

**ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE SOCIAL,
EMOTIONAL, AND
PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS**

Second Edition

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS

Seventy-Six Activities That Teach Children,
Adolescents, and Adults Skills Crucial to Success in Life

By

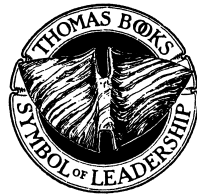
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*To family members and others
who have helped us learn social,
emotional, and problem-solving skills.*

FOREWORD

The book you hold in your hand is a treasure chest of creative ideas guaranteed to make a difference in the lives of those who engage in its many activities and exercises. It is the result of years of study, experience, and listening. Ever since creating the Ungame 35 years ago, I have observed the way people seem to thrive and grow in an atmosphere of acceptance, without the stress of competition that can leave some feeling like losers. I believe these activities and games will bring out the best in those who engage in them. The way the suggestions encourage success as skills are practiced will enable everyone to walk away feeling like a WINNER.

I'm struck by the breadth and practicality of the subjects covered, and I appreciate the suggested discussion topics at the end of each activity. That will surely help participants recognize their progress as well as discover where they need continued practice of a particular skill.

All skills can improve with practice, and with the variety of activities found between the covers of this book, participants will find it fun and challenging to practice improving their emotional, social and problem-solving skills. The fact that many of these exercises involve the entire person, body, mind, and emotions will help the participants retain what they learn and be more apt to transfer their learning to everyday life.

As you use these exercises, pay close attention to the valuable principles outlined in the book and share them with others. As we learn to communicate more effectively and improve our problem-solving skills, the world will become a more caring and peaceful place.

RHEA ZAKICH,
Creator of the Ungame

PREFACE

We began work on the first edition of this book by searching other books, journal articles, the Internet, and the memories of colleagues. We based some of the activities on classic parlor activities such as charades. Some activities we made up whole, using creative processes that defy easy explanation. Once we had developed a number of activity ideas, we created a standard presentation format that includes suggestions about how to help participants transfer to their everyday lives the skills they learn engaging in the activities. For field testing the activities, we created a standard evaluation strategy that focused on the extent to which participants enjoyed the activity and the extent to which the activity produced the types of experiences that occur in sophisticated training or counseling.

For example, John realized, as a result of engaging in some of the activities, that he could stand to improve his ability to take the perspective of others with whom he interacts and to understand their motivations and emotions. One night he played poor tennis, and a friend beat him for the first time ever. John felt unhappy and started to leave, saying little. Then he thought about engaging in the “Losing Well” activity with a group of children, and he called the other participant over to his car and praised him for his outstanding playing. The friend smiled—and then pointed out that John’s tires were badly in need of air. He was right, and John saved the tires by adding air. John later thought that he now had a new anecdote to share with clients—and his children—about how using a good social style, specifically being a good loser, pays off, sometimes in surprising ways.

Since the publication of the first edition of this book, *Games to Enhance Social and Emotional Skills*, in 1998, we have maintained our strong interest in positive psychology with its focus on skills and methods of living effectively and happily. We continue to see the teaching of these skills and methods as valuable for both the prevention and treatment of psychological problems. We have focused more in recent years on problem solving as a skill that one can use to solve many types of psychological problems (see, e.g., Malouff, 2006; Malouff, Thorsteinsson, and Schutte, in press). The second edition shows that greater emphasis in its addition of six new activities for teaching problem solving and in the inclusion of “problem-solving” in the title of the book.

Another change has involved an emphasis on activities rather than games. Although some of the activities are still quite game-like, others are more challenge oriented in that participants try to accomplish something together or separately. The activities remain noncompetitive because we believe competition can have negative effects as well as positive ones. However, the motivating excitement of competition is built into the activities in the form of challenge or goal seeking.

The second edition includes ten new activities that teach a wide variety of coping skills, social skills, and problem-solving methods. Every activity description includes an explanation of how to use the activity to make valuable changes in the life of the participants. Each activity has an example of how the activity was used with actual participants. The second edition also includes updated and new supporting material, including a description of problem-solving methods.

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Many of the activities in the book are based on ideas of others. We have acknowledged these contributions at the end of the activity description, but we would like to thank Dr. Lena Hall, Dr. Janice Ellery, and Jennifer Tarnowski for personally giving us activity ideas, and we would like to thank everyone who published a comment or an activity idea that led to one of the activities we describe. Finally, we would like to thank the scores of individuals who participated in the activities and shared their feelings about the experience.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND PROBLEM-SOLVING ACTIVITIES

WHAT ARE SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS?

Intelligence can be defined as the ability to see relationships, to think abstractly, to solve problems, and to learn new material quickly (Sternberg & Detterman, 1986) or as capacity for adaptation through effective information processing (Roberts, Zeidner, & Matthews, 2001). However, renowned psychologists E. L. Thorndike (1920) and Howard Gardner (1983) realized some time ago that these skills constitute only one of several types of intelligence. Other types of intelligence include social and emotional skills, musical skills, and body-movement skills. Daniel Goleman (1995) greatly increased public awareness of the importance of social and emotional skills with his nonfiction bestseller, *Emotional Intelligence*.

Important social, emotional, and problem-solving skills include (a) identifying and expressing one's own emotions, as well as identifying the emotions that others are experiencing, (b) using emotions in solving problems and other cognitive activities, (c) feeling realistically self-confident, (d) maintaining a positive outlook, (e) realistic goal setting, (f) systematic problem solving, (g) persisting in pursuing reasonable goals, (h) coping with adversity, and (f) using a broad range of social skills ranging from communicating effectively to organizing groups (Gardner, 1983; Goleman, 1995; Malouff, 2006; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). The book presents activities in chapters following this organizational scheme.

WHY USE ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS?

Psychologists and counselors often want to teach social-emotional and problem-solving skills. However, many clients, especially children, adolescents, the chronically mentally ill, and individuals pressured into treatment by courts, employers, or schools, generate little or no effort toward improvement (DiGiuseppe, Linscott, & Jilton, 1996). By using a fun, activity-centered approach, a mental health professional can help maximize effort by these clients, while also strengthening rapport.

For decades various therapists have used activities and games to help clients, sometimes using a commercial board game such as the Ungame™ or the Thinking, Feeling, and Doing Game™. Some therapists have made up their own activities or used ones they heard about from another therapist. Therapy experts have recommended fun activities for training various skills (Dwivedi, 1993; Mattaini & McGuire, 2006), such as social skills (e.g., Cartledge & Milburn, 1995) and emotion-recognition skills (e.g., Stark, 1990).

ARE ACTIVITIES EFFECTIVE IN ENHANCING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS?

The activities in this book are based on empirically supported elements of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). The activities involve such standard cognitive-behavioral methods as setting goals, discussing strategies, observing others perform a skill, role-playing in and rehearsing a skill, and receiving reinforcement or corrective feedback. Mental health experts use these same methods in social or behavioral skills training programs (Martin & Pear, 2006; Miltenberger, 2003), self-esteem enhancement training (Pope, McHale, & Craighead, 1988), depression prevention programs (Jaycox, Reivich, Gillham, & Seligman, 1994), and various versions of cognitive-behavioral treatment for psychological disorders (Emmelkamp, 2004; Lieberman, DeRisi, & Mueser, 1986) that have been found to reduce the level of psychological problems (e.g., Fraser, Galinsky, Smokowski, Day, Terzian, Rose, & Guo, 2006; Weisz, McCarty, & Valeri, 2006). Challenging, fun activities shift the training from dry, schoolwork-like experiences into something appealing.

Further, the activities are designed to build participants' self-efficacy for engaging in the process or behavior suggested by the activity. Bandura (1994) defined *self-efficacy* as individuals' beliefs about their "capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate

themselves and behave” (p. 78). Higher self-efficacy has been found to be associated with good outcomes in a variety of realms of life, ranging from greater job satisfaction and performance (Judge & Bono, 2001) to better physical health (Bandura, 1997) to better academic performance (Bandura, 1997).

Bandura (1986, 1997) suggested that the level of an individual’s self-efficacy in a given realm of life is determined by four factors: (a) personal mastery experiences, (b) vicarious mastery experiences, (c) verbal persuasion, and (d) physiological and affective states. Personal mastery experiences lead to the expectation of repeated future good outcomes. Vicarious mastery experiences involving observation of a similar other who is successful can also lead to the expectation of future good outcomes for the self. Verbal persuasion, or the assurance by others that one can achieve a good outcome, bolsters self-efficacy. As physiological and affective states (such as a very high level of arousal or negative mood) can influence perception of efficacy, reduction in or re-interpretation of such states can lead to higher perceived self-efficacy.

Engaging in a skill-building activity provides a source of personal mastery experience. The activities described in this book are designed to encourage success when practicing the skills, and the suggested topics for discussion to follow each activity should help draw participants’ attention to their mastery experiences and encourage them to contemplate how they might extend these mastery experiences. Experiences of other participants as well as experiences mentioned by the activity coordinator can provide vicarious mastery experiences. Realistic encouragement by the activity coordinator can be a further source of self-efficacy, as can be guided focus on positive affective states experienced during the activity.

There are few published studies of the effectiveness of engaging in a single activity or game in producing positive psychological effects. Barak, Engle, Katzir, and Fisher (1988) showed that engaging in an emotions identification and role-playing activity led to improved empathic understanding in undergraduate students. Foxx, McMorrow, and Mennemeier (1994) showed that repeatedly engaging in a board activity that required mentally retarded participants to decide how to act in specific social situations led to improved social behavior in an analogue work setting but not in an actual institutional workshop. Other researchers found that playing a social skills game led to greater improvement in natural settings when generalization strategies such as verbal prompts and praise in the natural settings were included (Griffiths, Feldman, & Tough, 1997; Wong, Morgan, Crowley, & Baker, 1996). As Cartledge and Milburn (1995) pointed out, engaging in one activity as the sole strategy for changing behavior in natural settings is unlikely to succeed. Including other strategies, such as prompts and practice in natural settings, self-monitoring, and reinforcement for desired behavior, improves the chances that activity-related learning will generalize to natural settings.