

Tower Tumble Therapy Game

by Marcie Yeager, LCSW, RPT-S

INTRODUCTION

Rationale: Groups, especially in their initial stages, can benefit from fun activities that build group cohesion and provide an opportunity for players to get to know each other in a safe, non-threatening manner. This activity is based on the always-popular tower building game (Jenga™ and its variations). This classic game has often been adapted for the purpose of stimulating conversations. This particular adaptation creates a game that, while lots of fun, is also cooperative and therapeutic.

Goals:

- 1) To build a sense of group unity by playing a game that is both fun and cooperative.
- 2) To foster communication skills and social interaction by providing a structured, friendly format for sharing personal information.

Application: This version of the game was developed for therapy groups and can accommodate up to four players (possibly more, see below). Although specially designed for groups of children, the game can also be played with families or with just one child and the therapist.

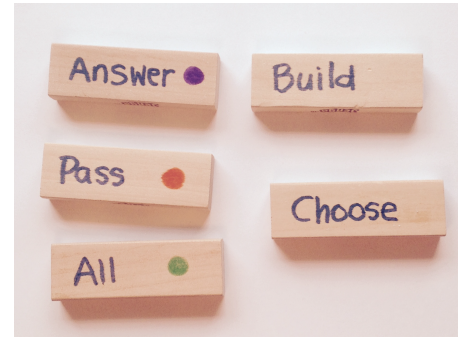
Materials needed:

- 1) A set of 54 Jenga™ (or similar) building blocks. The therapist prepares the blocks prior to the game by marking each block with an instruction (see samples, pictured at right.)

Mark the blocks as follows (the color circles on the blocks correspond to the colors on Tracking Cards).

- 12 blocks are marked with the word **Answer**, plus a circle of color (4 green, 4 orange, 4 purple)
- 9 blocks are marked with the word **Pass**, plus a circle of color (3 green, 3 orange, 3 purple)
- 9 blocks are marked with the word **All** plus a circle of color (3 green, 3 orange, 3 purple)
- 12 blocks are marked with the word **Choose**
- 12 blocks are marked with the word **Build**

- 2) One **Tracking Card** per player (see sample at right). Four different cards are provided. Each card has 12 questions, color-coded (green, orange, purple) to correspond with the circles on the blocks. (If you have more than four players, two players can share a card and take turns pulling a block and following the instructions. You can also make extra copies of the cards, but the more cards in play, the more difficult it will be to finish the game without tumbling the tower.)



INSTRUCTIONS

(Note: If you have not played a Jenga™-type game before, see General Rules/Strategies on page 3.)

Introduce the activity: Discuss with the group members:

You may have played a game like this before. Who has played it?

For those who have never played before, provide a brief explanation:

The way this game is played is we build a tower with blocks, then we carefully remove blocks from the middle of the tower, one-by-one, and try not to make the tower tumble.

Usually in this game, if you make the tower tumble, you are out of the game.

Explain that your version of the game is a little different from the traditional version.

Today we are going to play the game in a different kind of way. We are going to answer questions as we play, and we will try to answer a certain number of questions before the tower tumbles.

Give a tracking card to each player.

Each of you will have a tracking card with questions on it. As we play the tower game, you will use your card to keep track of the questions that you have answered.

Getting ready to play: Put all of the blocks **face down** in the center of the table or floor, reserving one each of the five types of block as samples (see photo above). Show the players the sample blocks and explain the instruction on each block.

There are five different kinds of blocks.

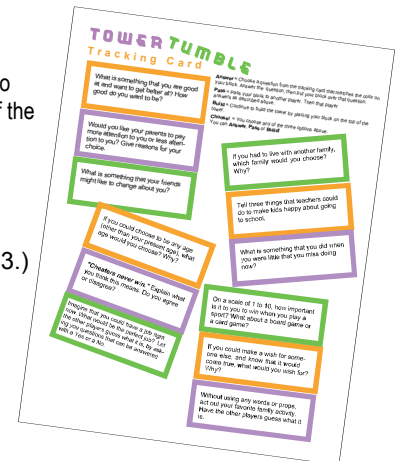
Answer = When you get an **Answer** block, you will choose a question on your tracking card that matches the color on your block. The colors are Purple, Orange and Green. Answer the question, then cover that question with your block.

Pass = When you get a **Pass** block, give it to another player. Then that player answers a question on their card (matching the color on the block) and then covers the question with the block.

All = When you get an **All** block everyone answers one question on their card that matches that color. You go first: answer one question and then cover it with the block. Then the next player answers a question (same color). That player will not have a block, so he or she will take any block (it doesn't matter what it says) **from the TOP level** of the tower and use that block to cover their question. Then the next player takes a turn.

Build = When you get a **Build** block, you will build the tower even taller by placing your block on the top of the tower.

Choose! = When you get a **Choose!** block, you get to decide what to do. You can use it to build the tower higher, OR you can use it to answer and cover **any question** on your card.



Build the tower: Return the sample blocks to the table or floor, **face down**, and mix all the blocks.

Divide the blocks more or less equally among the players. The blocks should be stacked in threes, with the first level being laid in one direction and the next level being laid the opposite direction (cross-wise).

Have one player set down the first level (place the blocks with the words facing down). When that player has carefully set the blocks, have the next player set down the next level, etc. Pause a bit between players to make sure each has finished. You may want to comment on their actions:

You are building the tower very carefully. In this game, it helps to act carefully.

You are creating a sturdy structure. We are off to a good start.

I like the way you are working together. Working together is what will help us win this game.

Setting a careful pace during the building stage will help to set a thoughtful tone for this activity. As you proceed with the game, you will want to encourage the players to take their time as they choose the questions that they would like to answer, formulate their responses, and listen to one another.



Set a goal: Tell the players that they will be answering questions and learning new things about one another. (If needed, establish some ground rules about listening respectfully, etc.) Explain that each time they answer a question on their tracking card, they will cover it with a block. Remind the players that with this game, sooner or later, the tower is going to tumble. Have the players jointly decide on a goal: a certain number (and perhaps color) of questions to answer on their tracking cards before the tower tumbles. For example:

Let's start with a goal that we will answer eight questions total (between all players) before the tower tumbles.

If that goal is easily achieved, the players can play another round and set a more difficult goal. You can tell the players:

You did great last time. Let's make our goal a little more challenging next time.

Encourage the players to discuss possible goals, then choose one. Some other examples of goals:

- 1) the group will answer at least 10 questions including at least one orange and one green per player.
- 2) the group answer at least 12 questions with at least six purple among them.
- 3) the group will answer three more questions than they did in the previous round, including one of each color for each player.

Begin the play: The first player carefully removes one block from the tower (using just one hand--see general instructions on next page).

After removing the block, the player reads the word and follows the directions.

If the instructions call for a player to answer a question, the therapist can encourage further discussion by commenting on the player's answer in a supportive way. For example:

I remember that I felt the same way when I was your age.

Can you tell us more about what happened next?

Has anyone else in the group ever felt the same way?

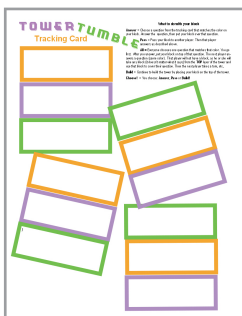
That's something I didn't know about you before. I like that we are all getting to know each other a little better.

After discussion is complete, the player covers the question with the block, and the next player takes a turn.

(If the therapist takes a turn, the information shared should of course be age-appropriate for the children.)

Ending the game:

- 1) **If the tower tumbles before** you meet the goal that you set, build the tower and play again. If it was too difficult to meet the goal, suggest that the group consider an easier goal the next time.
- 2) **If you meet the goal** that you have set before the tower tumbles, you have several options:
 - continue playing until the tower tumbles.
 - continue building the tower without doing the question part of the game: just take turns pulling out a block and setting it on the top of the tower. Continue until the tower topples.
 - allow the player with the most questions answered to tumble the tower.
- 3) **When you begin a new round**, set a different goal. You may also have the players exchange cards.



Variations:

The questions on the tracking cards are meant to invite sharing of personal information that is interesting but relatively non-threatening. After the group has played this basic game a few times, the therapist might want to include questions that call for more disclosure, or that help the group to discuss information regarding a particular topic (family issues, peer issues, etc).

A blank template for the Tracking Card is included and the therapist can make multiple copies and then design custom cards for a particular group. Alternatively, the therapist could ask the group to brainstorm for questions to add to a blank Tracking Card. Have them come up with more than ten questions (maybe twenty or thirty), then have them select the ten best questions for the card. This will stimulate lots of interesting discussions!

General rules/strategies for tower building games

Removing blocks:

You can only use one hand to remove your block.

Each brick is a *slightly* different size and weight, so some will feel stuck in place while others will feel loose.

Before you decide which block to remove, you are allowed to test the blocks. Do this by **gently** tapping blocks with your finger and looking for blocks that are somewhat loose and can be easily removed.

As the game progresses, and the tower changes its structure, blocks that had previously felt “stuck” may become loose. Keep checking for loose blocks that can be easily moved.

Take your time. Don't rush yourself. A steady hand and lots of practice also help!

Building the tower:

The initial completed tower will have 18 levels. When it is your turn to remove a block, you cannot take a block from the top level.

When you remove a block and place it on top of the tower, continue to build the tower in the same way, placing the blocks on the new level in the opposite direction of the previous level.

As play continues and more levels are added, you cannot take a block from the top level OR from the level that is right below an incomplete (less than three blocks) top level.

Tower Tumble therapy game: Strategies for cooperative play

The Tower Tumble Therapy Game is played cooperatively, so it has its own set of strategies for “winning” the game.

The group as a whole wins when they meet the goal they have set for themselves.

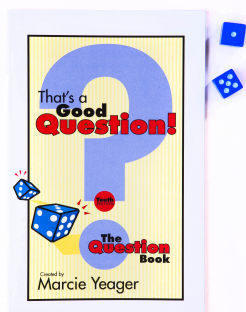
Although there is an instruction on each block, there is often some choice involved in how to comply with the instruction. The more carefully each player makes his or her choice-- keeping in mind the goal that the group has been set--the better chance the group has of winning.

For example, let's imagine that the goal chosen is for every player to cover one question of each color. If a player pulls a **Pass** block with a purple circle, the player has a strategic choice to make in deciding which player to pass the block to. A good strategy would be to look at all of the cards and find a player who has not yet answered a purple question, and pass the block to that player. By enabling that person to answer and cover that question, the player has brought the group one step closer to reaching their goal. (If there is more than one player who has not answered a purple question, other strategic factors may also be taken into consideration. Encourage players to stop and think about what will be the best play for the group as a whole.)

If a player gets a **Choose** block, the player can answer any question on his or her card **OR** can use the block to build the tower. The latter choice introduces a fun element to the game: by putting the block back into play, it is there for another player to choose on a future play: However, it cannot be taken immediately (see above rule about not taking blocks from the top levels), so players will have to remember which block says *Choose!*

If one player gets an **All** card, the other players will have to take a block from the top level of the tower to cover their questions. If there is more than one block at the top level, it is OK for them to turn over the blocks and decide which one to take and which ones to leave. This is another opportunity to think strategically. For example, an **All** block is more valuable than an **Answer** block, because it allows multiple people to answer and brings the group closer to meeting their goal. Thus, it is a good strategy for a player to take the **Answer** block and use that to cover his or her question, keeping the **All** block in the tower for future use.

If you have a very competitive group that gets overly-focused on whether they are meeting the goal (to the point that they aren't very interested in answering questions that don't contribute directly to the goal), explain that the goal is just for extra fun. All questions should be answered according to the blocks that are pulled, and the most important part of the game is answering questions and getting to know one another.



The questions in this game were selected from ***That's A Good Question: Youth edition.*** (available on Amazon.com, \$13.95)

TOWER TUMBLE

Tracking Card

What to do with your block

Answer = Choose a question from the tracking card that matches the color on your block. Answer the question, then put your block over that question.

Pass = Pass your block to another player. Then that player answers as described above.

All = Everyone chooses one question that matches that color. You go first. After you answer, put your block on top of that question. The next player answers a question (same color). That player will not have a block, so he or she will take any block (it doesn't matter what it says) from the **TOP** layer of the tower and use that block to cover their question. Then the next player takes a turn, etc.

Build = Continue to build the tower by placing your block on the top of the tower.

Choose! = You choose: **Answer** any question on your card or **Build**.

What is something that you are good at and want to get better at? How good do you want to be?

Would you like your parents to pay more attention to you or less attention to you? Give reasons for your choice.

What is something that your friends might like you to learn to do?

If you had to live with another family, which family would you choose? Why?

Tell three things that teachers could do to make kids happy about going to school.

If you could choose to be any age (other than your present age), what age would you choose? Why?

"Cheaters never win." Explain what you think this means. Do you agree or disagree?

Imagine that you could have a job right now. What would be the perfect job? Let the other players guess what it is, by asking you questions that can be answered with a Yes or a No.

What is something that you did when you were little that you miss doing now?

On a scale of 1 to 10, how important is it to you to win when you play a sport? What about a board game or a card game?

If you could make a wish for someone else, and know that it would come true, what would you wish for? Why?

Without using any words or props, act out your favorite family activity. Have the other players guess what it is.

TOWER TUMBLE

Tracking Card

"Try, try, and try again." Tell about a time that you really worked to achieve something even though it was hard at first.

What do your parents do to teach you right from wrong? When you have children of your own, what will you do?

Tell about a friend's family that you like a lot. What do you enjoy about that family?

What is something that you worried about or were afraid of when you were younger?

If you have a really special surprise for someone, how hard is it for you to keep it a secret?

Think of a job that you would love to have when you are grown. Without using words or props, act it out. Let the other players guess what the job is.

Of all of your relatives, which would you like to spend more time with? Why?

If you could change one way of doing things at your school, what would it be?

Tell about a friend that you don't see anymore. How would it feel to be with your friend again?

If you could see into the future and know one thing that will happen in your lifetime, what would you want to know?

Imagine that you are the family dog. What makes you happy? What makes you sad?

Imagine that you are the child of a famous person. Whose child would you want to be? Let the other players guess who it is, by asking you questions that can be answered with a Yes or a No.

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Choose! = You choose: **Answer**, **Pass** or **Build!**

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Who has been the kindest person in your family this week?

What is an important lesson that you have learned from your parents?

Do you consider any family members (siblings, cousins) to also be your friends? Explain.

What is something that you would be willing to stand up for, even if it meant other people would criticize or be mean to you?

Do you like to know what someone has planned for your birthday, or would you rather be surprised? Why?

Think of your favorite kind of food. Let the other players guess what it is by asking you questions that can be answered with a Yes or a No.

Tell about a time that someone praised you and you felt very proud.

What would you like for your teacher to tell the other teachers about you?

What might you do in the future that would make you feel really proud?

Pretend you entered a contest and won 1st prize. What kind of contest would it be? What did you do to win?

Tell about something that you think is unfair. How would you change it?

Think of something that you are good at. Act it out (without using words or props) and let the other players guess what it is.

TOWER TUMBLE

Tracking Card

Tell about a time that someone praised you and you felt very proud.

What is your favorite way to spend the weekend? What is your least favorite?

Imagine that you are grown and have a house of your own. What is it like?

Pretend you have a time machine. You can make one quick trip in it, either to the past or to the future. Which time would you choose?

Some people say that "A dog is a man's best friend." What do you think this means? Do you agree or disagree?

Imagine that you have a surprise present for your parent(s) that is really going to please them. Have the other players guess what it is by asking questions that can be answered a Yes or a No.

What could you do or say today that would really please your mother or father?

Pretend kids give teachers grades for how well they do their jobs. Which teacher would earn an "A" and why?

What is your most important contribution to your family?

Should you stick up for a person being bullied whether or not that person is your friend? Give reasons for your answer.

What is the biggest hope that you have for your future?

Pretend there is a new student at school. Show how to welcome them. Stand up, walk over to another player, introduce yourself and start a conversation.

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