

# *Thriving at Home*



Telehealth Play Therapy Activities for  
Licensed Therapists

Inspirational Quote Page! During this time at home if you find a quote that helps you think, feel, or behave more positively jot it down here! We've started you off with one of our favorites...

*“Breathing in, I calm my body.*

*Breathing out, I smile.*

*Dwelling in the present moment, I know this is a wonderful moment.”*

*-Thich Nhat Hanh*

This workbook was compiled by a small group of play therapists in Albuquerque, New Mexico to support therapists while they are providing therapy to children and families during the 2020 Coronavirus quarantine. These activities were compiled from multiple sources to support and guide licensed mental health therapist during Telehealth therapy sessions with children.

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## Telehealth Play Therapy Activities

### **Paper Plate Activity**

Materials: Paper Plate, Styrofoam Plate, or Plastic Plate

Purpose: Psychoeducation about Anxiety and Worry

Have the client collect toys or items around their house and have them place them on the plate. Have the client hold the plate up with their hand. If several minutes go by without the client getting tired and putting the plate down have them add more to the plate until they are tired of holding up the plate.

Discussion/Processing

Process with the client the metaphor of the items on the plate representing anxiety, worries and stressors that the client is carrying and how carrying these emotions can wear us out. Discuss with client coping skills, problem-solving skills, and supports that can help the client take some of the client's anxieties off of their plate.

### **Me Tree- Sueann Kenny- Noziska (2018)**

Purpose: Engagement and Assessment

Materials: Drawing Materials

Have a client draw a tree that includes roots, a trunk, a hole, branches, leaves falling off the tree, and a top of the tree. Then have the client answer the following questions, the answers correspond with each part of the tree.

Roots: What are my roots? What grounds me?

Trunk: What helps me stand tall and strong?

Branches: What am I reaching for?

Falling Leaves: What can I let go of?

Top of the Tree: What am I growing into?

Process the client's answers with them after the activity.

### **Benevolent Experiences Ecomap- Sueann Kenny-Noziska (2018)**

Purpose: Identify Protective Factors and influences

Materials: Art Supplies or Toys that the client can use as symbols to answer the questions (animals, action figures, cars, army men, food, etc.)

Have the client answer each question either by writing the answers for each question, drawing a symbol to represent the answer of each question, or picking a toy or symbol to represent each answer.

- 1) Did you have at least one caregiver with whom you felt safe?
- 2) Did you have at least one good friend?
- 3) Did you have beliefs that gave you comfort?
- 4) Do you like school?
- 5) Have you had at least one teacher who cared about you?
- 6) Have you or do you have good neighbors?
- 7) Has there been an adult (not a parent/caregiver or person from #1) who could provide you with support or advice?
- 8) Do you have a predictable home routine, like regular mealtimes and a regular bedtime?

Discuss and process with client after the activity.

### **Family Map- Sueann Kenny-Nowiska (2018)**

Purpose: Assess family system

Materials: Paper and Drawing materials

Have the client draw a picture with each family member represented as a symbol. Therapist can also have the client pick a toy or an item around their house to represent each family member. Client can also create a symbol for each family member out of play-doh.

Process with Client after.

### **Simone Says**

Purpose: Regulation

Play Simone Says with the client. If the client is hypoactive you can have the client do active things such as jumping, jumping jacks, push-ups ect. If the client is hyperactive you can have the client do calming things such as sitting still, laying down, standing on one foot etc.

### **Bubble/Calm Breathing-**

[https://www.anxietycanada.com/sites/default/files/calm\\_breathing.pdf](https://www.anxietycanada.com/sites/default/files/calm_breathing.pdf)

Materials: Bubbles for both the therapist and the client

Purpose: Calm breathing is a technique that teaches your child to slow down his or her breathing when feeling stressed or anxious.

When your child is feeling anxious, his or her breathing will change. When we are anxious, we tend to take short, quick, shallow breaths or even hyperventilate. This type of anxious breathing can actually make the feeling of anxiety worse! Doing calm breathing can help lower your child's anxiety and give him or her a sense of control. Calm breathing is a great portable tool that your child can use when feeling anxious, especially in situations when you are not there to help him or her through it.

Calm Breathing:

Have the client take a slow breath in through the nose (for about 4 seconds).

Hold your breath for 1 or 2 seconds.

Exhale slowly through the mouth (over about 4 seconds)

Wait 2-3 seconds before taking another breath (5-7 seconds for teenagers)

Repeat for at least 5 to 10 breaths

A good way to practice calm breathing it is to do some **bubble** blowing, because you have to take a slow, deep **breath** to make a big **bubble**, and you have to blow the **bubble** really slowly or it will pop! ... Take a slow, deep **breath** in, hold it for a second, and then slowly blow some **bubbles**.

**Story Telling- Terry Kottman and Kristin Meany-Walen (2018)**

Make up a story about...

Story can be used to explore just about anything. Story telling can be used with both individuals and families. Using a metaphor in a make-believe story can give the client the distance needed that a real story cannot do.

You can have clients use their toys (stuffed animals, plastic animals, action figures, Legos and Lego people, etc.) to tell you a story or you can have they can tell you a story without any toys.

Pictures can be downloaded to help spark stories. You can show the client a picture and have them make up a story about what happen before, during and after the photo was taken.

Client can tell you a story using favorite characters from a book, movie, video game etc.

**Speed Drawing- Creator unknown**

Material- Paper and drawing materials

Have the client fold a piece of paper in half vertically (hotdog style) and then horizontally (hamburger style) giving the client 4 boxes on each side of the paper. Determine an amount of time that the client has to draw each picture (i.e. 30 seconds, 45 seconds, 1 minute,

etc.). Give the client a prompt one of the squares, then give the client the allotted amount of time to draw then move on to the next square.

Examples of prompts:

Draw something that makes you happy

Draw something that makes you angry

Draw something that makes you feel safe

Draw someone that you are thinking about

- Anything can be used as a prompt and the activity can fit each client's needs, goals, and what you know about them as a client.

After all the drawings are complete, have the client tell you about each picture. Discuss and process the drawings with the client.

### **Speed Lego Building**

Materials- Legos

Same premises as the above activity, but use Legos instead of drawing and give clients time limits to make things (a superhero, a robot, a house, a safe space, a care, something that makes them happy, etc.)

### **Speed Play-Doh Building**

Materials- Play-doh

Same premises as the above activities, but use Play-doh instead of drawing and give clients time limits to make things (a superhero, a robot, a house, a safe space, a care, something that makes them happy, etc.)

### **If I were a Superhero- Susan Kelsey**

Goals: Assess the client's coping mechanisms and improve the client's ability to conquer fears.

Materials- drawing paper and drawing materials

Explain the activity as follows:

"Lest pretend that you are a Superhero who has never been invented before. Imagine what you look like, what your superpowers are, and how you use them. After you invent your superhero, draw your superhero in action on the paper."

After the client finishes his/her drawing, explore in depth who she/he has invited and what the superpowers are and how they are used. It is also helpful to explore how the superhero may be like the client and the qualities that the client possesses.

Discussion: The client's superhero can provide valuable information about his/her coping strategies. Children who are traumatized or feel hopeless may have trouble inventing a superhero.

**Postcard Activity (2017)-** <https://positivepsychology.com/art-therapy/>

Material- post card PDF found on <https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/postcard-art-activity.pdf> or a piece of paper in place of the post card PDF. Drawing materials

Most people would probably agree that it's easier to express or recognize hurts and regrets when there's distance between yourself and the problem. This is why the postcard activity can be a good self-discovery exercise that helps answer the question, "what would I say to someone if I didn't have to do it face-to-face?"

- Have clients write a message to someone they're frustrated with or to someone with whom they have something to share;
- On the blank side, have the client express their feelings with art;
- Use this as a way to start a conversation about what's being expressed with the postcard (Post Card Activity, 2017).

**What Anxiety Looks Like-** <https://positivepsychology.com/art-therapy/>

Materials- Paper and drawing materials

Understanding and visualizing anxiety can be a pivotal first step in controlling and treating it. Representing anxiety as an abstract concept, a human, or even a monster could help the artist develop strategies to recognize it when they feel it coming on and to deal with it appropriately.

Here's how to do the activity:

- Draw, paint, or create a collage considering these suggestions as a template: If anxiety had a body (and personality) what would it look like? How would it talk? What does it care about? What does your body look like with anxiety? What would it look like if anxiety was no longer present?;
- Discuss the appearance and personality of the anxiety, or journal about what you've discovered (Tartakovsky, M., 2015).

**What Feelings are in your Heart-** <https://socialworkhelper.com/2013/10/14/feelings-heart-art-therapy-exercise-kids/>



Materials: Heart worksheet that can be printed by clicking on the picture in the link, or have a client draw a heart on a piece of paper. Drawing/coloring materials

The objective of this intervention is to allow children to develop vocabulary and identification of feelings to promote healthy expression of emotion. This exercise also serves as an open-ended question about how the child views their world at the moment.

This exercise is used to explain that everyone has feelings or emotions, and this is normal. Explain that there is no right or wrong way to do this exercise. Help the child brainstorm and list the emotions they can think of and suggest some that may be missing from their lexicon.

Using crayons, colored pencils, or markers, have the child choose what colors match each emotion for them. For example, angry might be red or sad might be blue. Then the child colors in how much of their heart is feeling that emotion right now.

\*Activity can also be modified to have clients draw pictures of the things in their heart that are important to them. Goodie "what's in your heart activity" into google images for ideas.

### **Emotions Drawing- Creator unknown.**

Materials- Paper and drawing/coloring materials

Have the client pick 5-10 crayons, markers, colored pencils etc. Have the client assign a feeling or emotion to each color. Have the client draw a picture using the colors and discuss and process the picture with the client.

### **Safe Place Drawing- Terry Kottman and Kristin Meany-Walen (2018)**

Materials- Paper and drawing/coloring supplies

Objective: Helps us to have a sense of what is important for the client's sense of safety

Tell the client to draw "a safe space." After the client is done with the drawing (if the client feels safe and willing) guide the client in verbally processing how the space they created establishes and contributes to a sense of safety for them. This can also be done in a family session with each member drawing a safe space.

### **Pokémon Character Creation- Terry Kottman and Kristin Meany-Walen (2018)**

Materials: Paper and Drawing/Coloring Supplies

Can be used to explore interpersonal dynamics (self-image, recognition of personal strengths, and weaknesses, and willingness to assess and take personal risks)

Ask client to create and draw a Pokémon character if their own. After the character is created, have the client make a list of 3 attacks and 3 defenses the character can use to keep himself/herself safe.

\*Activity can be modified to have clients create characters from their favorite show or video game such as Minecraft.

### **Self Portraits- Terry Kottman and Kristin Meany-Walen (2018)**

Materials: Drawing/Coloring Supplies and Paper

Have the client create a Self Portrait:

Can be representational or nonrepresentational.

Client can draw pictures of their whole body or just their face

Clients can be asked to draw shapes and patterns that show how they feel about themselves

They can draw a picture of themselves as an animal, car building, plant, etc. (think of the client's interests)

You can also have clients create portraits of there real self and their ideal self.

### **Music-Terry Kottman and Kristin Meany-Walen (2018)**

Have clients (especially teens and adolescents) play you their favorite songs or songs they dislike. Music can tell you a lot about the client. You can have clients play you songs that they listen to when happy, sad, to get energized etc.

Here are some questions you can ask about the songs:

What do you like/dislike about the song? Music? What do you like/dislike about the musical group/singer? What do you like/dislike about the type of music?

What makes this song/music special to you?

What was going on when you first heard this song?

What does this song tell us about what's important to you?

What impact does this song have on you or your life?

What is going on with you when you listen to this song?

How do you feel when you listen to this song?

What feelings does this song evoke in you? How do you feel after you listen to it?

### **Scavenger Hunts**

Can be adapted to clients and allows for a lot of creativity on the part of the therapist.

Some ideas include:

Emotions scavenger hunt:

- Give the client an emotion/feeling and have them find a toy or household item that represents the emotion/feeling for them and have them tell you why.
- Let the client come up with an emotion/feeling but tell them to keep it to themselves. Have them find a toy or household object that represents the emotion and then have them show you the object and guess what emotion/feeling the client was thinking of.
- Have client find items in the house that represent each member of their family
- Have client find items that tell you different things about the client's personality. (likes/dislikes, hobbies/interests, things they feel represent a part of who they are, etc.)

### Show and Tell

Telehealth provides a great opportunity for clients to show the therapist their worlds. They may want to show you their bedrooms, their house, pets, important toys, space spaces, etc.

### Sand Tray Worlds

Although the client may not have a sand tray, you can have clients use their toys (animals, cars, action figures, army men, etc.) to set up worlds on the floor or a table.

**Bibliotherapy:** Read books to client and discuss and process the message of the story with the client.

### The Ungame

If you have the ungame it is a great conversation starter that works great for telehealth

### Would you Rather

Play would you rather with your client

### I Spy...

Play I Spy with your client

### 20 Questions

Play 20 questions with your client

## DICE-BREAKERS

Roll a 1, choose from:

- Which superhero would you most want to be and why?
- If you could only eat one food for the rest of your life what would you choose?
- Describe yourself in five words or less
- If you could only keep four things, which would you choose?

Roll a 2, choose from:

- If you could get rid of one emotion forever, which would you choose?
- Describe your dream job.
- What is your favorite song? Play it now if possible.
- If you were a teacher what kind would you be?

Roll a 3, choose from:

- What's the scariest thing that has ever happened to you?
- You are granted one superpower for the rest of your life, what is it?
- Describe the perfect day.
- If you could live anywhere in the world where would you choose?

Roll a 4, choose from:

- Name something that really gets on your nerves.
- No pets or 10 pets, which would you choose?
- You've just won an award, what would it be for?
- Indoors or outdoors, where do you prefer to be?

Roll a 5, choose from:

- Who is someone you admire?
- You get to be in a video game for a day, which game would you choose?
- Describe your dream home.
- You get to choose your breakfast, lunch and dinner, what would you eat?

Roll a 6, choose from:

- You can have dinner with any 3 famous people, who would you choose?
- Describe the angriest you have ever been?
- If there was one place you would never have to go again, where would that be?
- You get to be any animal for a week, which would you choose?

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## THE ROCK & THE PLAY-DOH

### *COVID-19: What can you control?*

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Hold the rock in your hand. Squeeze it as hard as you can. Try to bend it. Roll it between your hands. Are you able to change the rock?

Now, place the Play-Doh in your hand. Squeeze it as hard as you can. Bend it. Roll it between your hands. Are you able to change the Play-Doh?

The COVID-19 pandemic may leave you feeling worried, anxious or scared. In these moments, think of the rock and the Play-Doh.

The rock is hard and can't be changed. You can't control the shape it takes.

The Play-doh, however, can be changed. You can control the shape it takes.

What are the "Play-Dohs" in your life right now? What can *you* control?

Believe it or not, you, my middle school friend, have some control over what is happening in the world right now.

**So, what are the "Rocks" and the "Play-dohs" of COVID-19?**

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#### **THE "ROCKS"**

##### ***I cannot control:***

- What other people do
- What other people say
- School cancellations
- The news
- Sickness
- Work assigned to me
- Doctor recommendations
- Restaurant and store closings
- How long this will last

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#### **THE "PLAY-DOHS"**

##### ***I can control:***

- What I say
- What I do
- The way I treat others
- My positive attitude
- Hand-washing and hygiene
- How well I do my work
- What I watch online or on TV
- Getting fresh air
- Social distancing: staying home
- Finding fun things to do at home

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Despite everything happening, *you do have some control.*

Take a deep breath and focus on the the "Play-Dohs."


Let go of the "Rocks."


We are all in this together. It will get better.


Story Telling Cards Shared on Facebook Tele-Play Therapy Resources page by Bridget Sheehan


 


### Story Telling Cards


**Good Character**  
They can be a person or a creature  


**Bad Character**  
They can be a person or a creature  


**Helping Character**  
They can be a person or a creature  


**Time**   
When does your story happen?  
Day or night? Spring, summer, autumn, winter? When in the day?

**Place**   
Where does your story happen? It can be ANYWHERE you like! On earth or somewhere else? In the city, the woods, under the sea? Inside or outside?

**Magical Object**  
What does it look like?  
What can it do?  


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Free Play therapy activity booklet with activities that may be able to be adapted to teleplay <https://lianalowenstein.com/e-booklet.pdf>

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