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For more information, please contact:

Institute of Behavioral Research
Texas Christian University
TCU Box 298740
Fort Worth, TX 76129
(817) 257-7226
(817) 257-7290 FAX
Email: ibr@tcu.edu
Web site: www.ibr.tcu.edu

SECTION 3

BACKGROUND INFORMATION



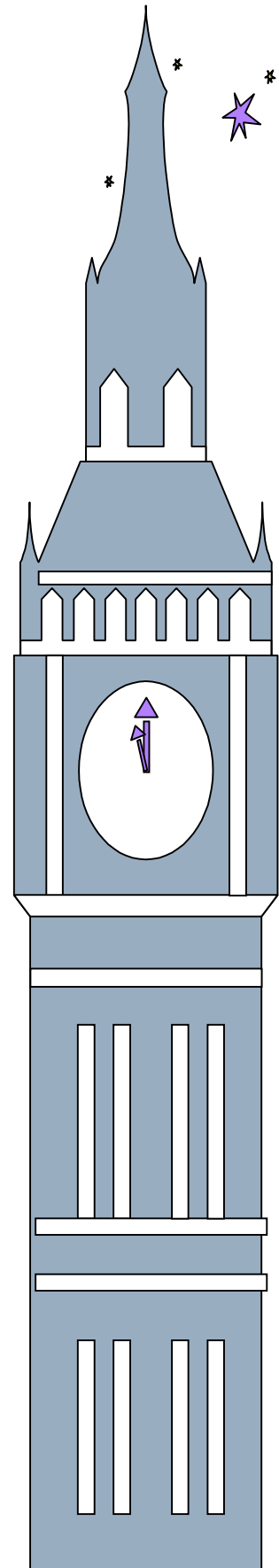
WHAT MAKES THESE ACTIVITIES USEFUL?

PREPARATION FOR CHANGE

One important precursor to making positive personal changes is having an accurate assessment of "where you are" and "where you want to go." Taking an inventory of personal strengths and weaknesses can enhance motivation and help determine appropriate strategies for making changes and benefiting from treatment. Having clients assess personal strengths has been applied widely with diverse groups, such as individuals with learning disabilities (Balcazar et al., 1995), survivors of traumatic brain injury (Lewington, 1993), nursing home residents (Frey et al., 1992), and the elderly (Fontes, 1991; Kivnick, 1993).

THE TOWER OF STRENGTHS

The Tower of Strengths is an activity that focuses on the assessment of existing and ideal strengths. This is a more extensive and systematic procedure than used in previous applications (see above). In order to increase participants' confidence in their abilities, they first consider the strengths they currently possess. Participants select 10 of their existing strengths from a set of 60 possible strength cards. The cards are made up of strengths from six different areas of the self (social, cognitive, physical/behavioral, emotional, motivational,



and spiritual). We have found that identifying existing strengths helps to boost a person's confidence in his or her specific abilities (Sia, Czuchry, & Dansereau, in press). Strength selection has several benefits over spontaneous listing of strengths. First, a person with low self-esteem may find it difficult and even threatening to be asked to list their strengths from scratch. Second, a person might spontaneously list strengths that are inappropriate for making positive changes. For example, a person may be proud of being able to "drink like a fish." Having a pre-existing set of pro-social strengths eliminates a potential focus on inappropriate strengths.

Once participants have assessed their existing strengths, they sort through the strength cards that were not selected and choose five ideal strengths they would like to develop further. This helps participants think about positive changes and goals. Discussion questions also are integrated into the activity to help individuals apply the activity to their own experiences.

THE WEEKLY PLANNER

The Weekly Planner is a related card-sorting task designed to help people determine realistic goals and strategies for reaching these goals. The participants select inspirational quotes that will remind them of ways to utilize their existing strengths to gain desired strengths. Participants select seven quotes (one for each day of the week) to remind and motivate them to work on their personal goals. The quotes can serve as a daily memory aid or affirmation for the positive changes a person wants to make. Discussion questions help them discover how to apply the quotes to their lives.

WHERE HAVE THE ACTIVITIES BEEN USED?

The Tower of Strengths and *The Weekly Planner* were designed as part of a five-year NIDA-sponsored project called Cognitive Enhancements for Treatment of Probationers (CETOP). The two activities were included in a treatment induction curriculum directed at motivating and engaging clients who have been mandated to drug treatment. In effect, the goal was to break through barriers to personal change so that treatment could have a greater impact. Induction activities were created to address the following issues (see Dees & Dansereau, 1997 for more information).

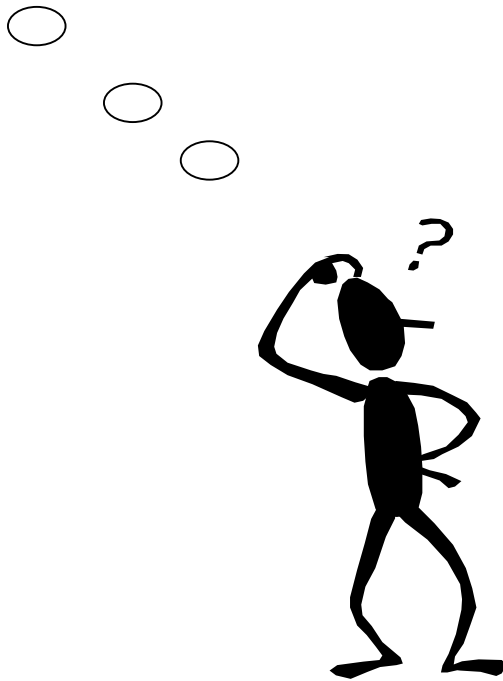


- Building appropriate self-esteem by identifying existing personal strengths and by developing new ones (e.g., *The Tower of Strengths*; *The Weekly Planner*).
- Facilitating the recognition of a need for positive personal and situational change using a board game format (e.g., *The Downward Spiral: The Game You Really Don't Want to Play*).
- Developing a positive view of treatment and identifying appropriate actions (e.g., *Believe It or Not* and the *Personal Action List*).
- Learning specific strategies for maximizing treatment opportunities (e.g., *Pegword Memory Technique*).

Feedback from the implementation of this curriculum suggests that *The Tower of Strengths* and *The Weekly Planner* are positively received by probationers.

To provide a more detailed evaluation, two studies using *The Tower of Strengths* have been completed with college students (see Sia, Czuchry, & Dansereau, in press, and Blankenship & Dansereau, 1998). The results indicate that the "Tower" activities increased specific self-esteem, motivation for change, and, in general, mood.

DO *THE TOWER OF STRENGTHS*
AND *THE WEEKLY PLANNER*
HAVE TO BE USED TOGETHER?



Although *The Tower of Strengths* and *The Weekly Planner* activities were originally created as complementary activities, they do not need to be used together. This manual describes each activity separately, although instructions on how to use the activities together are also provided.

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