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# Board Games for Kids: Reducing Stress and Learning Through Play

Ben Wolf, OTS

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## Introduction

**Poverty** - In 2014, roughly 5.5 million children in America under age 6 years lived in a poor household (Jiang, Ekono, & Skinner, 2016).

**Stress** - Chronic stress has been known to have serious effects on brain function and physiological developmental outcomes when experienced over extended periods of time (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

**Executive Functioning** - Prefrontal cortical development, which is heavily involved with executive functioning skills, can be adversely affected by environmental deprivation and stress (Kishiyama et al., 2009).

**Occupation of Play** - Play has been shown to be helpful in moderating or eliminating stress (Wang & Aamodt, 2012).

## Objectives

### Aims of the project

- Intervention manual: Create a board game manual that can be used to aid in the reduction of stress and improvement of executive functioning skills for children in underserved populations.
- Address essential life skills (social, executive functioning, coping skills) through participation of playing, modifying and creating board games.



A New Leaf: Homeless and domestic violence shelter with provided services: affordable housing solutions, youth services, foster care, counseling, financial literacy, workforce support, community services, and neighborhood economic development.

## Program Description

### Design and Setting:

- The implementation of a pilot program, Board Games for Kids, was a 14-week program that incorporated play and facilitation of social and executive function skills to decrease stress for children at a local homeless shelter, A New Leaf.
- **After School Program (ASP):** 21 total participants attended After School Program
- **Participants:** 7 of 21 children participated in program
- **Ages:** 5 -11

|                                  | TOPICS   | ACTIVITY  | ETIQUETTE  | RULES   | GAMES   | EVALUATIONS   |
|----------------------------------|--|---|--|---|---|---|
| <b>PLAY GAMES</b><br>Week 1-3    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exposure</li> <li>• Socialization</li> <li>• Discovery</li> <li>• Interest/disinterests</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introductions</li> <li>• Playing basic games</li> <li>• Learning about interests</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Playing respectfully</li> <li>• Turn taking</li> <li>• Appropriate behaviors</li> <li>• Being humble</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to play</li> <li>• Ask questions</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uno</li> <li>• Jenga</li> <li>• Checkers</li> <li>• Sorry</li> <li>• Trouble</li> </ul>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clinical Observation</li> <li>• Staff Observation</li> </ul> |
| <b>MODIFY GAMES</b><br>Week 4-6  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion</li> <li>• Brainstorming</li> <li>• Ideation</li> <li>• Interests</li> <li>• Socialization</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Playing and Modifying Games</li> <li>• Discussing what makes games fun</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Playing respectfully</li> <li>• Turn taking</li> <li>• Appropriate behaviors</li> <li>• Being humble</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changing Rules</li> <li>• Identifying aspects of the game that make it fun</li> </ul>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comparing games</li> <li>• Mechanics of games</li> <li>• Figuring out interests</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clinical Observation</li> <li>• Staff Observation</li> </ul> |
| <b>CREATE GAMES</b><br>Week 7-10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative expression</li> <li>• Self-expression</li> <li>• Mastery</li> <li>• Self-identity</li> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Sequencing</li> <li>• Organizing</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talking about game ideas</li> <li>• Creating games/ideas that are fun</li> <li>• Choosing styles and themes</li> </ul>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with a peer</li> <li>• Planning ideas</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy rules / Hard rules?</li> <li>• Writing out the rules</li> <li>• Discussing rules with me</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Play testing games with themselves and peers</li> <li>• Working on creation</li> </ul>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clinical Observation</li> <li>• Staff Observation</li> </ul> |
| <b>TEACH GAMES</b><br>Week 11-14 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socialization</li> <li>• Expression</li> <li>• Sequencing</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Playing created games with others</li> <li>• Talking about games created with others.</li> <li>• Likes/interests in project</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening to feedback</li> <li>• Providing feedback</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explaining rules to peer</li> <li>• Teaching game to others</li> </ul>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Playing created game with peers</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clinical Observation</li> <li>• Staff Observation</li> </ul> |

## Outcomes

### Authors Observations:

- Improved development of appropriate play skills.
  - Foundation established through board game etiquette
  - Taking turns, being respectful, asking questions, appropriate seating/standing, hands to ourselves
- Improved executive functioning skills
  - Planning, organizing, sequencing
  - Less prompting, less assistance with strategies, less modeling required

### Staff Observations:

- Improved peer to peer interactions
- Improved mood
- Improved behaviors and abilities during general play

## Discussion/Conclusions

- Game play is a valid occupational therapy treatment activity
- Demonstrates an original idea OT can implement into practice
- Intrinsic motivation plays a big role in effective learning
- Limited scholarly research relating to board games
- Difficult to quantify improvements or decline in behaviors and mood without standardized assessment tool

## References/Literature cited

- See attached

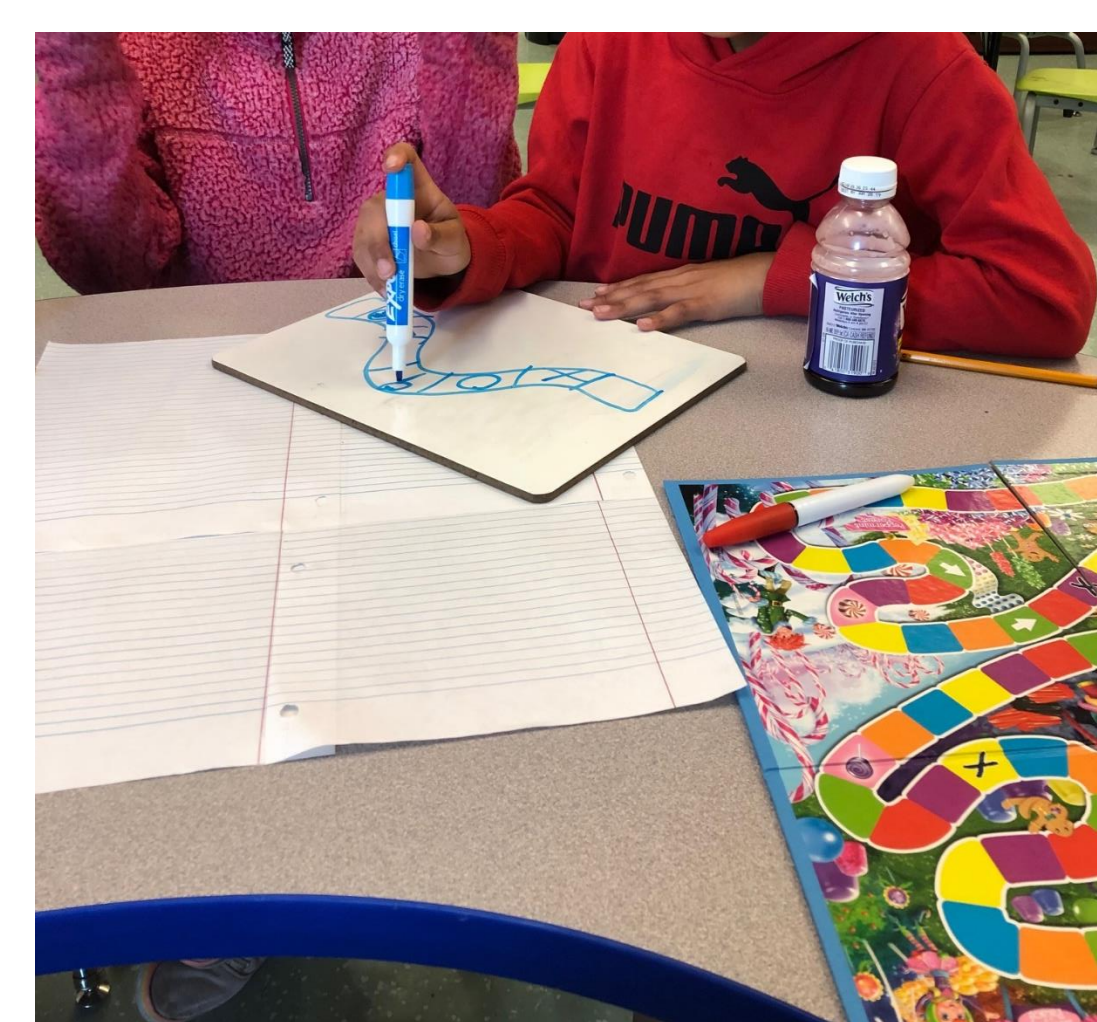
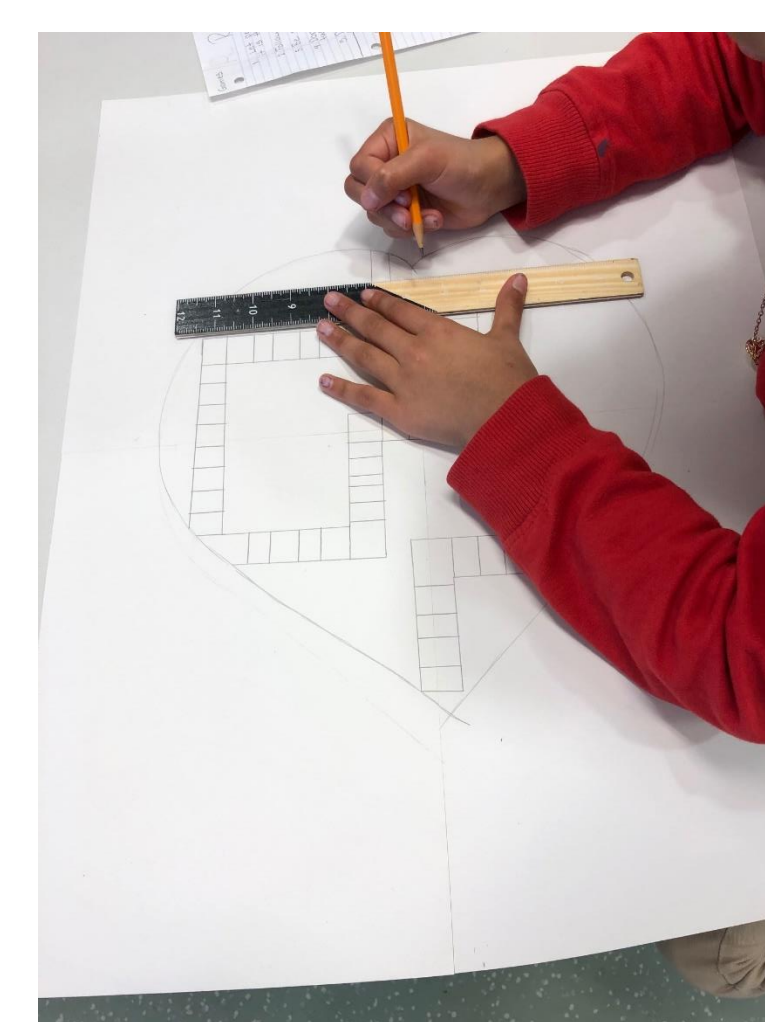
## Acknowledgments

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### PLAYING GAMES



### MODIFYING GAMES



### CREATING GAMES

