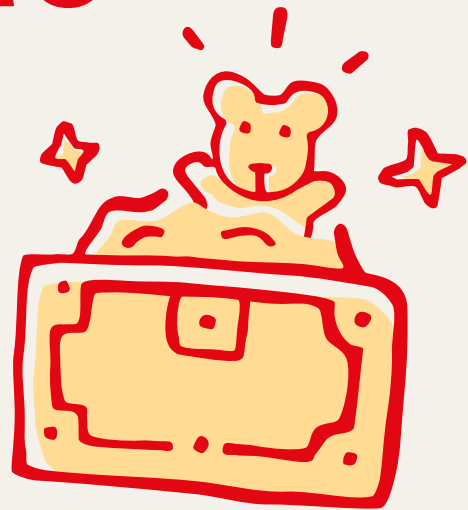




Save the Children

A toy box of ideas

**for working
with children**



Introduction

This toy box of ideas is intended to inspire volunteers, professionals and other committed people to work with children in an even more versatile and resource-oriented way. It presents more than 30 exercises that can help to achieve this goal. They originate from the field of psycho-social support, can be implemented without much material and are very diverse in their application.

As language barriers can exist when working with refugee children, there are also exercises that are not based on verbal communication, but rather focus on movement, for example. To explain them, gestures, facial expressions and demonstration by example are often enough – with, if necessary, a short translation. What's more: some children may already know the game, making it easier for new children to get started. Another equally important detail is the discrimination-sensitive introduction of methods into practice. These should be selected and adapted so that no child experiences exclusion (e.g. due to certain movements that cannot be performed, etc.).

Due to the different conditions and group sizes, the exercises serve as inspirational examples that can be adapted, supplemented and changed to suit the conditions on the ground. In doing so, we would like to encourage people to

try out the exercises and also invite young people, parents and other caregivers to play along. In our experience, everyone enjoys being involved. The feeling cards needed for some of the methods can be found on the last page of the treasury.

Finally, we would like to give a few hints and tips for successful work with children

- Ensure a safe atmosphere that is both play- and child-friendly, as well as respectful
- Children love rituals, especially at the start, during greetings, and at the end
- Ensure that there are sufficient opportunities for movement, which will then allow resting or concentration phases to be inserted
- Use music whenever possible: it can “break the ice” in many exercises or enhance their effect
- Create contexts in which participants can get to know each other better and actively shape the schedule: cooking, talking about themselves, designing, etc.

**We wish you plenty of fun and success
with these exercises!**

1

Activation, fun and games

This category presents exercises and games that get children and families moving. The exercises are primarily intended to be fun and enjoyable and to bring the participants into contact with each other. The small

selection in our toy box of ideas can grow continuously through research on the Internet, exchange with colleagues and, above all, with the use of the children's experience and ideas for new games.



5–10 minutes



No material required



SUITABLE FOR

Groups



LANGUAGE

Language skills required



GOAL

Activation and familiarisation

Everybody who ...

Preparation

The children sit or stand in a circle, while one child volunteers to stand in the middle

Procedure

The child in the middle names something, whereupon the children to whom this applies change places. For example, “Everyone who likes to eat cake, change places”, “Everyone who has ever climbed a tree, change seats” or “Everyone who wears trainers, change places”. The child in the middle tries to get a place in time. The child from whom the space has been taken is next in the middle; it is now his or her turn.

Variant

The children all stand together in a circle without one child being in the middle. You start with “Everybody who ... change places” and the children run through the circle. This variant is less competitive; the focus is on getting to know each other and movement. You also have the possibility to introduce more serious topics in a playful way, for example, “Everybody who has ever been sad” and can combine these with lighter topics such as “Everybody who has ever jumped in a puddle”.



10–15 minutes



No material required



Groups



Minimal language skills
required



Interaction and movement

Mountain, Dwarf, Giant

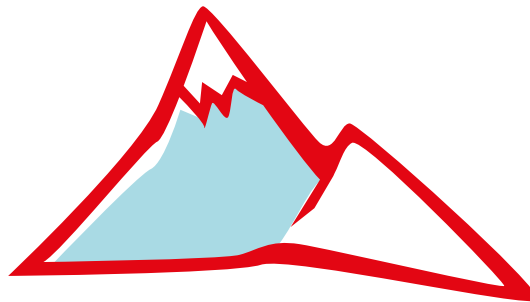
Preparation

No preparation required.

Procedure

One child is chosen as the catcher. This child catches the other children and turns them either into a mountain, a dwarf or a giant by saying to the caught child as they make touch contact: “mountain”, “dwarf” or “giant”. As soon as touch contact has been made, he/she must stop, but can be freed by the other players. The child doing the catching tries to transform all the children.

A child who has been transformed into a mountain stands with their legs apart and forms his or her hands into a point above the head. He/she can be freed by having another child crawl through his or her legs. A child who has been turned into a dwarf squats down very small. He/she can be saved by someone walking or hopping over him or her with their legs apart. A child who has been transformed into a giant stands on tiptoe and stretches his or her arms upwards. He or she can be saved by having another child walk around the giant once.





5–10 minutes



No material required



SUITABLE FOR

Groups



LANGUAGE

No language skills required



GOAL

Activation and group emotions

Body Percussion

Preparation

The children stand in a circle.

Procedure

First, you ask what possibilities there are to make music or sounds with the body. For example, a child might say: “with the feet”. The group then tries out the suggestion together, all stamping their feet on the floor. After collecting some ideas and trying them out together (e.g. clapping, tapping, clicking fingers), you can explain the following: “We are now going to do a group rhythm exercise in four stages. I will start with the first stage and do something, you do it after me. Then it’s someone else’s turn, they do something and we do it and so on.” For example, you stamp your feet 4 times, the group imitates you, then one child is allowed to perform a new sequence, e.g. tap the thigh 5 times, the group repeats this sequence and then both in turn (stamping, tapping). Then it is another child’s turn to perform a sequence (e.g. clap twice), everyone claps twice and then does all the sequences in a row: Stomp 4 times, tap 5 times, clap 2 times, etc.

Extension 1

The rhythm can be varied in terms of speed and volume: faster, slower, louder, quieter.

Extension 2

The rhythm can be established as a ritual for the group, for example, as a greeting or farewell.

Variation

The exercise also works in one-on-one conversation; here people can take turns demonstrating something.



5–10 minutes



No material required



Groups



Minimal language skills required



Fun and group cohesion

Cat, Mouse, Elephant

Preparation

The group divides into two teams which face each other.

Procedure

You explain the game to the children and introduce the actions for easier understanding: With a cat, you show your claws and call out “meow”, with a mouse you form your hands into ears at the top of the head and call out “squeak, squeak, squeak”, with an elephant you form a trunk and call out “arouuu”.

The game then works like “rock, paper, scissors”. Each team briefly agrees on its move and then, after a signal from you, represents a mouse, a cat or an elephant. In keeping with the “rock, paper, scissors” idea, points are awarded as follows: the mouse is eaten by the cat, the elephant splashes water on the cat and the mouse scares the elephant. Then a new round begins.

Variant

“My biggest fan” – for large groups. In this, two sets of children face each other and play “rock, paper, scissors” once. The person who loses now gets behind the person who won and becomes their biggest fan. The person who won continues to play. When this person loses, they (as well as her fans) get behind the person who won, and so on. At the end, the whole group stands behind one of two children, who then engage in the final duel while being cheered on by their fans.



10-15 minutes



A blanket, rug or large towel



SUITABLE FOR

Groups



LANGUAGE

Minimal language skills required



GOAL

Cooperation and group cohesion

Flying carpet

Preparation

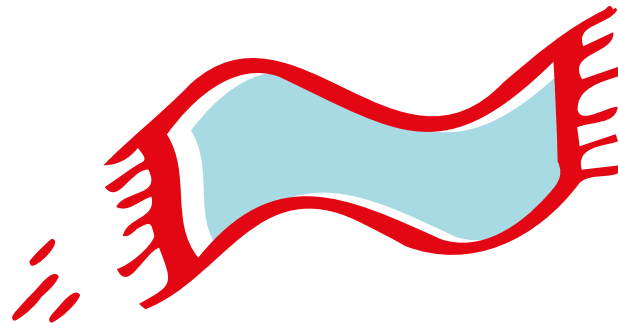
The children stand or sit together on a blanket.

Procedure

You tell the children that a special task that they have to solve together is waiting for them. They now find themselves on a flying carpet. They have already taken off. Suddenly they realise that the carpet can no longer fly like this. To make it work again, the children have to turn the carpet over without leaving it. The children then try to turn the carpet over without “falling off”; this usually only succeeds through teamwork. Several attempts are possible. You can support the children in finding solutions after initial trial and error. The focus here is on how they can do it together as a team.

Extension

The children are not allowed to speak and have to communicate non-verbally.





10–15 minutes



MATERIAL

Several small balls



SUITABLE FOR

Groups



LANGUAGE

No language skills required



GOAL

Activation and familiarisation

Group juggling

Preparation

The children stand together with you in a circle.

Procedure

You look at one person in the circle and say “Hello XYZ” and throw the ball to them. The latter looks at another person, says “Hello XYZ” and throws the ball to that person. After all the children have had the ball once, it lands back with you. Now the round is repeated. Everyone has to make sure that they follow exactly the same order. If the group does well with this, you add another ball to the game: After throwing the first ball, throw the next one in the same order. Subsequently, more balls can be put into play.

Extension

The exercise is suitable as an introductory game and can be repeated or used as a ritual. Over time, the group manages more and more balls or complete passes. This strengthens the group’s sense of cohesion.

Variant

Different types of ball or even large marbles can also be used. In that case, everyone sits down on the floor or a chair and rolls the balls across the floor in the appropriate order. This variant is usually a little quieter and allows the group to move closer together.



5-10 minutes



No material required



SUITABLE FOR

Groups



LANGUAGE

No language skills required



GOAL

Movement and interaction

Chain tag

Preparation

No preparation required.

Procedure

One child is chosen as the catcher – “it”. This child tries to catch the other children. As soon as the person who is “it” has tagged another child, he or she takes the other child by the hand and both of them try to catch the others together. The next child caught is again taken by the hand and helps to catch the others. In this way, gradually, a long chain is created. The child remaining uncaught at the end gets to be “it” next.

Variant

As soon as a fourth child is caught, the chain splits into two chains of two children.



10–15 minutes



Two cushions or cuddly toys



SUITABLE FOR

Large groups



LANGUAGE

No language skills required



GOAL

Activation and interaction

Cushion Race

Preparation

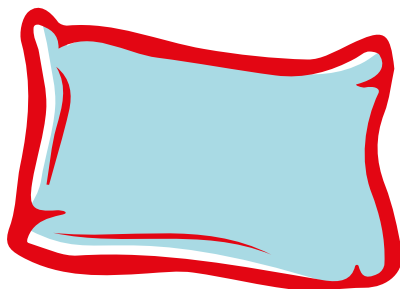
The children form a circle.

Procedure

First, the children count through a sequence once: The first child says “Group 1”, the second child: “Group 2”, the third again “Group 1” and so on. They continue to stand in a circle. If there is an odd number of people, join the circle and play along. The pillows, cuddly toys, etc. are now given to one child from group 1 and one from group 2, who should be roughly opposite each other. At the start signal, the children pass the cushion to the next person in their group in a clockwise direction. The cushions “race” until one has overtaken the other. The group with the overtaking cushion wins. A new round can then begin.

Variant

If no cushions, cuddly toys or similar items are available, paper can also be crumpled into two balls and used as an alternative.





10–15 minutes



No material required



SUITABLE FOR

Groups



LANGUAGE

Minimal language skills
required



GOAL

Movement and fun

Come with me – run away...

Preparation

The children form a circle.

Procedure

One child is chosen and set to run around the outside of the circle. At some point, they tap another child on the back, either saying: “Come with me!” or “Run away!”. They run on. If it is “Come with me!”, the child who has been tapped on the back follows the other in the same direction, and in the case of “Run away!”, in the other direction. The child who is the first to reach the gap stands/sits in the circle. It is now the other child’s turn (again) to tap another child on the back and say: “Come with me!” or “Run away!”.

Extension

For very large groups, several children can be selected to run around the circle at the same time and tap on the back of another child.

Variant

“Duck, Duck, Goose”: One child walks around the circle, tapping each child briefly on the back. Each time the child taps, they say “duck” until suddenly they say “goose”. The child tapped must then react quickly and run after the child who tapped him or her. Whoever reaches the gap in the circle first takes the place there. The other child continues walking and starts the next round.



TIME

10–15 minutes



MATERIAL

No material required



SUITABLE FOR

Large groups



LANGUAGE

Minimal language skills required



GOAL

Movement and fun

Cowshed

Preparation

The children line up in groups of 3.

Procedure

You explain to the children that each group of three is a cowshed. Two children form the shed by creating a roof with raised arms. The third child is the cow and stands in the shed (under the arms of the other two children). Ideally, one child will be left over at the end who can now make three different announcements (alternatively, you can do this).

“Shed”: all the sheds change places, and the cows stay put.

“Cow”: All cows change places, and the sheds remain standing.

“Cowshed”: Everyone changes places. The child who made the announcement finds an appropriate place for himself/herself.

The child who is left at the end may call out “cow”, “shed” or “cowshed” again.

Variant

The content of the exercise can be adapted to the children’s interests, for example “horse paddock” or “castle ghost”, following the same sequence.



10–15 minutes



MATERIAL

Chairs



SUITABLE FOR

Groups



LANGUAGE

Minimal language skills
required



GOAL

Interaction and quick
reactions

Fruit salad

Preparation

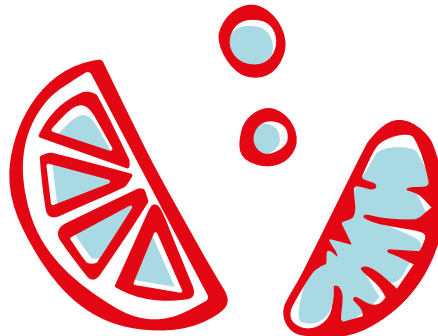
The children sit in a circle of chairs and one child stands in the middle.

Procedure

Three children sitting next to each other name a type of fruit, e.g. apple, banana, strawberry. These are repeated by the children in turn – like counting. So each child is either an apple, banana or strawberry. The child in the middle now calls out one of the three types of fruit and the corresponding children change places. The child in the middle also tries to get a seat. The person who cannot find a chair stands in the middle next and calls out a type of fruit again. If a child in the middle calls out “fruit salad”, everyone has to change places.

Extension

The choice of terms can be based on the children’s interests, for example, sports, favourite foods or pop stars. It is also possible to use terms from other languages that the children choose themselves.





5-10 minutes



No material required



SUITABLE FOR

Groups



LANGUAGE

No language skills required



GOAL

Interaction and movement

Mirror gymnastics

Preparation

The children line up in pairs in the room.

Procedure

One child demonstrates movements and the partner mirrors the movement by imitating it. The speed of the movements can be varied: gymnastics in slow motion or in fast forward mode. You should give appropriate instructions.

Extension

Music is played during the mirror gymnastics. The musical wishes of the children can be taken into account.

Variant

One person demonstrates movements and the whole group imitates them.



10–15 minutes



MATERIAL

A cuddly toy, ball, cushion or similar item



SUITABLE FOR

Groups



LANGUAGE

Minimal language skills required



GOAL

Cooperation and group feeling

Where is Horst?

Preparation

The children line up on a baseline and you stand about 10–30 m away from them. There is an object in front of you, e.g. a cuddly toy called “Horst”.

Procedure

The children try to bring “Horst” to them behind the baseline without being noticed. This works particularly well when the children cooperate with each other. You keep turning around (away from Horst and the children), during which time the children are allowed to move around. Then you call out “Where’s Horst?” and turn back to the children. They must then remain frozen, and anyone who moves is sent back to the baseline by you. As soon as “Horst” has been picked up, after each time you turn around, you can guess which child is hiding “Horst” behind their back. If your guess is correct, the game starts all over again.

Variant

For small children, the game variation “Sleeping Giant” can be played. The giant (that’s you) lies in front of a ball (or similar) and falls asleep again and again. Only while he has his eyes closed are the children allowed to move. When a child has grabbed the ball, he/she runs to the baseline with the ball. The waking giant runs after him and tries to catch the child with the ball.

Attention should be paid to the following:

Through your actions, you have the opportunity to influence the game and encourage the children’s cooperation in hiding “Horst”. This works by varying the time you turn around or by choosing your guesses accordingly.

2

Resources and strengths

This category contains exercises that teach children the following: you can do a lot and you are important. In the process, their self-esteem is promoted. The children should learn that they can be effective actors themselves.

One thing closely linked to this complex of issues is the participation of children and families in time together. Ideas from children, parents and other caregivers are welcome. For example, ask the children to play a game that they choose. You can explain it to the other children. Or ask the

families to bring their favourite music, their favourite food or simply their favourite object.

When children are able to experience their own resources and strengths, this contributes significantly to a happy and appreciative atmosphere in a group. Many of the following exercises are best done in smaller groups or one on one with the child or family, but can also be adapted to other contexts.



3-5 minutes



No material required



Groups and individual contact



Language skills required



Attention and creating a positive experience

“That was nice!” – storytelling round

Preparation

Children sit together, e.g. in a circle of chairs.

Procedure

You ask the children to share a positive experience, a nice moment or an event that brought them joy with the group.

The exercise can be used as a ritual at the beginning of a group or a meeting to positively influence the group atmosphere and to ensure the children enjoy a good start. If the children feel that they are being listened to and that someone is interested in their lives, they will be more likely to share difficult or uncomfortable moments with you and the group elsewhere.

Extension

In order for the children to have more of a part in leading the conversation, you can let the children choose who is next. It is nice if you use a ball, a stuffed animal or something similar that the speaker is holding. She can then throw it to the next person.

Variation

A one-to-one conversation can also be started with the exercise. The child can talk about the experience. In addition, the children can also paint a picture or create a collage.



20–30 minutes



Paper and pens



SUITABLE FOR

Groups and parent/child collaboration



LANGUAGE

Minimal language skills required



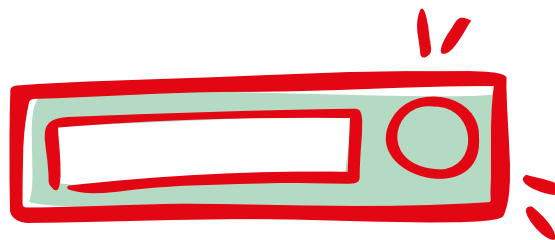
GOAL

Fostering family identity and creating a process of exchange

Family nameplate

Preparation

Each family has a sheet of paper and pens.



Procedure

You explain to the families that they are now going to paint a big nameplate for their front door that shows at a glance who the family is and what makes them tick. The sign will, therefore, show what strengths, traditions, qualities, habits or talents are hidden behind the apartment door. When each family has painted their sign, the pictures are presented to everyone and looked at in an appreciative way.

Extension

If you want to promote the exchange and networking of families, you can ask a question after the presentation of the pictures: which family's doorbell would you love to ring and why?

Attention should be paid to the following:

Should members of the family not be present, be in danger or are perhaps deceased, the exercise can sometimes be saddening. Therefore, consider beforehand whether the participants are emotionally stable enough to benefit from the exercise and, above all, whether the children will not be overwhelmed. When you do the exercise, it is important to create a trusting framework, provide supportive guidance and show an appreciative, open attitude.



Flexible



2-4 small marbles per child,
alternatively dried pulses



Groups and individual
contact



Language skills required



Drawing attention to
positive experiences

Happy marbles

Preparation

No preparation required.

Procedure

The children are taught that there are tricks for remembering happy experiences and preserving joyful moments, especially when everyday life sometimes seems sad or boring. One of these tricks is using happy marbles or beans. For this, each child first receives two small marbles (alternatively pulses such as beans or chickpeas), which the child puts into their right trouser/jacket pocket or similar pocket. At every happy moment during the time spent together, a marble now changes trouser pockets and goes into the left pocket. Before the children say goodbye again, they are asked how many marbles have changed pockets. Those who wish can also tell the others when and why a happy moment occurred.

Extension

The children can also take the task home and collect happy marbles throughout the day or even the week.

Attention should be paid to the following:

The number of marbles or beans should be adjusted gradually. It is important to start with a few marbles to create a sense of achievement and then increase the number according to the children's experiences.



Flexible



Paper and pens



Groups



Language skills required



Strengthening cohesion in the group

Secret friends

Preparation

Each child writes his or her name on a piece of paper and these are collected in a bag or similar.

Procedure

You explain to the children in the group that they are about to pick out a piece of paper with a name on it. The task will then be to do something good for this child in the course of your time together. It could be to be especially friendly to the child, to help the child, to take over a task, to give them some food or similar. The whole thing must be as secret as possible, so that no one is recognised as a secret friend before the end of the time spent together. Group time then proceeds as usual, depending on the context. Finally, the children guess who their secret friend is and reflect on their experiences.

Extension

The exercise can also be carried out over a longer period of time, e.g. over several dates, with a fixed group.

Attention should be paid to the following:

You should make sure that none of the children have picked out their own name.



10–15 minutes



No material required



SUITABLE FOR

Groups



LANGUAGE

Language skills required



GOAL

Creating appreciation
and connection

The Compliments Game

Preparation

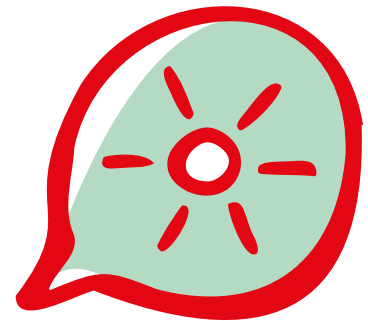
Everyone gets a sheet of paper and a pen.

Procedure

The children are asked to draw a self-portrait on the sheet. Just what the picture looks like is irrelevant – what is important is that the people are recognisable. The sheets are then collected and shuffled by you. Then each child picks out a sheet and tries to identify who it is. They show the picture to the circle and say: “I got XYZ”. After the named child has confirmed this is true by nodding briefly, the other child continues: They compliment the child in the picture and give the picture back to them. For example, “What I like about you is ...”. Or “I particularly like the fact that you ...”. Or “I like ... about you.” The child who has received a compliment is next in line and picks out a slip of paper.

Variant

Instead of self-portraits, it is also possible to write just names on the slips of paper. These are then put into a bag and pulled out one after the other.





30–60 minutes



Pens, paper (as large as possible)



Groups



Minimal language skills required



Recognising strengths in the group

Resource Animal/ Group Strength Animal

Preparation

The paper (scrap paper can also be used here) and pens are laid out and ready.

Procedure

First you talk to the children about animals and their strengths. The children exchange ideas and could say, for example: “The cheetah is fast”, “The fox is clever”, “The elephant is wise”, etc. After the children have collected their ideas, you tell them that they should now draw and design a “Group Strength Animal” together. Everyone works on the picture at the same time, which results in a fantasy animal that represents all the strengths of the group. It could end up with the head of a parrot on the shoulders of a hippopotamus with the legs of a hamster and so on. At the end, the picture is described by the group and should at best be hung up in the room. In addition, a name can be found for the animal, which can act as a “mascot” in the future.

Variant

A “Family Strength Animal” can also be drawn. This can either take place in the context of working with families, or each child can draw their own “Family Strength Animal” and in doing so reflect on what he or she likes about the family.

Attention should be paid to the following:

The animal can be made up. Whether it has seven legs or three heads, the only important thing is that all the children are involved. The group process may need your support.



15–20 minutes



MATERIAL

Paper and colouring pens



SUITABLE FOR

Smaller groups and individual contact



LANGUAGE

No language skills required



GOAL

Recognising individual strengths

Resource Flower

Preparation

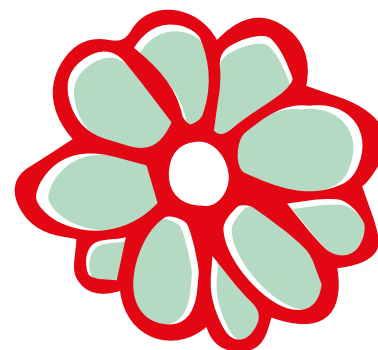
The children get paper and pens.

Procedure

The children draw a flower with 4–6 petals on their paper or get a sheet with a flower already drawn on it. In the petals, they write or draw their strengths, interests and resources. Helpful questions: what do I particularly like to do? What am I good at? What do I enjoy? The flowers can also be painted, cut out and creatively designed. The children are supported in their search for resources, strengths and interests and are helped where needed. The finished flowers are then presented to the group, displayed if necessary and looked at together.

Extension

Water lily: cut out the flower and fold the petals towards the centre. The closed flower is then placed on the surface of water (sink, paddling pool, pond, etc.). The group observes how the flower opens like a water lily and all the strengths become visible.





15–30 minutes



Paper and pens



SUITABLE FOR

Small groups and individual contact



LANGUAGE

Written language skills required



GOAL

Recognising individual strengths

Resource hand

Preparation

All the children get a sheet of paper and pencils for drawing.

Procedure

The children are first instructed to trace their hand on the sheet. Then they write one strength on each finger. Helpful questions can be: what do you like to do? What are you good at? What qualities do you like about yourself? The hand can then be coloured and creatively designed. Finally, the children present their resource hands to the group.

Extension

In individual work, the children can also be asked which finger's strength they would like to develop, show more of, use or experience. This allows individual goals and corresponding exercises to be linked.

Variant

The exercise lends itself as a parent-child exercise. Through parents or other caregivers supporting children in finding strengths and positive qualities, the family automatically experiences an appreciative moment of connection.



30–60 minutes



MATERIAL

Jars with lids (e.g. old jam jars), coloured paper, pencils



SUITABLE FOR

Groups



LANGUAGE

Written language skills required



GOAL

Creating appreciation and connection, encouraging self-worth

Superpower jar

Preparation

Each child receives a jar; there are many small coloured pieces of paper and pens.

Procedure

You tell the children that they are now all about to receive a jar containing their personal superpowers. First, all the children write their names on their jars. If materials are available, the jars can also be glued and decorated. Then all the children write a positive quality, a strength or a compliment for all the other children on a small piece of paper and put it in the corresponding superpower jar. The children can take home their personal super power jar and open it at a time of their choice and read the compliments of the other participants.

Variant 1

The making of superpower cards requires less time and effort. To do this, fold an A4 page lengthwise into a card, write the name on the front and all the compliments on the inside. The card can also be designed creatively. This exercise is useful for goodbyes, for example.

Variant 2

If the language skills are poor, small drawings can also be thrown into the jar or the children can be helped by you or by interpreters.

3

Feelings and emotions

This category provides exercises that can help children (and adults) to deal with their own feelings and those of other people. The first thing to do is to promote perception of feelings, learn to differentiate them, find words for one's own state of mind and, at best, to enter into an exchange with others about it. An open and benevolent attitude is especially important here to convey that every feeling the children feel is okay, and that they will receive support if needed.

The following exercises tend to be designed for smaller groups or individual discussions. Some of them should only be used if you are going to have long-term contact with the children. You will find small, more movement-oriented

or playful exercises at the beginning of the chapter; these can be carried out at a lower level.

Especially for children suffering from stress, working with feelings is very important and helpful, but at the same time it can overwhelm them. In such situations, it is important to support the children directly in regulating their emotions, for example, through conscious breathing or guided mindfulness. This can mean, for example, standing up, taking a few steps or drawing attention to the here and now by asking certain questions such as "What day is it?" or "What do you see on the wall?" In general, you should always adapt to the needs and stage of development of the children, and only do what you are comfortable with.



15–20 minutes



MATERIAL

Copies of the 5 feeling cards, pens



SUITABLE FOR

Small groups and individual contact



LANGUAGE

Minimal language skills required



GOAL

Recognising, perceiving and naming emotions

What colour is the feeling?

Preparation

The copies of the feeling cards and pens are laid out.

Procedure

First, show the feeling cards and ask the children which feeling they recognise in each one. If language skills are poor, terms can be translated. The children are then allowed to make their own feeling cards and are asked to assign a colour to each emotion. It is a good idea to discuss this with the group or several children in advance. Helpful questions: “What colour is sadness for you?”, “What colour is anger?”, “What is your favourite emotion? And your favourite colour?” At the end, the children can present their pictures to each other. For this, you can ask all the children to first show their picture of a certain feeling (e.g. fear) and put it in a place, then the next feeling (e.g. joy) and so on. As a final round, the children can take turns to show their favourite feeling card.

Extension

The coloured feeling cards can be used in follow-up exercises, e.g. “Feelings and the body”.

Variant

If group work is not possible, the copies of the feeling cards can also be left out and the children can colour them independently.

Attention should be paid to the following:

Encourage the children to express themselves, think and share while painting and crafting. In the process, convey that all feelings are OK and that there is no right or wrong feeling.



25–30 minutes



Pens, paper, feeling cards



Small groups and individual contact



Language skills required



Promoting the perception of the body and emotions

Feelings and the body

Preparation

All the children place their own feeling cards from the exercise “What colour is the feeling?” in front of them. They also have a piece of paper on which they draw a rough outline of their body, or on which it is already printed.

Procedure

The children are asked where they feel the sensations of joy, anger, sadness, fear and serenity in their bodies. After a short discussion, the children can use the body outline on their sheet to draw their feelings there. You simply use the previously selected colour for each feeling for this. Children often manage to make this connection surprisingly quickly. In the group, the experiences are then compiled and the children exchange their feelings.

Extension

Later, this work can be used to do exercises that regulate feelings. For example, conscious breathing when anxious or stamping several times when angry.

Variant

For the exercise, the children can also have their own body outlines drawn on wall-paper. This approach strengthens their relationship to their own body, but is slightly more elaborate to implement.

Attention should be paid to the following:

When working in a group, it is important that each child has their own experience of where they feel a sensation, and this is not questioned. It can be enriching for the children to realise that all children have their own feelings, and that these can be felt in many different ways.

If a child is triggered or in a state of emotional distress, he or she should receive immediate support by being placed in the here and now.



5–10 minutes



Feeling cards



Large groups



Minimal language skills required



Express current emotional state

Feelings in space

Preparation

Lay out the feeling cards in the room.

Procedure

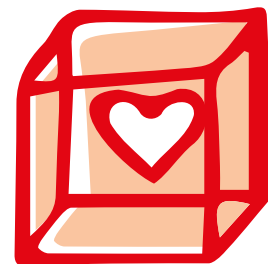
The children are asked to walk around the room, looking at the cards and turning their attention inwards. Let them find out how they are doing today. Now ask them to assign themselves to a feeling or even to stand between two feeling cards, for example, if they feel both sad and happy. Depending on the children's language skills, ask some children briefly, for example: "What makes you happy today?", "You're standing next to fear, what makes you fearful? How can the group support you today?". Alternatively, summarise using your observational capacity, for example: "Thank you, I see a lot of you feel ..., some of you have several feelings, ..., ... at the same time. Nice to see you all here today."

Extension

The exercise can be used in a ritualised way to repeatedly get an impression of the current state of the participants' emotional well-being and their related needs.

Attention should be paid to the following:

The exercise should be used briefly and with the right sensitivity to understand the children's current state of mind. No child should have to speak out or feel pressure. If you have concerns about a child's well-being, you can raise these during a one-on-one conversation.





3-5 minutes



No material required



SUITABLE FOR

Groups



Minimal language skills
required



Perceiving a connection
between feelings and body

Feelings in motion

Preparation

No preparation required.

Procedure

Have the children walk around the room and move like a certain feeling; you join in. You say, for example: “Now we’ll all walk like we’re really angry.” The children are encouraged to show the movements in a pronounced way. Then comes the next feeling: “Now we’ll all walk like we’re really scared right now.” After all the children have imitated all the feelings in movement, they are allowed to choose one feeling and move around the room accordingly.

Extension

Depending on age and language skills, the connection between the body and emotions can be worked out. Among other things, this will focus on how the children can consciously use their bodies to deal with their feelings. In the case of strong anxiety or sadness, for example, it can be helpful to consciously adopt an opposite body posture.

Attention should be paid to the following:

Guidance should be playful and encouraging, with the intention of strengthening self-efficacy.



3-5 minutes



Clothes pegs, thick paper/
cardboard, pens



SUITABLE FOR

Groups



Minimal language skills
required



Express current emotional
state

Emotional barometer

Preparation

The emotional barometer is made and hung up. For this, the numbers 0 to 10 are written on thick paper (preferably cardboard) – from bottom to top. The clothes pegs are labelled with the children's names.

Procedure

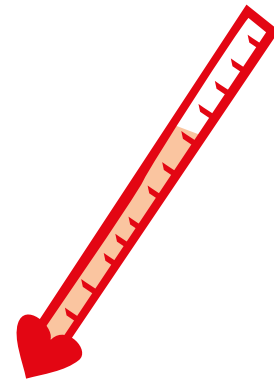
As soon as a child comes into the room, they can take their clothes peg and indicate how they are doing on the scale from 0 to 10. The child does not have to express himself or herself verbally. Thus, the barometer serves as a swift self-reflection tool for the children and provides an overview for you. It can easily be integrated into group processes.

Extension

The barometer can also be expanded and embellished with emojis or similar.

Attention should be paid to the following:

You should keep an eye on the placement of the pegs and ask about them or offer support: "I saw you weren't doing so well today. How can I help you?"





TIME

5–10 minutes



MATERIAL

Feeling cards or small pieces of paper



SUITABLE FOR

Groups



LANGUAGE

Language skills required



GOAL

Recognising and expressing feelings

Miming feelings

Preparation

Either have the feeling cards ready or write feelings on small pieces of paper.

Procedure

Depending on the age group and language skills, the feeling cards or slips of paper with feelings are mixed and laid out face down (or collected in a bag). Then the children pick out a piece of paper one after the other and, using mime, express the feeling or emotional state to the group (if the child cannot read, the term is whispered in the ear). The group tries to guess the term. Whoever is correct is next.

Variant

Depending on age and language skills, the current mental state can first be written on a piece of paper. “Today I feel ...”. Afterwards, the slips of paper are collected. Now each child may pick out a piece of paper and, using mime, express the feelings of another. Depending on what the children agree on beforehand, the person whose condition has been shown can be guessed, or this information can be left unspoken.



TIME

5–10 minutes



MATERIAL

2x feeling cards



SUITABLE FOR

Groups



LANGUAGE

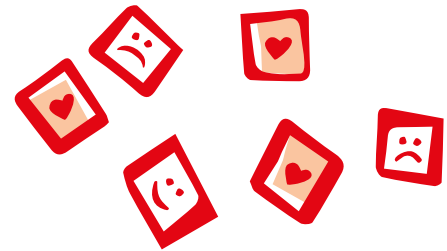
Minimal language skills
required



GOAL

Recognising emotions

Emotional memory



Preparation

You lay out the feeling cards face down.

Procedure

The exercise works like a memory game. However, no cards are revealed. One or two children leave the room briefly. All other children pick out a feeling card each and spread out in the room (standing or sitting). Now the children come back in from outside and tap two children each. These two then show, using mime, the feeling that was depicted on their card. If both show the same feeling, a pair has been found. The game ends when all pairs have been found.

Variant 1

The exercise can also be done as an activation exercise with different objects on the cards. For example, as animal memory, movement memory or song memory.

Variant 2

The exercise can also be used to assign groups. For this, the feeling cards are distributed (in the appropriate number, depending on the size of the small group) and the children act out their feeling. In doing so, the children who show the same feeling recognise each other and come together as a small group accordingly.



5–10 minutes



Feeling cards



Groups and individual contact



Language skills required



The connection between feelings and behaviour

When I am anxious, I ...

Preparation

The children sit in a circle. In the middle, the feeling cards lie upside down on the floor.

Procedure

The first child turns over a feeling card and names the feeling. Afterwards, several children are asked to say what they do when they feel like this. For example: “When I’m sad, I cry”, “When I’m scared, I hide”. Or “When I’m happy, I like to play with others.” Sitting in a circle, not all children need to speak. After a few contributions, the next feeling card can be turned over and the same question asked again, for example, “What do you do when you are happy?”

Extension

If there is interest and enough attention for the topic, further questions can be joined on so as to talk about needs. For example, “What do you need when you are sad/anxious/angry?” The children then say “When I am ..., I need ...”. Often the children already have strategies to regulate their feelings; this is shown by the question: “What helps you when you feel ...”.

Attention should be paid to the following:

It is important that all children feel comfortable during the exercise, and that the process is guided according to the attention span and emotional resilience of all children.

4

Relaxation and stabilisation

Many of these exercises are suitable as a short break, e.g. after or between a concentration phase or following movement exercises. They are meant to help release tension in a playful way. The effects can be enhanced by ritualising or repeating the exercises. A quiet atmosphere or even calm

music also contributes to overall success. In addition to exercises for one's own physical awareness, there is also an opportunity to direct one's attention outwards and thus align oneself again in the present.



3-5 minutes



No material required



SUITABLE FOR

Groups and individual contact



LANGUAGE

No language skills required



GOAL

Brief relaxation by stretching and flexing

Picking apples

Preparation

Everyone lines up in the room.

Procedure

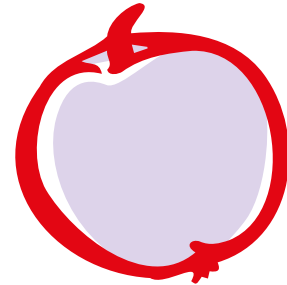
You explain to the children that they are now going to pick all the imaginary apples from an imaginary tree. To do this, they should stretch their arms all the way up and stand on their tiptoes to reach the apples in the treetop. The apples that have been picked are slowly placed in an imaginary basket standing on the floor. In doing so, everyone lets their arms dangle downwards. Repeat this process 3 to 5 times.

Extension 1

This exercise can also be incorporated as an interim task, e.g. as a short form of relaxation in concentration phases. To do this, you ask the children to stop their current activities and “pick apples” from where they are.

Extension 2

The effect of relaxation is enhanced if the children inhale deeply through the nose when stretching and exhale through the mouth when relaxing (upper body and arms dangling down).





10–15 minutes



No material required



SUITABLE FOR

Groups



LANGUAGE
No language skills required



Promoting attention and concentration

Passing on impulses

Preparation

The children stand or sit in a circle.

Procedure

The children take 3 deep breaths in and out, then hold hands. A child passes on an “impulse” (e.g. a short, firm handshake) to his/her neighbour. This child, in turn, passes on the impulse until it reaches the child who started it. Now another child can start an impulse and send another shortly afterwards. When both impulses have returned to the child who started, it is another child’s turn to start one or more impulses.

Extension

The impulses can run in both directions. In addition, a double handshake can be introduced as a change of direction.

Variant

The impulses can run in both directions. In addition, a double handshake can be introduced as a change of direction.

Attention should be paid to the following:

The exercise should be varied according to the goal. If the exercise is intended to convey more of a concentrated sense of calm and relaxation, the rules are kept fairly simple and the exercise is guided slowly and quietly. If the focus is to be more on cooperation and attention, a faster, more stimulating attitude makes sense.



5–10 minutes



No material required



SUITABLE FOR

Groups (children and parent/child) and individual contact



LANGUAGE

Minimal language skills required



GOAL

Drawing attention to the here and now, concentration and creativity

Magic object

Preparation

The children sit or stand in a circle.

Procedure

You have a magic item in your pocket. This is invisible and can change into something else at any time. For that to happen, everyone has to be very quiet. You rummage in your pocket, take out the invisible object and show the group what the object can transform into. By way of an example, you make hand movements that reveal a flower and then a bird and then a banana and finally a handkerchief. The children are allowed to guess what it was.

Then you explain to them that the magic object is now to be passed around the circle and can become something different for each child. Each child mimes one thing with their hands. Only when the magical object has returned to you and you have carefully stowed it away do the children take turns guessing what each child mimed. This means everyone has to stay focused and memorise everything well.

Variant

The exercise can also be successful on a one-on-one basis, with the child and you taking turns to imagine what the magical object has become.

Attention should be paid to the following:

The exercise should be gone through quietly, slowly and at the same time with a sense of excitement. Some children need some time to think about how to do the exercise, but in the end, everyone usually comes up with something. When in doubt, they can adopt the ideas of the other children.



10–15 minutes



Large stick (e.g. broomstick or metre stick)

Large stick (e.g. broomstick or metre stick)



Medium-sized groups

Medium-sized groups



No language skills required

No language skills required



Promoting attention and concentration

Promoting attention and concentration

Magic wand

Preparation

The group is divided and the children stand in two rows closely facing each other.

Procedure

You ask the children to take 2 to 3 deep breaths and then extend the index finger of each hand. The outstretched fingers of the children facing each other should touch in the middle so that the fingers of all the children form a line. Place the broomstick on this line, making sure that the index fingers of all the children touch the stick. The task for the children is now to place the stick on the floor. This can only be done together, and the children try until they succeed.

Extension

The exercise can be made more difficult by not allowing verbal communication and/or by having the children close their eyes (note: only if all children feel comfortable doing this).

Variant

Alternatively, a tyre or other light object can be used.

Attention should be paid to the following:

If initial attempts do not succeed, reflection as a group becomes particularly important. You support the children to better coordinate and act together as a group.





10 minutes



No material required



Parent and child group



No language skills required



Relaxation and strengthening connections

Pizza massage

Preparation

The children sit down on a chair in front of their parents or other caregivers and turn their backs to them.

Procedure

You guide the pizza massage, give “baking instructions” and show the corresponding movements. The dough requires water, flour and yeast. These ingredients are mixed on the children’s backs (circular movements) and then kneaded. Then roll out the dough (spreading movements), cut the tomatoes (lightly tap the edge of the hand on the back), spread the tomatoes (palm of the hand presses on the back) and finally sprinkle a lot of cheese on the pizza (light tapping movements with the fingertips). Then put the pizza in the oven, close it (press your hands behind your back).

Extension

Include more toppings and appropriate movements, or bake a different dish, e.g. apple pie.

Variant

2 children at a time join together or all sit in a circle and massage the child to their right.

Attention should be paid to the following:

All children should feel physically comfortable all the time and know that their boundaries are respected.



3-5 minutes



No material required



SUITABLE FOR

Groups



LANGUAGE

No language skills required



GOAL

Relaxation

Turtle in the sun

Preparation

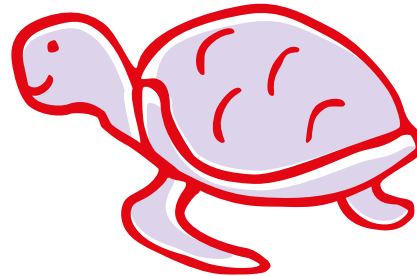
The children line up in the room.

Procedure

You guide the children to imagine they are a turtle. They walk in a relaxed fashion (everyone walks slowly around the room). You say that it is starting to rain and the turtles retreat under their shells (children make themselves very small on the ground). A little later the sun starts shining again; the turtles are happy. At the same time, the children stand up and stretch their arms and hands in the air. Repeat the sequence of walking, rain and sun several times. To make sure it ends with the children relaxed, the last phase should be a walking one.

Attention should be paid to the following:

If language skills are limited, you can simply do the exercise and use pictures of a turtle, as well as of the sun and rain.





3-5 minutes



No material required



SUITABLE FOR

Groups and individual contact



LANGUAGE

No language skills required



GOAL

Relaxation

Snake breathing

Preparation

The children sit down on a chair or stand in a circle.

Procedure

You explain to the children that they will now learn to breathe like a snake. To do this, it is important to breathe in deeply through the nose. To facilitate this, the children should put their hand on their tummy and feel how it rises and falls. When exhaling, the children should try to hiss slowly and for as long as possible – in other words, to imitate the sound of a snake. The group repeats 4 to 5 breaths together.

Extension

After a little practice, the breathing technique can also be used to regulate emotions.





10–15 minutes



No material required



SUITABLE FOR

Groups and individual contact



LANGUAGE

Minimal language skills required



GOAL

Drawing attention to the here and now and concentration

Detective work – what's different?



Preparation

The children sit in a circle and look at each other.

Procedure

You choose two children to become detectives. They leave the room and wait there until they are brought back in. In the meantime, the children in the group change a total of three to six things about their appearance. For example, shoes or clothes are changed, glasses are taken off or the jacket is put on the wrong way round. The detectives are then allowed to come in and guess what is different. If their language skills are limited, they can point to the changes or even change back the relevant items such as shoes. The group can offer hints and tips. Afterwards, two other children are allowed to take on the role of the detectives.

Extension

The exercise teaches children in a playful way to direct their attention from inside to outside and to perceive the room, other people and objects in great detail. Therefore, it can also be practised and applied using individual contact as a stabilisation technique for emotional regulation.

Variant

The exercise can also be done in pairs or with two children at a time. For this, two children sit or stand opposite each other, one child turns around and the other changes something about himself or herself (takes off his glasses, takes off his scarf, etc.). Then the guessing starts.



3-5 minutes



No material required



SUITABLE FOR

Groups and individual contact



LANGUAGE

No language skills required



GOAL

Muscle relaxation

Squeezing lemon juice

Preparation

The children sit or stand in the room.

Procedure

You guide the children to imagine they have a lemon in both hands (if their language skills are limited, you can show them a picture of a lemon). These lemons are to be squeezed in the next few minutes. To do this, the arms are bent and the hands are clenched into fists. You explain it to the children and demonstrate that the most juice can be squeezed out of the lemons when the muscles of the entire arms and hands tense up. So now everyone squeezes the lemon juice out of the lemons at the same time for about 20 seconds. Afterwards, the lemons are thrown into an imaginary bin and the children can shake out their hands and arms. This sequence of first tensing the muscles and then consciously relaxing them is repeated several times. At the end of the exercise, the squeezed lemon juice can be drunk together imaginatively.

Extension

The exercise (based on E. Jacobson's Progressive Muscle Relaxation) can be done with all muscle groups.



Save the Children

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This toybox of ideas for working with children was developed in an outreach context for refugee children and families from Ukraine.

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