



## **2019 Florida Recreation and Park Association's Annual Conference**

Improv Exercises for Students with Autism, ADD, Sensory Processing Disorder and other Neurological Disorders.

### **PRESENTERS:**

**Craig Price**, Education Director, The Naples Players

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**Margot Escott, LCSW**, Psychotherapist, Improv4Wellness Instructor

### **GOALS**

1. Benefits of improv for students with ASD, SPD and ADD include improved communication skills, creative thinking and social skills.
2. How to set-up Improv classes. The ideal room is one that has nothing on the walls (which could distract students) a wood or carpeted floor, yoga mats and/or small carpet squares. A poster board or white board that lists the games, with colors matching a dice or spinner. Each student gets to roll the dice and choose games from that color they'd like to play. A board with their names on it and gold stars that can affix to that board. Students get a star when they participate in the game.

## **DESCRIPTION OF GAMES FOR SMALL AND LARGE GROUPS, VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL**

### **STORY CIRCLE WITH FEELINGS**

Group sits on carpets and shares a story that happened that day or that week. It could also be something they're looking forward to on the weekend. After a short story they say how it makes them feel. The instructors and group model back that feeling. For example, tomorrow I'm going to see Toy Story 4 and I feel excited! Then, the whole group shows them what excited looks like. This is important as children and adults with ASD often have a very flat affect and are unable to connect facial expressions with feeling. Non-Verbal students can participate by showing emotions and showing how they are feeling today when it is their turn to share.

### **MISS RUBY DANCE (MRD)**

MRD is done in a circle standing and one student begins by saying "Miss Ruby Dance" and the group repeats exactly how that student said, "Miss Ruby Dance" with their voice and their body following the movement. The Student can repeat their "Miss Ruby Dance" in three different ways with the group mimicking them each time. Finally the student will say "And she dance like this!" The rest of the group imitates the dance and repeats the phrase. This helps with social skills, movement, agility, patience, i.e. waiting ones turn, eye contact and creativity. Non-verbal students can repeat movements and demonstrate their own movements when it is their turn.

## **OBJECTGAME**

The group stands in the circle and, with a small group. One object is brought out and passed around the circle. Each member of the circle performs a different task with the object. Task can be the actual use the object was originally produced for or it could be a brand new way the object has never been used before. If the object is a strainer for pasta the student could perform the straining of pasta or they could put it on their head like a hat. For larger groups or 6 or more, objects can be handed to each student so that every student in the circle has an object. To begin the game they all try their activity with their object at the same time and everybody gets to see what the other students are doing. Then they pass the object to their left. Everybody getting a new object and able to do a new activity. Students keep passing all the way around the circle until everybody has tried multiple objects.

## **ZIP ZAP ZOP**

One student begins with zip by motioning to a student, making eye contact saying “Zip” The second student makes eye contact and motions to another student and says, “Zap”. Then finally that student motions and makes eye contact with another student and says “Zop”. This “Zip, Zap, Zop” continues around the circle with students looking at others and making eye contact and motion. After the students have mastered these phrases the game can morph into sounds or funny words. Verbal and nonverbal children can play this at the same time. No sounds are necessary for the game to work.

This game enhances group socialization, focus, attention, eye contact, patience and verbalizations.

## **ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS (RPS)**

Rock paper scissors, the classic game that everyone’s played as a child, now can be played as a group activity. Students pair off and challenge each other to a game of rock paper scissors in the traditional way. The only difference is that there are no losers, everybody wins! When one student wins the original contest of RPS the other student becomes their cheerleader. Their job is to cheer their team on to victory, verbally and non-verbally. Then find another team to challenge. Each team challenging each other until there are finally only two players remaining for the championship with a team of cheerleaders behind each player. This activity helps with focused attention socialization skills, team building and eye contact.

## **I AM A TREE**

In this game, one student steps out into the middle of the room says, “I am a tree” and strikes a tree pose. Then another student thinks about what might take place next to a tree and poses next to the “tree” as a squirrel. Or they might think what else goes next to a tree and be a little girl on the ground reading a book under the tree. After several students join the tableau the original student gets to pick one of the students to stay on stage for a brand new scene starting with their “thing”. If it was the girl reading a book the rest of the students come out, start a new scene, which may be a library. This game helps with creativity, listening, focus and frustration tolerance as each student awaits their turn.

## **MINDFULNESS EXERCISES**

Teaching Mindfulness techniques and meditation helps students learn self-regulation and a coping skill for stressful times.

## RESEARCH

Mindfulness-Based Program for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Their Parents: Direct and Long-Term Improvements

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5968048/>

## PRESENTER BIOS

**Margot Escott, LCSW** incorporates over 30 years experience as a counselor, speaker and teacher in her *Improv 4 Wellness* classes that are designed to use humor, play and improv to achieve well being. Margot graduated from the New York University School of Social Work in 1983 and has lived and practiced in Naples, Florida since 1984. She attended the Rutgers Summer School of Addiction Studies in 1987 and 1990 and has extensive post-graduate training in addiction studies and co-dependency. Throughout her professional career, Margot presents workshops and seminars on “Therapeutic Value of Humor and Play” on a national level, and have published several articles on humor, geriatric issues and improvisational comedy. She is an active member of the National Association of Social Workers and the Florida Chapter of NASW.

**Craig Price** is the Education Director at The Naples Players Sugden Theatre. Craig Price trained and performed with Second City in Chicago, with the legendary Del Close at Improv Olympic, followed by five years on the road with ComedySportz. Craig opened the Center for Performing Arts in Bonita Springs, developing their Performing Arts and Theatre Program. Craig formed several area Improv groups including Bonita City Improv, teaching improv to adults and children, and served as Assistant Director for WGPU’s award winning Curious Kids TV show. As TNP’s Education Director Craig teaches acting and improv, directs KidzAct, and performs with Stage 2 Improv and developed their inclusive theatre class program dedicated to providing high-quality arts access for those with additional needs. Craig teaches Improv for ASD classes and teaches improv classes to members of special needs organizations throughout Naples, Florida.

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