

# InnerMagic – the children's self esteem game – an innovative tool for care and intervention in child and youth care practise



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## Introduction : the need for innovative tools

- \* South African children facing **large scale trauma** : problems of abandonment, neglect, physical, emotional, sexual abuse & risk
- \* we often feel helpless / overwhelmed : how to help? How to uplift?
- \* lack of therapeutic resources and/or funds
- \* limited professional help available
- \* frustration of lengthy therapy process (one-on-one)
- \* **lessons** learnt **volunteering at tsunami** in Indonesia Jan 2005

# Games are a fun way of “learning”....

Tsunami experience helped me focus the idea for a “Monopoly of Feelings Game”

- \* Realized more practical simple, easily accessible directive methods work can very effectively at assisting (without years of psychological training)
- \* Given the right tools & attitude **ALL** adults are in a position to **help** children

# Massive devastation – brought out people's coping skills and resilience





# CHILDREN are :

resilient – even in the face of tragedy

highly flexible and adaptable – if given the **correct** support

curious – have a need to explore; play & express themselves

creative – full of imagination  
(which can help in healing)

sensitive – to change & our  
Words & emotions

enjoy simplicity





"We think **kids are behavior problems**, or they're not interested in learning, or they're not able to learn, when really, when you get down to the bottom of it, **there's some experience** that they've had that has **taken priority over everything** that's going on in their life."  
—Melinda Johnson, Teacher



# IPods versus old 'record players.....

today's children are often :

more technologically advanced

more sensitive

more creative

more perceptive

more emotionally intelligent / 'in tune' with feelings

more 'switched on' / aware

more 'wise' / intelligent / profound

more 'difficult' : determined, strong willed, stubborn

**AND can be more misunderstood**

# A child-centered framework – that evolved into the game





# What we know builds self esteem & in the child care setting....

## Feelings:

Feeling **acknowledged** and connected to the CYCW - start the day by greeting every child as you see them, and ask them how they are doing before anything else.

**Positive** words – the power of our words to influence self esteem & neurology

## Respect:

Being **involved** in making choices (choices – make children feel respected; experiential learning – creative ideas)

A good **relationship** - kindness, empathy & respect (studies show fewer behaviour problems via kindness than those who scream, shout, demean, threaten/belittle)

## Security:

Basic **needs** met (food, shelter, love/care) this home may be the only safe place/sanctuary they have.

**Routine and boundaries** (activities and limits that are consistent)

words

release of oxytocin (feel good hormone)

activates brains motivational centers

enhances happiness

reason

makes all feel good

(shaming)

gain self control

& irritability

gain confidence

operation

allows us to feel valued

enough”

have a choice to change

builds resilience

communication

promotes growth

esteem

incr. emotional turmoil

release stress hormones

interrupts normal function

impairs logic &

feel bad (criticizing/blaming/

creates anxiety

undermines co-

feel “not good

make us defensive

impairs

destroys self



Neg words said with anger : send *alarm messages* to brain-interferes with decision making processes of frontal lobe increases irrational actions

# What games do ....

1. **Promotes “family” fun and togetherness** : family 'off-time' ; present-moment focus (relaxing)
2. **Teaches patience, sharing and good sportsmanship** : involves 'turn taking' and opp.to regulate their emotions through 'winning' & 'loosing”
3. **Are fun and make us happy** : kids thrive on positive interaction; games can build confidence
4. **Master a ton of skills** : developmentally games can offer a chance to master eye-hand coordination; manual dexterity; colour, number and shape recognition; grouping and counting; letter recognition, reading and more. The repetition of games helps them learn concepts faster than in classroom

# value of games ....

5. **Develops motor skills** : TV = sitting still! Simple games like Twister, Simon Says and rope jumping develop gross motor skills, improving balance and flexibility. Board games need dexterity and improve fine motor skills, whereas balancing games offer a complex multi-sensory activity.
6. **Stimulates intellectual development** : Letting kids figure things out for themselves in games is fabulous! Using reasoning, logic and planning in a fun environment allows kids to build important 'brain skills' that promote intelligence.
7. **Great for energy release** : Remember the 'hose' metaphor; Emotions need release
8. **Expands creativity, flexibility and imagination**: taps into fantasy; invent own games & create new rules etc.



# InnerMagic™ design

- ★ all children have **innate** potential
- ★ choice empowers children
- ★ **self esteem is enhanced** : belonging, mastery, independence, generosity, free expression=what they say counts, allowed to make mistakes, child is 'in charge')
- ★ **positive affirmative statements** (Feel Good Stickers)
- ★ **atmosphere of non-judgement** (makes child express)
- ★ **non-threatening activity** (engaging, non-competitive)
- ★ **life skills can be taught** (via possible real-life scenarios)

# design principles continued ...

- ★ sharing enhances the relationship (child & therapist play as equals)
- ★ all areas of development = NB
- ★ children CAN learn to identify, express & manage their emotions effectively
- ★ learn through repetition (not pressured to do 'right')
- ★ learn via variety of different activities/media
- ★ colour, shape and symbols (have unconscious affect)

**Aim** : to collect **one token** from each of the **six centers** and return to Magic Land

- ★ **in the centers** players choose to do 1 (out of 3) developmental **tasks** (related to that center) to win a **token**
- ★ **coloured stars** (en route to centers) each relate to a specific card/activity



# How it works

- ★ InnerMagic™ : magic/potential is **already** inside
- ★ **adult plays like a child** - an 'equal', spontaneous, innocent, curious, fun-filled, accepting all answers, non-judgmental, excited, flexible (allow child's ideas)
- ★ **child focused** - encourage CHOICES throughout, 'be boss'
- ★ **start and finish** in Magic Land (inner wholeness)
- ★ **don't move through Magic Land**
- ★ **choices** (start place; routes; center activities non-threatening atmosphere)
- ★ **players** move along coloured **stars** to get into **centers** (to win tokens)



# Instructions for “stars”

- ★ Take a **red** Doing card (must answer what he would DO)
- ★ “I’m a **star** because ...” (a reason player is special)
- ★ Take an **along the Way** card (anything can happen)
- ★ Take a **blue** Saying card (must answer what he would SAY)
- ★ Take a **green** Feeling card (must answer with FEELING)
- ★ **Sit still** (breathe deeply three times)
- ★ Share a **knowing/belief** (anything he knows or believes)
- ★ Take a **chance** card (Fly forward; Fly backwards; Along the Way)
- ★ Take a **lucky** card (Make a wish; Center; Feel Good sticker)

★ White = make it any colour

# Instructions for Centers

In each center players must perform 1 of 3 developmental tasks to gain a beaded wire token:

- ★ **SPORTS** (physical) – hop; move; explore
- ★ **FUN** (creative/social) – fun; creative; friends
- ★ **SCHOOL** (mental) – think; freeze; opinion
- ★ **FAMILY** (emotional) – love; share; kindness
- ★ **EXPRESSION** (expressive) – talk; truth; act
- ★ **FOREST** (spiritual) – beauty; ideas; change

# Playing tips

- ★ set up on ground (less threatening, engages child easier)
- ★ engage child in set up & play : **empowering** (tokens into centers acc. to colours; playing pieces, reading cards out)
- ★ quick Reference guide (use to 'teach'/as memory tool)
- ★ enough time (45mins – 1hr; no not rush child; continue next wk)
- ★ select / order / remove cards (acc.to age & issue; itemize)
- ★ play 100% as a child - in answering; asking child if you did well enough to gain a token; hones
- ★ reinforce central concepts : can **always i.d, say/ do**

# .....more tips

- ★ non-reading children (read the cards for them)
- ★ use as memory tool (Quick Reference Guide – encourage to tell you 'rules' : remedial value)
- ★ younger children / limited concentration  
span – change game play : young play just moves from center to center (not on the stars), while adult plays normally
- ★ ending : visualization for winner (emphasis on magic/ goodness is already inside)
- ★ ongoing message – we can **always** identify how we **feel** in any situation; can always **do** something, can always **say** something



# Other easy ways to build self esteem

**See them as whole & good** (Crystal bowl 'experiment') and remind them of their potential & show them how 'bad' feelings affect their behaviour & lives)

**Feelings release : anger** : angry mountain & thumb squeeze

**draw it out** (unstructured; / painting / clay/ writing for older kids)

**Colour-Feeling-Trick**: vacuuming out the 'bad' feeling & blowing in a new one (can do themselves by breathing) **exercise it out / physical release** : games using animals; music; movement; jumping; Chasing-Colours;

**Teach - concept : always** can know how one **feels/** what can you **say/do ...**

**Empower** with choice (either....or....or ...YOU decide...).

# A fast positive exercise

The “I'm a star because .....” game

Get each child to think of at least one reason that they are special, different or unique. Taking turns, each child must say out loud “I'm a star because....” and the rest of the class answers : “Thank you for being a Star!”

The game can also be played by getting classmates to find reasons why their friends are stars : “Sipho is a star because.....” and the child mentioned says “Thank you”