped in a residential or vocational setting. In such an instance, the leader may have to work with an intact group consisting not only of individuals of all levels of functional abilities, but also perhaps of persons of different ages, and different levels of physical capabilities and

behavioral adjustment. Although such diversity makes group leadership difficult and decreases the habilitative impact of the game, this should not dissuade one from developing a game program. Many of the socialization games described in the final section of this book can be utilized with heterogeneous groups.

If a leader can select specific persons to become members of a socialization game group, we suggest that he/she consider the following criteria:

1. The sex of members is a significant variable of group composition. Many of the games can be utilized with same-sex or heterosexual groups. If a goal is to promote heterosexual interaction, then a group balanced with males and females should be developed. Same-sex groups might be considered when clients withdraw from members of the opposite sex; or need to develop peer interaction skills with members of their own gender.

2. The age of group members is another important variable. Although our experience has shown that the socialization games appeal to a broad age range of persons, a narrow age range may promote more group cohesion, because of members' similar developmental interests. A narrow age range may, thus, contribute to a group leader's goal of promoting peer relationships among group members.

3. The admixture of members of different functional abilities is an important variable. Our own experience has shown that a broad range of abilities creates challenges for the leader, because it is difficult to modify any single game so that it will sustain the interest and involvement of group members of widely discrepant abilities. In such an instance, the more able may be bored, or the least able may be virtually excluded from active involvement in group process. However, a group of persons of different functional levels within a narrow range can work with positive results. For several months, we conducted a group of women with moderate and severe mental retardation who resided in a state-operated developmental center. The women with moderate mental retardation were able to act as peer models and coaches for less able women. The latter gained much by observing the behavior of their peers and the more able were rewarded by their coaching role. A group leader may, therefore, want to seed the group with several persons who are functioning at a higher level than most group members. The greater the disparity in levels of functioning between group members, however; the more difficult or challenging it becomes for a group leader to provide success for all members.