

RESOURCES

Board games for young people

The Goodbye Game



Childsworth/Childsplay

Plainview, NY, USA
Childsworth/Childsplay/
Dover, Kent, UK
Smallwood Publishing, 1996
\$52.00/£44.94 ISBN 1 588 15023 2,

The Good Mourning Game



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Incentive Plus, \$49.95/£47.50

PLAY IN GENERAL AND GAMES

SPECIFICALLY have an important role in working therapeutically with children and young people. There are various games available as resources for this work and these can be very effective at engaging children and encouraging them to talk. Not only are children familiar with the format of a board or card game, but there is something much less threatening about answering questions as part of a game rather than in direct response to an adult's asking. Such resources are generally not recommended for use by children outside of a therapeutic context with an appropriate adult.

Games should be used to facilitate the therapeutic interaction rather than replace it. The role of the adult is crucial – they are responsible for encouraging the young people to make the most of the opportunities for exploring emotions provided within the game. If games are used effectively in an appropriate therapeutic context, the discussions prompted by the game take precedence over the game-play, which fades into the background and may even be forgotten.

The Goodbye Game uses a standard board game format where the player has to pick a card depending on the colour of the space on which they land. Different cards have questions pertaining to different assumed stages of the grieving process: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. The board is set out so that as the game progresses the initial stages of grief are less represented and the latter stages more represented.

There is a discrepancy between the box lid and the instructions as to what age it is suitable for (ages 6-12 and 4-12 years old respectively) but, even with adult assistance, a four-year-old might struggle with the game concept

let alone the questions. The adult could adjust the game to suit the ages and particular circumstances of the child or children and might, for example, remove some of the cards which were considered inappropriate for their age. The instructions include what to do when landing on the 'log' or 'in the stream', but I was unable to see how this related to the game play. This was frustrating for me as an adult and would probably cause most children to disengage from the process.

The Good Mourning Game has a similar structure although it is slightly more complicated, with players having to gain a certain number of different tokens for the different types of cards (like *Trivial Pursuit*). The cards are related to remembering, playing, coping, feeling and imagining. The game finishes with the use of self-affirmation cards. Each player also has a number of pass cards which allow them to decline to answer some questions if they wish, but still be rewarded (with a token) if they attempt an answer.

The affirmation cards are an excellent idea and would be a good way to end the game, but it is difficult to know how easy it would be to put them into

practice. It might be a good idea to think of particular affirmations specific to each child, based on what they had shared during the game, and encourage the other children in the game to contribute. I particularly liked the emphasis on coping and playing whilst still remembering the deceased and expressing the associated feelings.

The recommended age range is 6-18 years old. Younger children (6-8 year olds) would probably need a lot of help in understanding some of the cards, and it might be appropriate to remove some of them. The 17-18 year olds might find the game a little patronising. However, even with these extremes of the age range, a suitably enthusiastic and sensitive therapist would probably still be able to make use of the game.

The problem with using board games within therapy or counselling is that the therapist may rely too heavily on the game, rather than on the relationship and discussion. If games are used, it is important that the adult involved does not depend on them to fill the time rather than think about what will be most helpful for the child. ●

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