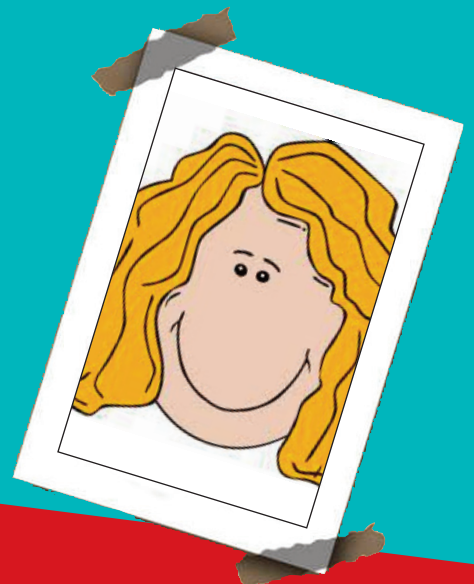


Here's one I made earlier...

Ideas for enlivening and
extending SLT sessions



Alison Roberts



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1

Introduction

For a long time I have been waiting for someone to write a book containing all sorts of cheap but useful ideas for enlivening and extending Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) sessions.

In my clinic I have always had many boxes of lovely photo cards and games. However, there is sometimes not quite the right resource for a particular client or group, or if there is, it is beyond the SLT purse. With all the talented therapy writers and resource makers creating great books and games I was sure that someone would write something for the therapist on a budget. Nobody did, so I have found myself attempting to fill this gap, and here is a collection of ideas that should provide you with new resources for very little money.

Good practice involves careful diagnosis and planning. To augment the well-established and structured programmes of therapy that speech and language therapists use, I have discovered four principles that can make for better therapeutic outcomes:

- 1 Most clients will respond more effectively if they feel they 'own' their therapy by being involved in making the materials they will use, so that the creative process becomes part of the therapy.
- 2 Sitting alongside clients making an item lends an atmosphere of working at their therapy together, giving guidance. This seating arrangement also reduces the chances of too much eye contact, which is helpful for some people who have a diagnosis on the autism spectrum.
- 3 Therapy is vastly improved when it is good fun, and preferably humorous. Clients will usually want to attend their next session if they have left the previous one with the warm glow of having had a good laugh. (And don't neglect yourself – if you have had fun in a session you will be a happier therapist!)
- 4 Sometimes clients make for themselves (or with a little help) something they like and want to keep. Such an item will be a pleasant reminder of something learned during their therapy, and might encourage them to return to therapy after a break.

I have always wished that cartoon drawing had been a module of my SLT training, and that *Blue Peter* studies had been another, but actually you don't need to be a great artist or craftsperson to create these games and activities. Also, you don't need huge quantities of spare time to make most of the items, especially if you can get organised with the equipment you need all in one go. I have provided a basic shopping list to help you get started.

Some of the games and activities address particular communication themes, for example, listening techniques or friendship skills, while others cover several areas simultaneously. I have divided the book into chapters according to either the skill area being addressed or the way in which the items can be used.

It is worth noting that although many of the activities and games note an appropriate age level, most of them can in fact be adapted for different groups just by presenting them in different ways – for example, a board game, however simple, can appeal to adults if the decoration is mature, or tailored to a particular interest. You have control over this process, so there is another advantage to producing your own equipment rather than buying ready-made items.

This book is essentially a body of practical ideas for you to use in your therapy, based on my experiences. Most chapters are concerned with an aspect of therapy, and begin with an introduction. Some references are included, and these indicate some of my own background reading, as well as forming a body of recommended reading, should you wish to further your knowledge in any particular area.

Above all, this book seeks to inspire you with confidence to invent your own games and activities, tailored to your clients and clinical settings.

Standard items to have in your cupboard

- A4 and A5 paper and coloured card.
- Pens, felt tip pens, pencils and sharpener.
- Right- and left-handed scissors.
- Glues (Pritt Stick and PVA), Sellotape and Blu-Tack.
- Ruler.
- Blank business cards, index cards and blank postcards.
- 'Taskmaster' blank playing cards.
- Flipchart paper rolls (needed for larger sheets, so ends of rolls are fine).

Also useful

- Box of odd, unwanted (even broken but safe) plastic, metal or wooden items or parts of items.
- Box of scraps of different fabrics.

- Watercolour paints in tubes.
- Upholsterer's foam of 75mm thickness, preferably cut into 75mm cubes.
- Planned timber, 50mm by 50mm, preferably cut into 50mm lengths to form cubes.
- Empty plastic drinks bottles.
- Lining paper, sold in DIY shops alongside wallpaper. It is flat and white or cream, and quite strong.
- Wire coat hangers and picture hooks for displaying your clients' work and decorating the room.
- Defunct boxes of Scrabble, often to be found at car boot sales and on markets – it's the tiles you are after, and it doesn't necessarily matter if it is not a full set.
- The cheapest possible baking parchment you can find. Don't confuse baking parchment with greaseproof paper; baking parchment will not stick, whereas greaseproof will.

Save

- Shoe boxes – for storage.
- Packaging trays from packs of small plants, or similar from some types of biscuits and chocolates.
- Jokes from crackers (however groan-making you think they are!).
- Dented or otherwise damaged toy cars.

Facilities needed or desirable

- Wall space.
- A shelf where you can leave items that your clients have made while the glue or paint dries.
- Fibreboard notice boards.
- Blackboard.
- Access to a PC and photocopier.
- Access to a paper guillotine.



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2

Self-awareness

and self-esteem

Raising someone's self-esteem can be a long and uphill task, but here you will have beads, paint, tee-shirts and paper chains to help you!

Therapists often see clients who have experienced years of not being understood, or of misunderstanding others. Such clients may arrive at our clinics not only with their given, named and particular diagnoses but also having grafted on their own coping strategies, with varying degrees of success.

Sometimes a client's strategies may include avoiding situations where they might have to communicate with others, retreating into timidity or silence and isolation. Perhaps they are now disillusioned with the whole idea of talking with others, and regard themselves as poor communicators, and/or not worth talking to. They may have decided that, for example, it would be better not to put up their hand to answer a question in class, or older clients may prefer not to try to offer an opinion in a conversation, or to take the first tentative steps in forming a relationship.

On the other hand, they may try putting on a brave face, ignoring other people's comments, and attempting to convey that their ways are equal or superior to everyone else's. This may well be misinterpreted by others as arrogance, with again the result of them becoming isolated.

Occasionally we encounter the type of client who has adopted a role of being the class or community clown, and while sometimes this role can be carried off successfully, there is often the risk of being laughed *at* rather than *with*, which can lead to a situation where they are bullied.

In some cases these feelings of worthlessness, the social isolation, the desire not to communicate with others or being bullied may become so severe that help from other professionals – counsellors, psychotherapists, and so on – may be needed. We need to be sensitive and make appropriate referrals when necessary.

However, here are some ideas to help when the case is not so severe, or for after or alongside other therapies.

'All about me' boxes

This is a self-awareness activity. It is best done over several sessions, taking time to complete the boxes to a good finish and talk them through. You can carry out this activity with just one client, or in a group.

A word of warning: this activity should be carried out in a light-hearted atmosphere, you are not trying to be a psychotherapist.

My advice is to make a box about yourself before the session, which you are prepared to open to reveal the contents. However, you should state clearly to your clients that they will not have to reveal the contents of their boxes to others if they do not wish to.

Materials needed

- Small (about 75mm x 75mm x 25mm) plain-coloured cardboard boxes, available from craft shops. The best sorts have a frame within the lid. If you really cannot run to that expense, then the small individual cereal boxes sold in packs are a good substitute, but you or your clients will need to paint them white before decorating, and make a neat opening at one end (and of course you have to remove the contents first!).
- A photo of your client.
- Felt tip pens.
- Small pieces of paper or card.
- Sticky tape.
- Varnish.
- Magazines.

Making your boxes

Use felt tip pens to decorate the outside of the box. Decorations can include images and words to show the world what this person is good at, or likes to do, and should include their first name. If your client is happy to do so, they will stick their photo on the lid of the box, within the frame. This part is on view, for others to inspect.

Some clients prefer to stick on pictures from magazines rather than their own drawings, so you or they will need to supply magazines which interest them – football, fishing, sewing, fashion magazines and so forth are all easily available. If they would like to use that approach, then – in an art of decorating known as decoupage – pictures can be cut or torn out, then stuck on the box, perhaps building up and overlapping the images. Then the box will need to be varnished (acrylic gel varnish is good), using several coats, so that the 'stuck on', multiple sources, appearance is lost.

Inside the box your client will place small pieces of paper or card with words on to describe their secrets, fears, disappointments, dreams, and so on. Some clients may like to have some help in writing down their thoughts, and some may like to chat about the contents with you. It is important for the clients to be sure that the boxes are kept in a secure place, and that you will not look inside without their permission. When they have completely finished making the boxes they may like to seal them with tape, or perhaps with attractive stickers.

Variation

This is good for a group setting. Together, each client begins writing on the pieces of paper or card that will go inside their box, starting with some less 'sensitive' topics, for example, preferences (favoured holiday resorts, music, types of food, best ever film, etc), or aspects of the clients' biographies (birthday, place where their childhood was spent, schooling, etc). If they are all willing, try this: pool all of the cards, and take turns to pick one out and guess who wrote it, before placing it in its owner's box. This can form a pleasant 'getting-to-know-you' session in the clinic. Later, cards with more private thoughts can be placed in the box without others seeing.

Please note: try to create an atmosphere where clients are happy to chat about the contents of their boxes, but be aware that occasionally disclosures are made that might need to be referred to another professional. My advice is to warn clients that anything said in the session by one member of the group must not be repeated by another member outside of the session. You yourself, however, should not promise to keep secrets, because you might hear a disclosure that needs action urgently from another professional.



'How I help people' poster

This is useful for self-esteem building, also self-awareness or awareness of others, and as a background to friendship skills, and it can make a good wall decoration.

Materials needed

- Paper.
- Photocopier.
- Pens.
- White stickers.

Making the poster

Place your own, or your client's, hand on the platen of the photocopier. Now close the lid and preferably cover it with a cloth to exclude as much daylight as possible. Take a photocopy and then copy this several times once you are satisfied with the image, as these copies are useful for several different posters. Store the spares flat. Older teenagers seem to like to photocopy their own hands. Don't worry if they are wearing jewellery or watches, as these photocopy surprisingly well, and add individuality.

If you have any health and safety qualms about photocopying clients' hands then you, or they, can draw around their hands instead.

Procedure

Use the hand image to make an insightful and esteem-raising poster. Head the poster 'How I help' or 'As a friend I ...'

Fill in a 'quality' or two in each finger and thumb, or in the palm. You may need to add small white stickers if the palm is too dark on the photocopy.

The 'qualities' written on the poster can be quite simple, for example, for the 'How I help' version, the statement might be: 'I give out the biscuits', 'I carry people's books', or 'I open the window for my houseparent'.

For the 'Friend' poster, they might write: 'I smile at my friend', 'I share chocolate', 'I remember birthdays', or 'I let my friend choose which film we are going to see'.

For a group setting you could cut out the hands and stick them on to a larger sheet as if reaching for each other.

Variation

Consider using the other copies for similar posters, for example, 'My strengths', 'My hobbies' or 'My favourite sports'. We made a mobile of 'My preferences' hand photocopies by sticking them on to stiff card – so that we could use both sides. We then tied them to crossed sticks, and suspended the whole thing from the ceiling.

Posters and mobiles like these can be a good way to decorate your clinic. For other decoration ideas please see Chapter 15 'Wallcharts and decorations'.

Paint splotch predictions

This is a self-awareness activity, for just one client or for a group. Please be aware that paint in tubes does squirt! You may need to cover the table with newspaper, and provide aprons, old tee-shirts or large paper napkins to protect clients' clothes.

Materials needed

- Heavyweight A4 paper. 100gm photocopy paper is adequate, but 135gm cartridge paper would be even better.
- Watercolour paints in tubes, preferably avoiding browns and black unless you are working with Goth clients.
- Pens.
- Scissors.

Making the splotches

Each client should make a wish to do with their current communication target, for example, 'I want to get better at using the phone', 'I want to make a friend' or 'I want to improve at smiling at people'. Try to encourage realistic targets that could be achieved within the course of therapy. These targets are written a little way above the bottom of the paper, which can be landscape or portrait way round.

The paper is now folded down the middle and the paper opened up again.

Small blobs of different colours of paint are squeezed fairly closely together in the upper part of the centre fold, that is, away from the written prediction. Now the paper is refolded and pressed flat, 'squidging' the paint outwards from the fold, and mixing the colours together a little.

Unfold your paper and here is an instant work of art with a pleasing symmetry, which you can 'interpret' together. Perhaps you can see a telephone or a bit of cable there, or a pair of shaking hands, or a smile. You may have to be very imaginative, but you should be able to see something, that can be a prediction that the target can be achieved.

If possible, make a frame for each picture by cutting a large rectangular hole into another sheet of paper, but take care that the written wish is still visible. These make colourful wall displays en masse and can be taken down and evaluated together at the end of the course – were the predictors right? Maybe things are going the way the predictor said, but you interpreted the time for improvement wrongly. You should of course engineer things so that something positive can be celebrated.

Variation

After making the splotches, use them as a discussion tool to help you and the client to decide which area should be worked on next.

We have used them for a fun activity in January, to predict something general that might happen during the year.

You might also want to use these pictures as motivational tools: 'Look, your paint splotch prediction says that you will have made a good /g/ sound by half-term; you are already quite good at it so maybe if we just do a little more work on it you'll be able to say you are good at predicting.'

For other motivation ideas please see Chapter 11 'Motivating your clients'.

Paint splotch pictures also make good decorations. For other decoration ideas please see Chapter 15 'Wallcharts and decorations'.



'Same and different' chains

People with communication disorders, especially those on the autism spectrum, often express feelings of low self-esteem, mentioning that they are not like other people. This activity is a pressure-free way for your clients to consider and celebrate (a) people's similarities, and (b) their unique qualities. If you have a wall available, it also makes a rather good display, with especially high impact if there are several together.

Materials needed

- Long strips of paper about 10–15cm wide; lining wallpaper cut lengthways into three will be tough, cheap and long.
- Good scissors (left-handed scissors are great for those who need them, and a worthwhile investment).
- Felt tip pens, thin coloured tissue paper, or sticky paper or shapes, for decorating the chains.

Making your chain

Fold your strip of paper into a concertina. You will probably be able to cut through about six layers of paper at a time (some clients may not be able to do so many), and each flat area will need to be big enough to draw a person on.

Draw the outline of a person (two-dimensional, not a 'stick person') on the front. A key point to make if your clients are making these themselves is that the hands (or elbows if hands are on hips), and/or outer edges of skirt, hat or shoes must stretch to the outside edge to create joining points. Now cut out through all the layers, making sure you don't cut through the joining points – otherwise you will end up with a lot of separate paper people rather than a chain. If you create more than one joining point the chain will be stronger. Have some female chains and some male ones.

Once the paper shapes have been cut out and opened up you will be able to discuss how people in general are similar to look at, and you can talk about our other similarities and emphasise our common humanity. You might also want to mention straight away that if we were all exactly the same, life would be boring. Stick one of these chains that show human similarities on the wall.

Now you can move on to the interesting fact of uniqueness or individuality, by decorating the people in another paper chain, being sure to make some female and some male, of various ethnicities, hair colour, some with glasses or hearing aids and so on, and of varying ages. As well as talking about external appearance, you might want to mention people's differing preferences, lifestyles, and so forth, and could add words to the cut-outs' bodies to indicate these differences.

It is important to make it clear that we are all different, and that it's fine to be as we are.

Variation

If you widen the concertinas so that you can fit in two people on the front, holding hands, you can make one more obviously female and one more male, or one fatter and one taller, or one older and one younger, and so on, creating lots of 'opposites pairs'. You can also add speech bubbles, either as a part of the cut-out, or separately by attaching those useful speech bubble-shaped Post-it notes.



Self-awareness beads

This is a good way for a group of children or teenagers to improve their self-awareness in a private or semi-private way. Girls particularly like this activity, but some boys seem to be quite happy to make these too, especially if the beads are brownish, or edged in a dark colour.

Materials needed

- Thin knitting needles or strong wire, or meat skewers with the ends made safe by rounding off the points with a file.
- White or coloured paper.
- Small, preferably wooden, beads from a craft shop (make sure they have a biggish threading hole that will fit on to your needle, wire or skewer).
- PVA glue.
- Felt tips.
- Varnish (I recommend the acrylic type).
- Scissors.
- Narrow elastic (craft shops sell elastic especially designed for threading beads; It's best to buy the thinnest type available).
- Needles that will be narrow enough to fit through the holes, yet with wide enough eyes to accommodate the elastic.
- Baking parchment (not greaseproof paper).
- Envelopes.
- Packaging trays from chocolates or small plants.

Procedure

Cut long narrow triangles – about 10cm (4in) long and 2cm (1¾in) wide, tapering to a point. (You may need to do this yourself if your clients have trouble with their fine motor skills.)

Colour the very outermost edges of the tapered point of each triangle.

Write along the triangle anything of interest about yourself. If you want to keep the information a secret you write it at the fatter end of the triangle, but if you are prepared to share a little of your disclosure you put it towards the thinner end. You will need to use very small writing! Alternatively you could add tiny decorations – hearts, smiley faces, stars and so on are quite popular.

Turn the triangles writing and decorated side down and apply paste along the length of the other side.

Place the knitting needle or wire across the fat end of the triangle and roll it up from the fat end. You should end up with a bead that is oval and ridged like a croissant – because that is exactly how they roll up croissants, from the fat end. You should be able to make several beads on one needle.

A few trials are advisable first before you spring it on your clients – you will soon see how much of the writing is visible.

Now you must leave the beads to dry until your next session.

Ideally you would varnish the beads before use as this will prevent them from unrolling, and make them last much longer, but that means you will have to repeat the drying process. (You might be able to do this between sessions for the clients.) Just use a small amount of varnish and place on baking parchment where they won't stick. Once dry, store them in individual envelopes, or in the indented packaging trays that some small plants, biscuits and chocolates come in, so that each client's beads are separate.

Now comes the interesting bit – threading the beads on to the elastic, interspersing the made ones with the ready-made variety that you have bought. You can make either a necklace or a bracelet.

The clients should find that they have something at the end they can actually wear.

