

Game Night at the Albert Wisner Public Library Fall, 2017

Game night was a great way to start off our Autism Welcomed Here series, *Improve Your Social Life: Social Skills and Having Fun for Tweens and Teens Living with Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*. Here is how we did it – and we believe that other libraries can easily and inexpensively produce their own Game Nights.

We are fortunate to have a large meeting room to use exclusively for this event. We set up tables and chairs as different “stations” around the perimeter of the room. One corner was for the life-size Jenga game. There was a large space in the middle for the Lava game that was played by some teens while others played table games. At the end of the night, we pushed everything against the walls to create a larger space for the Hungry Hungry Hippo game.

We started with Getting to Know You Bingo (example attached). The event included teens from the Teen Advisory Council. The bingo cards included spaces with phrases such as “Someone with a pet,” “Someone who is left-handed,” “Someone who has been to California,” etc. The goal of the game is to complete the bingo card by asking the other players questions and filling in the boxes with the names of players who fit the phrases. The teen advisory board students were encouraged to circulate to all the visitors and ask (model) the bingo questions, and then prompt, if needed, the visitor to ask them a question in turn. Adults (caregivers and volunteers), with experience working with special needs children, helped to prompt questions and answers as well. They also encouraged the ASD teens to physically circulate around the room and approach people they didn’t know in the hopes of completing a box. It was played non-competitively -- some kids got a kick out of yelling “Bingo!” when they finished, and everyone cheered.

The table stations had different games at all levels: Connect4, Uno, Trouble, Checkers, Jenga, Chinese Checkers, Quick Cups (a cup stacking race game). We also had a pattern matching game called Q-Bitz Jr. This could be played alone or side-by-side. It is a quiet game that helped some teens feel included in the activities, but without a lot of direct noise. One girl was quietly engaged in it for a while, and then some adults and teens joined her, admiring her skill and trying the game for themselves. It was a good way for the shy teenager to engage. The noisiest game ended up being UNO, when 8 players joined in – the game grew and grew and those who knew the rules coached the others as the game went along -there were lots of cheers and groans during the marathon game! It was helpful to have a variety of games. Next time, we would add the game-size version of Hungry Hungry Hippos, to prepare everyone for the grand finale, especially those unfamiliar with the game.

While some were playing the table games, others were participating in two movement games: Lava and life-size Jenga. Lava involves two teams, and blocks of wood. Our blocks were cut from

2x4s – they are about 12 inches long and two inches off the ground. The idea is to imagine that the floor is filled with lava, so you must get your team safely across the room in a line by stepping only on the wood blocks. The leader goes first, places the first block, and then stands on it. She then places the next block, passed to her by the teammate behind her, on the floor ahead of her and then steps to stand on the new block; the second teammate then stands on the block behind the leader. The third player passes the next block step to the second player, who then passes it forward to the leader who places it in on the ground, takes a step onto it, and her teammates follow suit. Once all the teammates are on blocks, the last teammate picks up the block she just vacated and passes it forward via the teammates to the leader, who will use it for her next step forward. The game progresses until the entire team is safely across the “lava” to the other side of the room. This game can be played competitively with two or more teams (teams can be two or more players – depends on the space and how many blocks of wood you have), or it can be a team-building game played with one group.

For life-sized Jenga, we used boxes that are used to hold 12 cans of 12-ounce soda (half cases). It helps if the boxes are uniform in size. If we had the time we could have wrapped all the boxes with brown paper, but we ended up leaving them uncovered. Although it is possible to buy life-size Jenga games on-line, most of them are made of wood. This would be more authentic to the table-top game, but the soda boxes are less dangerous should someone get hit when the tower tumbles. A minimum of 30 soda boxes is recommended. Start by stacking the boxes in threes – three on the base, the next row stacked on top in the other direction, then back to the original direction, until all the boxes are stacked. The players take turns removing one box towards the bottom of the stack, and setting it on top of the stack, without making the entire tower tumble. Life-size Jenga has different rules and variations: we agreed that everyone could use two hands to remove a box, they could steady the structure while removing a box, and they could not select a box from the two top rows. Everyone helped with set up, restacking, and clean up. There are no “winners” per se – the game can go on indefinitely, as long as everyone successfully keeps re-stacking the boxes without the tower toppling. There were cheers for everyone when the stack falls – no hard feelings, playing for fun.

The grand finale was life-size Hungry Hungry Hippos. This game required scooter squares (approximately 12”x 12”), small round laundry baskets, and round plastic balls (ours are colorful and are approximately 2.2” in diameter). We ruled out playing with balloons because of the risk of them popping near kids’ faces and making a startling noise. It is probably best played on a gym floor, but it worked fine for us in the meeting room, which has low-pile industrial carpet tiles. Each team of two has one player on their belly on the scooter, with a basket. The other teammate holds the first player’s legs and pulls the player in and out of the center circle, where the balls are placed. Using the laundry basket, the first player tries to trap and drag as many balls as possible back behind their starting line. Although it can be challenging to hold your

head upright while lying prone on a scooter with your hands occupied by the basket, the kids loved to try it and got really involved without really thinking about the gross motor skills and strength involved (one major hazard: run-over fingers. We reminded everyone regularly to watch their hands). More than winners and losers, this game generated the most laughs and cheers, and was a great finale to our super fun Game Night!

We hope that you find this summary helpful and that many libraries will have the opportunity to have as much fun as we did! If you have any questions or would like more details, please do not hesitate to contact us. Thank you.