



THIRD EDITION

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

NINETY ACTIVITIES

That Teach Children, Adolescents, and Adults
Skills Crucial to Success in Life

John M. Malouff, Ph.D., J.D. • Nicola S. Schutte, Ph.D.



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By

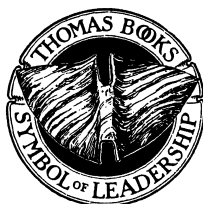
JOHN M. MALOUFF, PH.D., J.D.

University of New England, Australia

and

NICOLA S. SCHUTTE, PH.D.

University of New England, Australia



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*For all those who are dedicated to helping others
develop their social, emotional, and problem-solving skills.*

FOREWORD

I have never met John or Nicola in person, but have come to know and admire them by seeing their commitment to creating ways to help people of all ages develop skills to become healthier and happier in their personal life and relationships. Opening this book is like entering a library and seeing the walls lined with books to assist you in teaching *the skills crucial to success in life*. *The authors, who are dedicated to making this a better world, have added several new creative exercises to their previous successful collection, producing an even greater book with nearly one hundred tested and proven ideas.*

Since I created the Ungame 42 years ago, I have become more aware of the need for a variety of teaching skills to assist young and old in ways beyond what the Ungame is able to do. While the Ungame teaches sharing and listening skills, it was not designed to teach participants how to deal with feelings, solve problems, delay gratification, or gain self-confidence. John and Nicola are masters at developing ways to gain these skills. Every activity is easy to set up, effective to use, and brings people together for an enjoyable experience. Everyone will learn something from participating in the exercises. Use them repeatedly and the skills they teach will be reinforced.

One of the new activities helps participants learn the importance of setting goals and creating an effective plan for achieving them. Another new one in this edition will help participants learn how to become aware of, identify, and forecast emotions. You'll get to visit the "Solutions Store" where you'll discover ways to teach participants how to generate solutions to problems they might face.

I like the way the activities are spelled out so the coordinator can add his/her own touches and examples. This book is guaranteed to help participants learn and grow. I intend to use some of these effective ideas in my workshops with adults. Thanks John and Nicola, you've done it again with this edition.

RHEA ZAKICH
Creator of the Ungame

PREFACE

This third edition includes 14 new activities that teach a wide range of social, emotional, and problem-solving skills. The target skills for the new activities vary from delaying gratification to facilitating team success. We have also updated references and identified an additional valuable use of the activities—to *assess* specific skills in a fun activity. Our experiences in testing the new activities have confirmed our view that even highly functioning adults lack many of the skills taught by the activities. With 90 activities total, the third edition provides many choices for fun activities to teach important psychological skills.

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 play. 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, 2013a; Malouff, Thorsteinsson, & Schutte, 2007). The second edition, published in 2007, showed 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 in the second edition involved an emphasis on activities rather than games. Although some of the activities were still quite game-like, others were more challenge-oriented in that participants try to accomplish something together or separately. The activities remained 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.

Every activity description in this third edition 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. We hope that you will find the new activities and recent references useful and that you will enjoy using the activities to teach others social, emotional, and problem-solving skills.

JOHN M. MALOUFF AND NICOLA S. SCHUTTE
University of New England Armidale, Australia

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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.

USES OF THIS BOOK

This book is for anyone who wants to help others improve social, emotional, or problem-solving skills: teachers, counselors, psychologists, occupational psychologists, parents, corporate trainers, and so on. The skills taught range from elementary, such as identifying emotions others are experiencing, to sophisticated, such as providing leadership and solving real problems. The activities teach skills of great value to children, teens, and adults.

The activities can help the activity coordinator teach skills, assess skill level, and begin a conversation about specific skills, including the value of the skills and how to improve them. The activities have special value in that they include fun elements that are important to maintaining motivation by individuals learning the skills. Because the activity coordinator participates along with learners in the fun activities, the activities can help the coordinator establish and maintain a positive working relationship with the learners.

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PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS**

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND PROBLEM-SOLVING ACTIVITIES

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

Intelligence is often considered a cognitive capacity useful in problem solving (Kline, 1990). It can be defined as the ability to see relationships, to think abstractly, and to learn new material quickly (Sternberg & Detterman, 1986). Renowned psychologists E. L. Thorndike (1920) and Howard Gardner (1983) realized some time ago that cognitive 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 effectively in solving problems and in other cognitive activities, (c) feeling realistically self-confident, (d) maintaining positive emotions, (e) value clarification, realistic goal setting, and planning (f) using effective problem-solving methods, (g) persisting in pursuing reasonable goals, (h) coping with adversity, and (f) using a broad range of social skills ranging from communicating effectively to cooperating with others (see Gardner, 1983; Goleman, 1995; Malouff, 2013a; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). This 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. 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). Psychotherapists have used fun activities with many types of clients, including individuals who have been sexually abused (Springer & Misurell, 2012).

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, 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, 2010; 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.

The activities in the book 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; Robbins, Lauver, Le, Davis, Langley, & Carlstrom, 2004) to creativity (Tierney & Farmer, 2002) to leadership (Hannah, Avolio, Walumbwa, & Chan, 2012).

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 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