

# SCHOOL DAYS - UPS & DOWNS

**Target population:** Elementary to middle school students (individual or group therapy)

**Rationale for activity:** School can be a source of stress for many children. They may not be able to easily articulate the perceptions and beliefs that give rise to feelings of anxiety, anger, and/or discouragement about school-related situations. This activity provides an engaging, non-threatening format for the therapist or counselor to begin to explore the child's perceptions and beliefs. It can also be used to introduce the concept of cognitive re-framing: the way one thinks about a situation can influence one's subsequent emotions and behavior.

**Goal of activity:**

- 1) explore experiences, perceptions, beliefs, and feelings regarding school-related issues
- 2) teach basic cognitive re-framing skills

**Pre-requisite knowledge for counselor/therapist:** Some knowledge of cognitive-behavioral therapy for the *Think It Over* cards.

**Materials needed:**

- 1) SCHOOL DAYS UPS & DOWNS Game Board. (Print in landscape orientation. If possible, print on card stock and laminate.)
- 2) Game markers, one per player. Use markers from any board game (or use small sandtray miniatures.)
- 3) Die or spinner.
- 4) Feelings Word Finder. (If possible, print on card stock.)
- 3) Three sets of game cards plus (optional) one set of blank cards. (Print and cut on dotted lines.)

**There are three types of cards:**

**That's a Good Question:** These are general questions about school-related issues. The player answers the question.

**Show and Tell:** Similar to above, but these cards have an "action" component--something the player must show or act out.

**Think It Over:**

These cards present a situation. Using the *Feelings Word Finder*, the player chooses one **feeling** that the person might experience in that situation, then tells what the person might **think** or **believe** that would lead to that feeling. Next, the player thinks of a different way to think about the situation, then selects one or more feelings that might follow from that different way of thinking. For example, if the card reads:

**Jena** wears a hearing aid. On the school bus, some children point to her hearing aid and whisper to one another.

If Jena feels **upset**, it may be because she is thinking "*They are making fun of me.*" However, if she thinks, "*Maybe they have never seen a hearing aid before. I can tell them about mine.*," then she might feel **calm** and/or **friendly**.

If the player thinks of a feeling word that is not on the Word Finder, the counselor/therapist can add that word in the blank spaces.

**Note:** There is a page of blank cards. Use these to create your own cards prior to introducing the game to the players, or use them for the **Variations** noted below.

**How to play:**

- 1) Shuffle all the cards and place them near the game board.
- 2) All players place their markers on or near the large snake's head on the game board.
- 3) The first player takes a card from the deck. (The counselor/therapist may want to go first to demonstrate how to play.) After responding to the card, the player rolls the die or spins the spinner and moves that number of spaces.
  - If the player lands at the bottom of a ladder, the player moves **up** to the top of the ladder.
  - If the player lands on the head of a snake, the player moves **down** to the bottom of the snake.

If a player does not want to respond to the card selected, allow the player to:

  - a) Give the card to another player (with the player's consent) and take another turn. When it is the other player's turn, the card then functions as an "extra turn" for that player. The player responds to that card first, then moves his/her marker. Then the player takes his/her regular turn.
  - b) If no other player wants the card, the player can put it at the bottom of the stack and take another turn.
- 4) Play continues clock-wise. Some questions may generate discussion among the group, and this can be encouraged.
- 5) Ending the game: Decide beforehand whether the game will end when the first player reaches the trophy at the end of the board or whether play will continue until all players reach the trophy. If play will continue, have a discussion beforehand about how the players are to act when a player completes the board. For example, the other players can offer congratulations when a player reaches the trophy. Players who have completed the board can continue to participate by contributing to the discussion, encouraging other players, and/or creating new cards (see Variation #2 on next page).

## VARIATIONS

(These variations provide a way for students to think about school-related issues and propose their own questions/situations for the game cards. They provide the counselor/therapist with insight into what issues are important to a particular student or group of students. )

**Variation #1:** If the player lands on a snake and has to move **down** the game board, the player can be given the option of using one of the blank cards to create a new card (and get another turn.)

- The player first chooses a type of card (*That's a Good Question, Show & Tell, or Think It Over*).
- The player then creates the question or situation for the card. The counselor/therapist may need to have some input in order to make the content of the question appropriate and the meaning clear.
- Once the question/situation has been properly formulated, the player answers the question.
- After answering, the player rolls the die or spins the spinner and proceeds as usual.

Note: To save time, the player can just state the question verbally rather than writing it on the card. The counselor/therapist can write it on the card later as time permits. The cards created in the course of the game can be kept for group review only, or added to the game, at the discretion of the counselor/therapist .

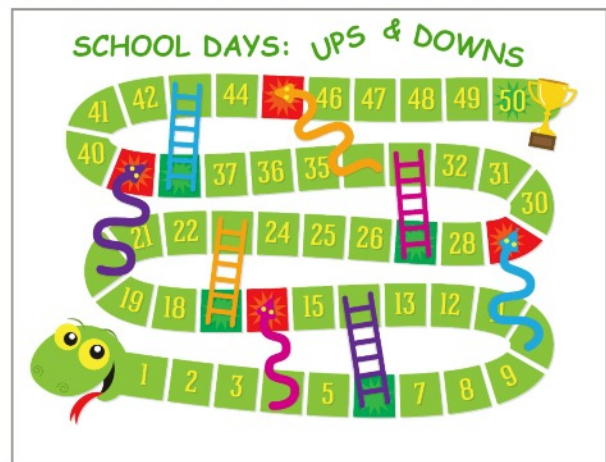
**Variation #2:** Once a player has reached the trophy on the game board (while the other players continue to play), he or she can be given the privilege of "brainstorming" for new questions/situations for the cards, for possible inclusion in a future game. This option will work best for an ongoing group, once members of the group have had some experience with the game. The student can write ideas on a piece of paper or directly on the cards. Emphasize that this should be done silently, keeping the ideas private for now (so that the new cards will be a surprise for other group members when included in a future game.) Later, the ideas can be reviewed by the counselor/therapist and discussed directly with that student. (Help the student make any necessary revisions and then add the cards to the game to be included the next time the game is played.)

### About the game board:

The board we have used for this game is a variation of the traditional "snakes and ladders" board game.

The traditional board game originated in ancient India (by some accounts as early as the second century BC), where it was called **Moksha Patamu**. The game eventually made its way to England (in the late 1800's) where it became known as **Snakes and Ladders**. In 1943, the American company Milton Bradley published and a new version of the game: **Chutes and Ladders**.

Like the traditional Indian board game, Chutes and Ladders is on a 10 x 10 grid with 100 squares. The board we use has only 50 squares, making for a quicker game. If desired, you could substitute a Chutes and Ladders board or a traditional snakes and ladders board. You (and your students) might also enjoy making your own version: there are lots of ideas on the Internet!



### **That's a Good Question!**

What are your earliest memories about going to school?

### **That's a Good Question!**

If you could choose between going to public school, going to private school, being home schooled, or not going to school at all, which would you choose? Why?

### **That's a Good Question!**

What are some important things that kids learn *at school*, but not *in class*?

### **That's a Good Question!**

On a scale of 1 to 10, how good are you at getting homework done? (Explain.)

### **That's a Good Question!**

Tell about about a funny thing that happened at school.

### **That's a Good Question!**

When you are a parent, what will you tell your kids about making "good grades?"

### **That's a Good Question!**

If you could change one way of doing things at your school, what would it be? How would people feel if that change happened?

### **That's a Good Question!**

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

### **That's a Good Question!**

What can a teacher do that would make you want to work really hard in that teacher's class?

### **That's a Good Question!**

Pretend that kids can give grades to grownups who work at their school. To whom would you give an "A" and why?

### **That's a Good Question!**

Name three things teachers could do to make kids feel happy about coming to school.

### **That's a Good Question!**

Name three things students could do to make teachers feel happy about coming to school.

### **That's a Good Question!**

On a scale of 1 to 10, how important is it for a kid to have friends at school?

### **That's a Good Question!**

Pretend you can start a new club at your school. What kind of club would it be?

### **That's a Good Question!**

Pretend you know a 5-year-old who is starting school for the first time. Tell three things the child should know about to be happy at school.

### **That's a Good Question!**

Of all the teachers you have had, which one is your favorite?

### **That's a Good Question!**

What's the biggest difference between this school year and last school year?

### **That's a Good Question!**

Imagine you live in a country where you aren't allowed to go to school. What are three things you would miss the most?

### SHOW and TELL

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

### SHOW and TELL

Pretend that you have hurt a friend's feelings. Show two ways to apologize: 1) Like you don't really mean it 2) Like you really, truly want that person's forgiveness.

### SHOW and TELL

Pretend that your friend has to go to a new school. Show your friend a way to make new friends: stand up and introduce yourself to another player. Look them in the eye and smile.

### SHOW and TELL

Think of a job that you would like to have when you are older. Act it out and let the other players guess what it is.

### SHOW and TELL

Pretend that you have received an award. What is it for? Stand up and show what you would say for your acceptance speech.

### SHOW and TELL

Pretend that your parent is having a conference with your teacher. Act out what each of them would say about you.

### SHOW and TELL

Pretend that you are taking a test and you feel **nervous**. Show what that looks like. Then show **confident**.

### SHOW and TELL

Show what body language a student uses to show a teacher "I am paying attention!"

### SHOW and TELL

Give an example of when it is important to be a "good sport." Then stand up and show what a person says and does to be a good sport.

### SHOW and TELL

Pretend you are excited about going to school. Act out what is happening that makes you feel excited. Have the other players guess what it is.

### SHOW and TELL

Who is one person that you would really like to impress? With another player, act out how to make a good impression on that person.

### SHOW and TELL

Pretend you are a parent and your child has made a bad grade. Show what you can say and do to make your child feel **encouraged** about doing better next time.

### SHOW and TELL

Pretend a teacher feels **annoyed** and show what that looks like. Then show **concerned**. Tell why a teacher might feel **concerned**.

### SHOW and TELL

Imagine some friends are trying to talk you into doing something you don't want to do. Show with your voice and body language that you really mean **NO**.

### SHOW and TELL

Pretend you are a teacher and you are going to teach your students something FUN! Tell what it is and have the other players act out how they feel about learning that.

### SHOW and TELL

Pretend that a wish of yours has come true. Act it out and have the other players guess what the wish was.

### SHOW and TELL

Show what body language you could use to show a bully that you are **determined** not to be bullied.

### SHOW and TELL

Show how you look when you feel **worried**. Tell about a time at school when you felt **worried**.

## Think it over.....

**Meg** missed the school bus. Her dad yells and says he won't drive her to school.

## Think it over.....

**Carla** gets a call from her son's teacher. He has been fighting with the other kids at school. The teacher asks Carla to come in for a meeting.

## Think it over.....

**Nora** gets into a big fight with her brother. They both say mean things to one another. After she cools down, Nora realizes that the things she said were unfair.

## Think it over.....

**Corey's** parents say that he takes too long to get ready in the morning. So now Corey has to go to bed an hour earlier.

## Think it over.....

**Mia** was joking around and sort of made fun of her friend. Now her friend won't speak to her.

## Think it over.....

**Toby** tries out for the basketball team but doesn't make it. His coach tells him that he can try out again next year.

## Think it over.....

**Dale** doesn't understand why the other kids don't want to play with him. His favorite teacher tells him it is because he always wants to be "the boss."

## Think it over.....

**Dylan** knows the answers to all the questions on the test. But he's not finished and the teacher says the time is up.

## Think it over.....

**Juan** asks his dad for help with his science project. His dad says that he is old enough now to do it on his own.

## Think it over.....

**Devin** finds out that her son was in a fight at school. Her son has never been in a fight before.

## Think it over.....

Every day, **Jake** gets picked on by the older kids at the bus stop. He has tried to get them to stop but nothing has worked.

## Think it over.....

**Mel** is working hard on his science project and is almost finished. Mel's friend comes over and says, "That looks like something my baby brother would make."

## Think it over.....

**Pierre** is on the baseball team. He's not one of the good players, and he strikes out a lot. But he has made a lot of new friends on the team.

## Think it over.....

**Jena** wears a hearing aid. On the school bus, some children point to her hearing aid and whisper to one another.

## Think it over.....

**Keli** had a bad day at school. When she gets home her mom is very busy taking care of the baby, talking on the phone and fixing dinner.

## Think it over.....

**Noah's** friend is teasing him, so Noah pushes him. His friend falls down the stairs.

## Think it over.....

**Jan** isn't paying attention in class. Her teacher calls on her to answer the question.

## Think it over.....

**Jes** drops a tray of food in the middle of the cafeteria. Everyone laughs.

That's a *Good Question!*

*SHOW* and TELL

**Think it over.....**

That's a *Good Question!*

*SHOW* and TELL

**Think it over.....**

That's a *Good Question!*

*SHOW* and TELL

**Think it over.....**

That's a *Good Question!*

*SHOW* and TELL

**Think it over.....**

That's a *Good Question!*

*SHOW* and TELL

**Think it over.....**

That's a *Good Question!*

*SHOW* and TELL

**Think it over.....**

# Speak from the Heart *Word Finder*

## Put your **Feelings** into *Words*

Be a feelings detective:



Find the **word** that expresses the **feeling**. Put a star by any feelings that you have had today. Put a check by feelings that you have observed in others. Add new words in the blank spaces.

**Happy**  
pleased  
proud  
confident  
calm  
sympathetic  
friendly  
loved  
understood  
fortunate  
excited

**hopeful**  
content  
optimistic  
appreciated

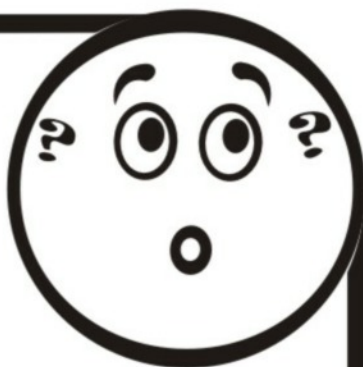


**left out**  
unhappy  
sorrowful  
discouraged



**Sad**  
blue  
lonely  
guilty  
ashamed  
embarrassed  
remorseful  
disappointed  
hopeless  
depressed  
miserable

**Unsure**  
nervous  
worried  
scared  
shy  
insecure  
suspicious  
surprised  
shocked  
mixed-up  
confused



**anxious**  
stressed  
afraid  
uneasy



**impatient**  
outraged  
offended  
aggravated

**Mad**  
annoyed  
disapproving  
fed-up  
jealous  
determined  
defiant  
disgusted  
frustrated  
angry  
furious