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## FAIRY TALES: LET'S PLAY?

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**Abstract: Introduction:** It is well known that psychoanalysis recognizes the importance of fairy tales in children's mental health. Fairy tales allows the children to expand emotionally, helping them to understand reality by including characters through which the child can easily project and externalize their mental processes in a controlled and comprehensive way. This study aims to understand whether fairy tales, in the form of board games, have clinical utility. **Methodology:** Four games were created based on fairy tales and 82 psychologists of both genders were later interviewed, after using these games with at least one child. **Results:** The results showed that the entire sample has already resorted to the technique of fairy tale games, with the vast majority claiming that this methodology is interesting and useful in terms of clinical practice. **Discussion and Conclusion:** The four games created based on fairy tales are intended to facilitate child psychotherapy. Taking into consideration, the results of this study, this methodology is presented as being a technique of therapeutic relationship, as it represents a platform through which a child is uninhibited and expresses himself, allowing him to work on his internal world.

**Keywords:** Fairy Tale, Therapeutic Games, Child Psychotherapy.

## FAIRY TALES

Fairy tales have always been part of children's daily live (HAMMON, 1992). The essence of a fairy tale is to be a story that is shared and transmitted from generation to generation and that suggests a solution to the conflicts and difficulties that every human being experiences throughout their development. Thus, telling fairy tales can be a safe way to get in touch with the child (HOURS, 2014).

According SILVERMAN (2020), children need to be able to experience the pleasure of

imagining, long before they find the pleasure of listening to a text and written language, and the fact of telling stories to babies will favour the construction of their first representations about the world.

For several centuries, the population has been aware of the fantasy universe, through fairy tales, since they have symbolic meanings, which have always awakened the unconscious and the conscious, enabling a complex map of the imaginary (SAFRA, 2005). Thus, in the past, fairy tales served to put children to sleep (SCHNEIDER and TOROSSIAN, 2009). Currently, these tales stimulate children's imaginative and fanciful capacities (SCHNEIDER and TOROSSIAN, 2009) in which it is possible to see reflected solutions to daily problems, problematic feelings and emotions about interpersonal relationships. In addition, fairy tales represent important ways to help children share their desires and express their inner agonies and conflicts (TSITSANI et al. 2012).

Fairy tales told to children are structured with the aim of suggesting mental images, and these same images allow children to reorganize their thoughts (BETTELHEIM, 2002). As such, telling stories to children and establishing a dialogue about them will potentiate the emergence of favourable reactions with regard to the development of the ability to imagine and recreate (VACHKOV, 2015).

At the same time, fairy tales seek to seriously address existential problems such as the need to be loved, the love for life and the fear of death. Thus, the way the stories end (example: "And they lived happily ever after") show the child the possibility of eternal life as well as the need to build a truly satisfying union with other people. Through fairy tales, the child is able to understand, both unconsciously and consciously, the need to detach from the adult and be independent, since the hero of the story is always looking

for something, that is, the fairy tales are future-oriented and serve as a guide for the child (BETTELHEIM, 2002).

In these narrations, the psychosocial crises of the children's development are represented symbolically through the different characters: fairies, witches, ferocious animals, superhuman figures with intelligence, but the hero and/or heroine remain ordinary humans who will have a death just like all human beings (BETTELHEIM, 2002).

In general, every child likes fantasy, heroes and fantastic stories, and fairy tales present imaginary events adapted to reality, promoting fantasy and transporting the person who hears them to a world of dreams and ramblings whereby represent a haven for both children and parents (BETTELHEIM, 2002).

“Each fairy tale is a magic mirror that reflects some aspects of our inner world and the stages required in our evolution from immaturity to maturity. This is one of the many truths revealed by fairy tales that can guide our lives.”

(BETTELHEIM, 1976).

## **FAIRY TALES AND PSYCHOANALYSIS**

Different authors (GUTFREIND, 2002; PICARD, 2002; XANTHAKOU, 2001) underline the importance of using fairy tales in psychoanalytic treatment. Fairy tales convey both latent and manifest meanings, addressing simultaneously all levels of the personality: id, ego and superego, and these levels are carriers of important messages for the psychic (FREUD, 1913). Thus, these tales help in the work of hidden ambivalences, and the unconscious fantasies of children, pre-genital anxieties and the Oedipus complex are extracted through fairy tales (DIATKINE, 2007).

The beginning of the tales always goes back to very distant times (“Once upon a time”; “Many years ago”), with the aim of

symbolizing to the child that reality is put aside and that he will embark on an imaginary world and of fantasy. However, as much as fairy tales deviate from reality, the following of the story is not extinguished, that is, the child can be transported to a fantasy world, but in the end the tale will restore reality to him in the most safe as possible. Such a phenomenon allows the child to learn a lesson: it's okay to let your imagination run wild and travel, but the important thing is that you don't let yourself be dominated by it (BETTELHEIM, 2002).

Parents, when they narrate these stories to children, give the impression that they appreciate and value their internal experiences projected in the story, attributing some added value to reality and such an event is assumed as an extremely important milestone for the child once she observes her own internal experiences accepted as realistic. In turn, parents, when choosing the most appropriate fairy tales for their children, must be aware of what is going on in their unconscious and not in yours, so that the tale meets the child's needs (BETTELHEIM, 2002).

## **FAIRY TALES AS A THERAPEUTIC MEANS**

The therapeutic power of fairy tales has been documented by numerous authors, including Freud, Melanie Klein and Winnicott (HOURS, 2014).

According to BETTELHEIM (1976), fairy tales constitute a therapeutic foundation for the future development of the child, contributing to their psychological development and assuming themselves as a support to face the various problems of children's life, such as emotional need.

Thus, when telling a story to a child, a global view of the world around them is provided, where they are allowed to expose their feelings and thoughts through a symbolic language, offering them different perspectives on life

(CALDIN, 2004) being that fairy tales will favour the child by stimulating different ways of solving problems, allowing them to understand and accept their own feelings and motivations and encourage the search for their self-concept (FRANZKE, 1989).

Psychotherapy uses fairy tales to minimize the impact of the disease on psychosomatic patients as well as on children suffering from cancer, being considered beneficial because these individuals narrate human difficulties and release their frustrations and sadness, acting as an incentive to the imagination and the aptitude of symbolism, also causing a stimulus for human thinking and providing a dialogue and socialization of patients, thus contributing to a functional and healthy communication (RUNBERG et al. 1993). Therefore, the tales force the child to concentrate and encourage a reorganization of pre-acquired concepts, and in this way they stimulate thinking (GUTFREIND, 2004) assuming themselves as an accessible and effective strategy for children to accept their condition (LEZHAVA and RTSKHILADSE, 2006).

Within the therapeutic context, it is possible to resort to two different techniques: the act of telling mutual stories and the invention of personalized stories. In mutual storytelling, the child begins to tell a story while the therapist listens. When the child finishes, the therapist reflects on the meaning of the content of the story based on non-verbal aspects that have relevance to the context. Then, the therapist responds to the narrative by telling a new story invented by him/her, while more reliable and adaptive solutions are added to the problems and conflicts represented in the initial story that the child told. In turn, the invention of personalized stories refers to the narration of stories invented by the therapist, based on the events and feelings that he/she detects in the child (FRANZ, 1996).

In this sense, invented fairy tales, especially in group modality, are used as a tool to express, share and support the experience of the disease in children. In addition, this therapeutic strategy assumes itself as a mediator of psychic processes that offer new solutions while improving the interpersonal relationship/communication between the participants of the group (MARGHERITA et al. 2013), assuming itself as a form of connecting emotional and cognitive aspects related to the disease, triggering conflicts, frustrations and symbolic meanings, decreasing anxiety and leading to control at the level of developmental tasks that are mirrored in the relationship with others (KEYTON and BECK, 2009).

In a study prepared by TSITSANI et al. (2012), it was found that 66.4% of parents used fairy tales to serve as an example to their children, 50% in order to alleviate their anxieties, usually at bedtime, all participants agreed that fairy tales represent instructional tools, claiming that they have a positive effect on their children's lives and still all participants recognized that their children enjoy fairy tales. Therefore, the results of this study emphasize the crucial role that storytelling plays in children's normal life and development.

In turn, the use of games based on fairy tales as a therapeutic means (LIMA and KALLAS, 2015; PAPAROTO et al. 2009) will allow the child to better express their emotions, favouring the formation of a bond with the child, it allows you to identify the concepts and rules that govern your behaviour, it allows you to verify the way in which the child relates to others, it allows you to identify feelings about yourself, certain people and situations, train you to solve problems and develop skills individual and social, assumed as fundamental for obtaining and transmitting values and insights.

With regard to clinical intervention, games make it possible to achieve certain

objectives that are directly related to the clinical complaint and also allow acting on responses, in order to modify them, due to the reinforcing function of the task (CLAMAN, 2005; GADELHA et al. MENEZES, 2004; PAPANOTO et al. 2009).

In short, authors such as LAFFORGUE (1995) argue that stories make it possible, on a preconscious level, to face certain anxieties, and therefore, assume a therapeutic value.

## OBJECTIVE

This study aimed to understand whether fairy tales, in the form of board games, developed by the research team, have clinical utility or not.

## METHODOLOGY

### PARTICIPANTS

For this study, 82 psychologists were surveyed, 92% female with an average of 10 years of professional experience (SD= 2.4 years), after using the games presented below, with at least one kid.

### PROCEDIMENTS

A cross-sectional study was carried out, in which the authors proposed to listen to the opinion of dozens of psychologists who used therapeutic games in clinical practice as an instrument and intervention strategy. In parallel, a sociodemographic questionnaire was administered and feedback on the



Figure 1: The Snow White Game.



Figure 2: The João and Maria Game.

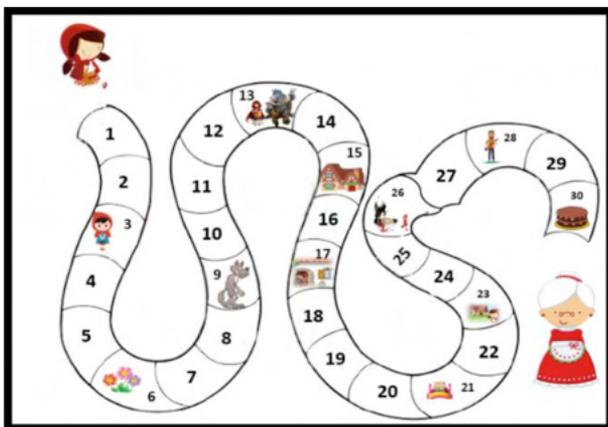


Figure 3: Little Red Riding Hood's Game.



Figure 4: The Three Little Pigs Game.

therapeutic utility of games was collected. This study complies with the Declaration of Helsinki of 1975.

## RESULTS

The results of this study show that the entire sample (100%) claims to have used games based on “Fairy Tales” as a therapeutic or pedagogical technique, considering these activities as an important instrument in the scope of clinical practice (Figure 5).

The results also indicate that the messages that the games intend to convey are marked by the professionals as present, given that the majority of the answers are between “agree” and “totally agree” (Table 1).

## DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

Listening to stories in childhood is very important for the formation of the child, and it is through them that one can feel and live

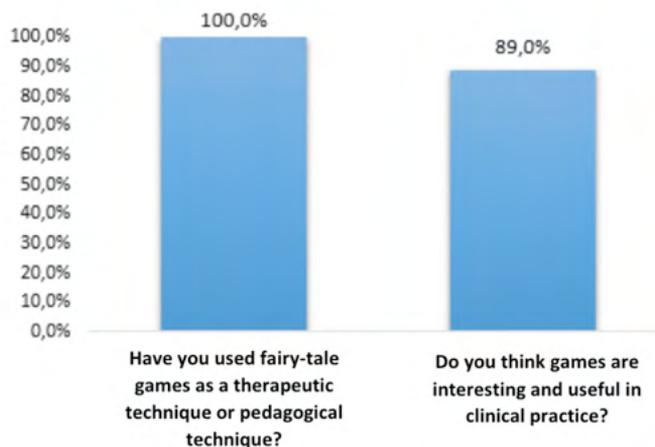


Figure 5: Use of “Fairy Tales” games.

n=82	DT	D	C/D	C	CT	Med
In life nothing happens by chance, it is necessary to work.	3 (3.7%)	6 (7.3%)	7 (8.5%)	34 (41.5%)	32 (39.0%)	4
It is important not to give up in the face of difficulties.	6 (7.3%)	9 (11.0%)	12 (14.6%)	30 (36.6%)	25 (30.5%)	4
Sometimes we make mistakes (for example when João and Maria ate the chocolate house) but we end up having the opportunity to solve them if we know how to learn from them.	2 (2.4%)	5 (6.1%)	7 (8.5%)	31 (37.8%)	37 (45.1%)	4
Children sometimes feel alone and "abandoned", even the heroes who win in the end.	4 (4.9%)	11 (13.4%)	9 (11.0%)	37 (45.1%)	21 (25.6%)	4
It's important to never give up.	3 (3.7%)	5 (6.1%)	8 (9.8%)	29 (35.4%)	37 (45.1%)	4

Alfa de Cronbach .83

Table 1: Main messages conveyed by the tales.

important emotions such as anger, sadness, joy or tranquillity, allowing to live in a profound way everything that the narratives provoke in which he hears them (MAINARDES, 2019).

Fairy tales intend to provide models of behaviour and implicit rules of pedagogy for the education of children (ZIPES, 1988 cit. in TSITSANI et al. 2012), and by mixing real facts with fiction, they promote the initiative and the capacity for autonomy of the children more effectively than the experience of everyday life itself (RUSTIN and RUSTIN, 2011).

Therapeutic games are powerful allies for psychologists in child therapy, both as

a vehicle for investigation and therapeutic intervention, with therapeutic games being a part of psychotherapy. Another important aspect related to these games is the fact that there is a strengthening of the bond with the children (GADELHA and MENEZES, 2004; PAPAROTO et al. 2009).

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the games developed and made available by the authors to the psychologists who participated in this study, represent a very interesting therapeutic potential, are pleasurable for children and can strengthen the therapeutic relationship, thus constituting another clinical tool available for different professionals.

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