

The Game to Grow Method of Therapeutically Applied Role-Playing Games

A Level Two Training for Mental Health Professionals

Presented by:
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Meet Your Instructor



Adam D. Davis, MA Ed, is a founder and Executive Director of Game to Grow, lead author on Critical Core, and has been a therapeutic game master since 2011. He earned his degree in drama therapy from Antioch University Seattle, and is a recognized member of the North American Drama Therapy Association. Adam developed the CoRe Gaming program at the Atlantic Street Center utilizing video games to teach Dialectical Behavioral Therapy skills, served as an experiential educator at Seattle's Woodland Park Zoo, and taught fourth-grade literacy for Seattle Public Schools.



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Agenda

- Introductions
- Legal, Important Information
- Learning Objectives
- Review of Level One
- TA-GM Lenses
- Common Roadblocks
- Great Facilitators have SPARK
- The Silverware Technique
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Collaborative Worldbuilding
- Collaborative Homebrew
- The DOTS System
- Treatment Goals
- Session Zero/Screening
- Practical Skills to Increase Engagement



Disclosures

This training is presented by Game to Grow, a 501c(3) nonprofit organization and has received no commercial support. Critical Core is a game system developed by Game to Grow, and proceeds from sales support Game to Grow's mission.

D&D Beyond provides some free access to Game to Grow for use in our programming. No other game systems or organizations mentioned in this training provided financial support or incentives for this training.

The trainers and developers of this training declare no conflict of interest.



Competency/Liability

No part of this training gives you permission or license to act outside of your bounds of competence in professional or personal settings.

You are not required to follow any advice given during this training, and you retain all legal responsibility for any suggestions you employ in your practice.

This training does not give you the ability to train other practitioners in the Game to Grow Method of TA-RPGs.



Potential Risks

Currently, there is no research to suggest utilizing TTRPGs in group therapy has an increased risk from traditional group therapy methods. Two recent reviews of the literature on applied RPGs did not identify areas of risk, but noted the research in this area is still emerging (Henrich, & Worthington, 2021; Arenas et al., 2022).

Consistent with traditional group therapy methods, clients may experience uncomfortable emotions as a result of engaging in this group. Clients should not engage in this group if it is clinically contraindicated. Groups should only be run by individuals competent in providing such services with the given population.



Learning Objectives

1. Identify the attributes of an effective therapeutic game master.
2. Use specific tools and techniques to respond to common roadblocks to effective TA-RPG.
3. Use the DOTS framework of narrative structure to align in-game encounters with treatment goals.
4. Use the ADDRESSING framework to recognize and respond to diversity within your player group and your in-game narrative in order to encourage players' sense of safety and resonance with narrative elements.
5. Implement “session zero” content and safety tools appropriately with regard to your population of players.

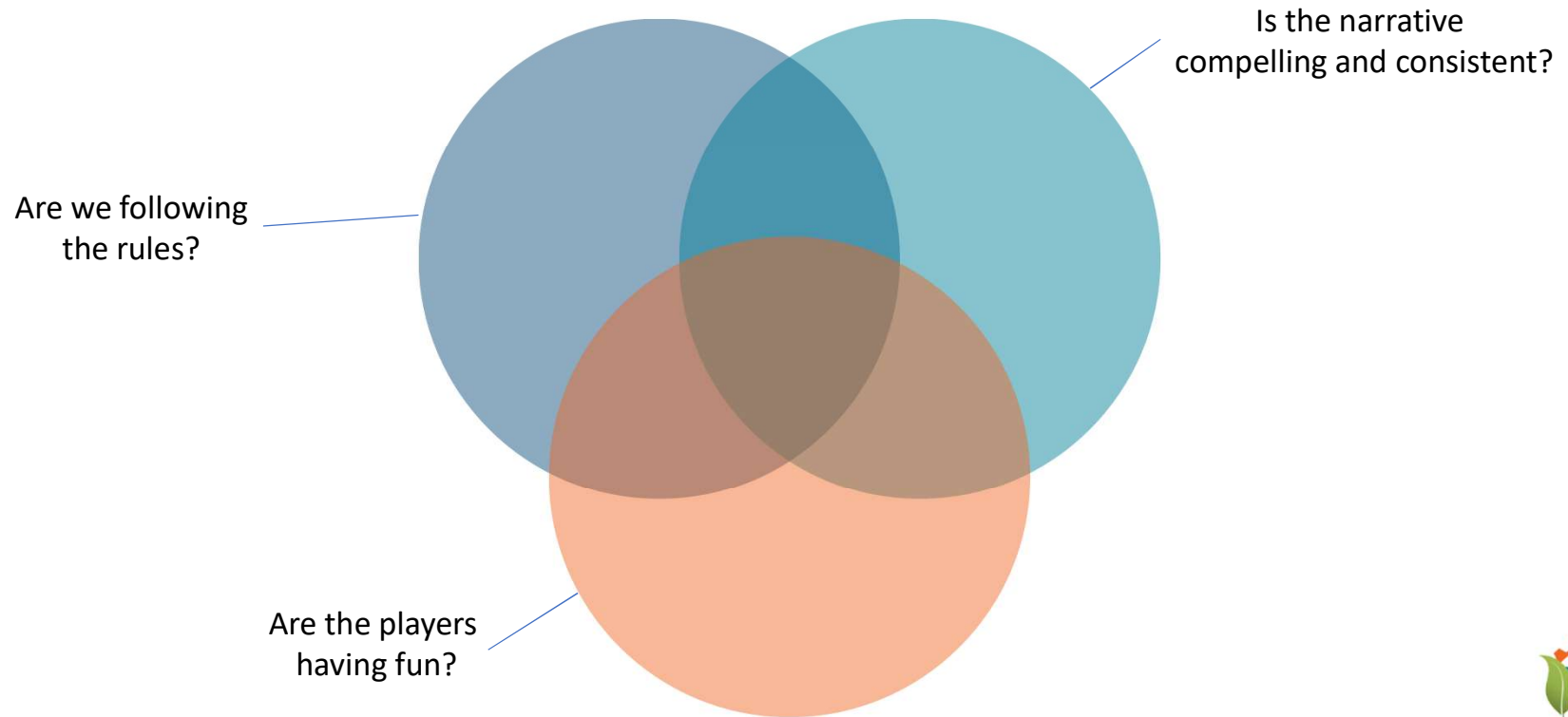


Building on Previous Learning

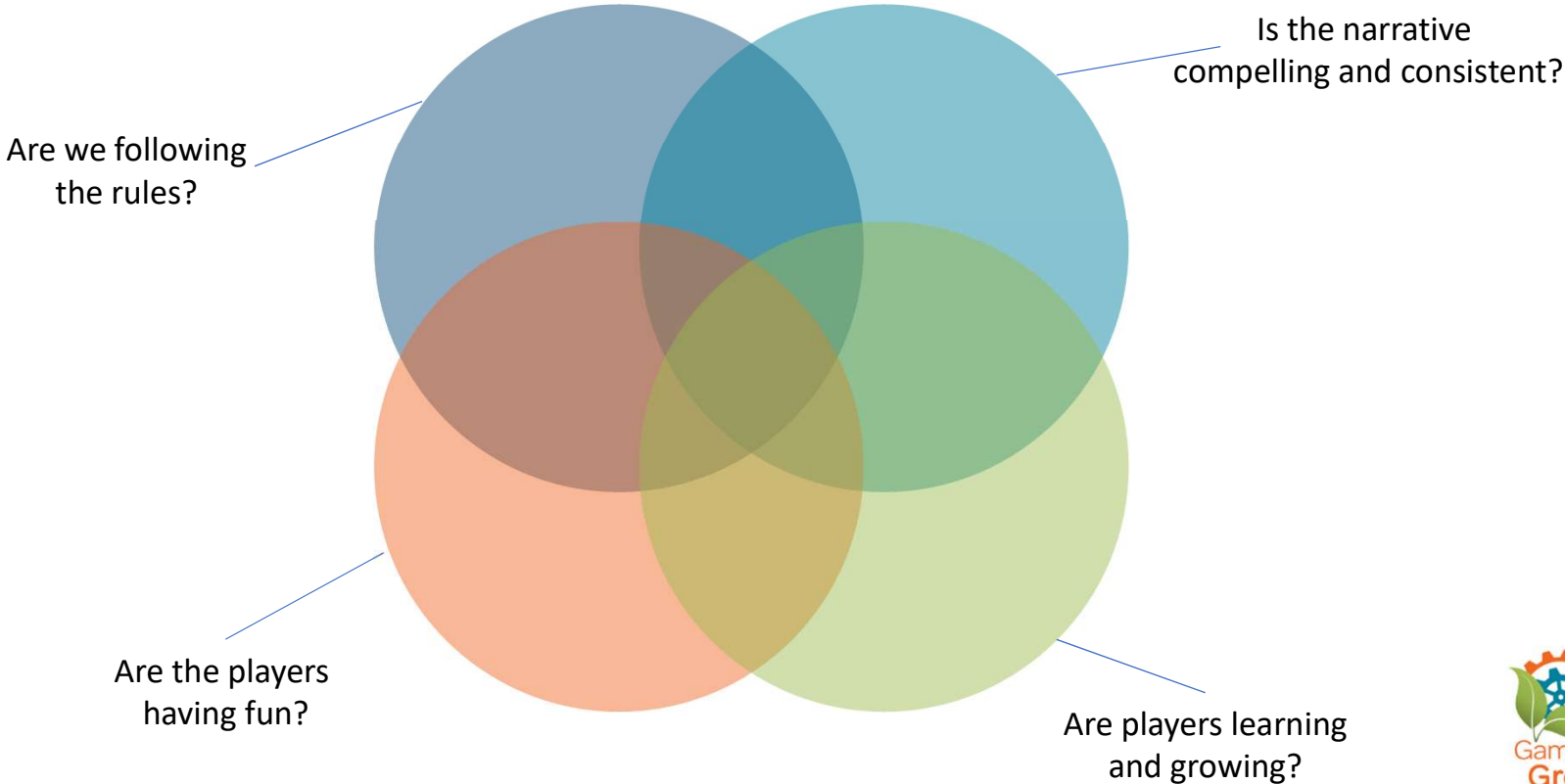
- **What is a TTRPG?**
 - Facilitated collaborative storytelling activity where participants role-play as characters
- **Core Capacities**
 - Regulation, Collaboration, Planning, Perspective, Pretend Play
- **Dimensions of Capacity-Building**
 - To build knowledge, performance, and fluency, participants need teaching, prompting, encouragement, reinforcement, and coaching.
- **Game to Grow Method of TA-RPG**
 - Developmental, Relational, Scaffolded, and Aesthetically Distanced, Play-Based Narrative Transference



Game Master Lenses



Therapeutic Game Master Lenses



Common Roadblocks in TA-RPGs

- Anxiety
- Disengagement
- Inflexibility
- Boundary Issues
 - Speaking over each other
 - Boundary testing
 - Inappropriate sharing
- Conflict Between Players

You are the *Facilitator*

- “*Facilis*” – easy to do, “ator” – person/thing that performs an action
- Your goal is to make it *easy* for group members to participate.

- Reframe challenging situations
 - Attribute best possible intent
 - View obstacles as opportunities for growth

- Engage with participants with unconditional positive regard
- Remove *unnecessary* obstacles



Effective Facilitators Have SPARK

Spontaneity

Playfulness

Attunement

Restraint

Knowledge



Spontaneity

- Be present.
- Respond authentically.
- Your players will surprise you. Let them.
- Be open to what emerges.

“A state in which psychological energy propels the individual to act appropriately to an unpredictable situation without a second thought, inhibition, guilt, or self-doubt.”

-Jacob Moreno

(as cited in Davelaar et al., 2008 p. 118).

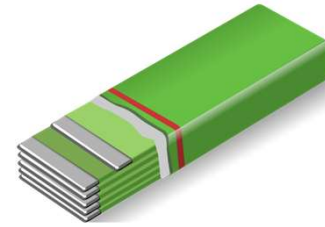


Spontaneity: Relevant Literature

- Anxiety is described in sociodrama literature as “blocked spontaneity” (Sternberg & Garcia, 2000, p. 128).
- Spontaneity is associated with self-efficacy, self-esteem, and intrinsic motivation (Davelaar et al., 2008)

Playfulness

- Reduce overt focus on rules.
 - Reduce overt focus on outcomes.
 - Be willing to adjust status.
 - Model authentic engagement and genuine curiosity.
 - Encourage participants to play.
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- Remember this: **If you're not playing, they're not playing!**



Playfulness: Relevant Literature

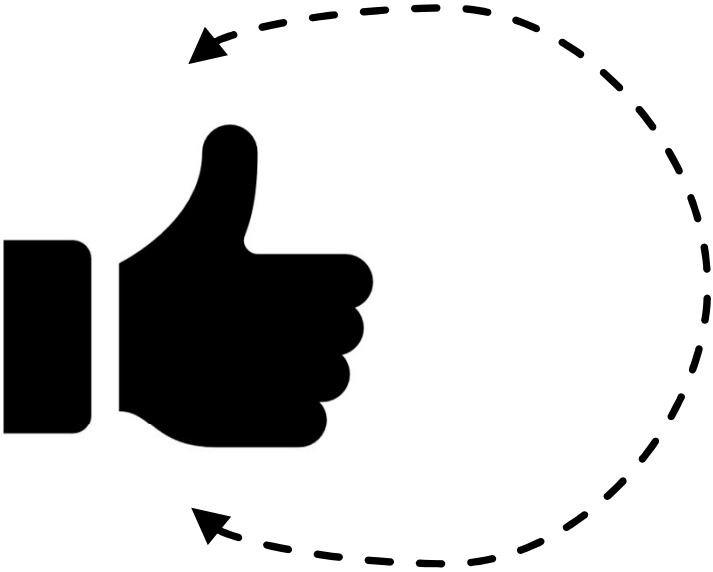
- Play has been used to support development of intergenerational relationships (Zhang & Kaufman, 2016).
- Structured play activities and play modeling can support increased engagement in play for children with developmental disabilities (Barnett, 2018).
- Imitation (matching) autistic youth's behavior during play can support increased engagement of the youth (Dawson & Galpert, 2008).



Attunement

- Connect authentically with individual participants.
- Read the room.
- Adjust tone and presentation accordingly.

Attunement: The Thumb-o-meter



Attunement: Social Cartography

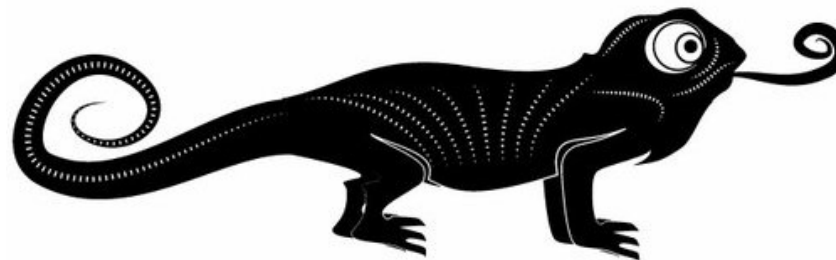
- Where is there social attraction?
- Where is there social repulsion?

- Who are natural leaders?
- Who are natural followers?



Attunement: The Chameleon Effect

- Mirror others' body language.
- Mirror others' affect.
- Mirror others' use of language.



Attunement: Co-Regulation

- Adjust face, voice, and bodily behaviors that indicate emotional expression.
- Increase or decrease affective/emotional display to help guide participants.
- Useful both proactively and responsively.
- A “flat” affect is a valuable tool to “lower the temperature” of a situation.

Attunement: Relevant Literature

- Nonverbal affect matching by therapist during sessions predicted decreases in avoidant attachment styles in adults (Håvås, Svartberg, & Ulvenes 2015).
- Accurate therapist attunement to client's treatment expectations reduced worry in clients with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (Coyne et al., 2021).

SPA in Action: “Yeah, and then adventure!”

- One person starts a “memory” of an adventure this group went on together: “HEY! Remember that time we went on an adventure to...”
- The next person responds with “Yeah! And then...” and adds to the “memory” of the shared adventure.
- Continue until the adventure is concluded.
- If there is time, anyone can start a new “memory” with the same phrase.

Pay attention to your Spontaneity, Playfulness, and Attunement!



Restraint

- Resist the need to be “in control.” Trust the process.
- Let participants share the lead.
- Resist the urge to be “helpful.” Let participants grow through their struggle.
- Resist attachment to outcomes.
- Resist being overly self-critical.
- Engage in mindful self-reflection.

“

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

”



Restraint: Relevant Literature

- Therapist dispositional mindfulness is associated with client-rated improvements in interpersonal functioning (Ryan et al., 2011).
- Trainee therapist meditation experience and non-reactivity were positively correlated with ability to management countertransference (Fatter & Hayes, 2013).

Knowledge

- Domains:
 - Game System/Rules
 - Therapeutic Approach
 - Participant Background/Interests/Goals
 - Facilitation Strategies
 - Session Planning
 - Self-Reflection

Knowledge: Relevant Literature

- The relationship between manualized competency is positive, but not the strongest predictor of outcome (Barber et al., 2007).
- Therapists with strong facilitative interpersonal skills (FIS) were found to be more effective than therapists with lower FIS over short treatment durations (8 weeks; Anderson et al., 2016)

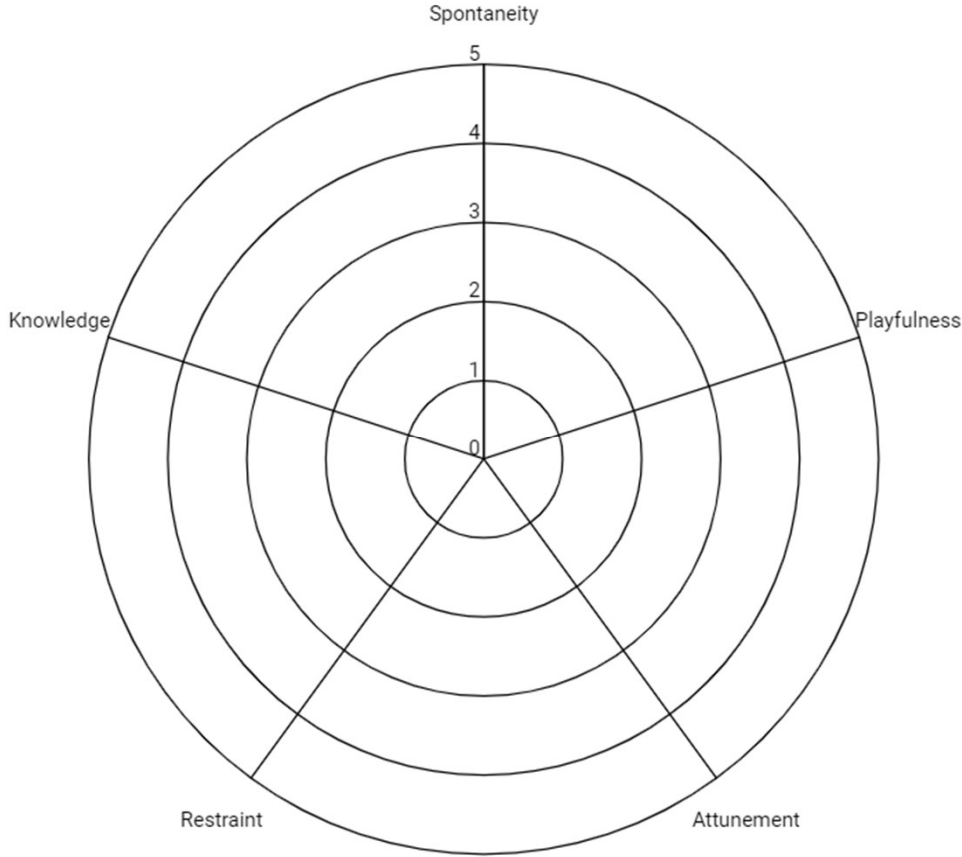
ARK in Action: Small-Group Discussion

- In your small group, discuss the following:
 - Fluency with game systems
 - Fluency with group therapy processes
 - Fluency with group facilitation techniques
 - How much do you like to prepare for RPG sessions?
- ***Create a name for your small group.***
- Discover how many things you as a group have in common.

Be mindful of your Attunement, Restraint, and Knowledge.

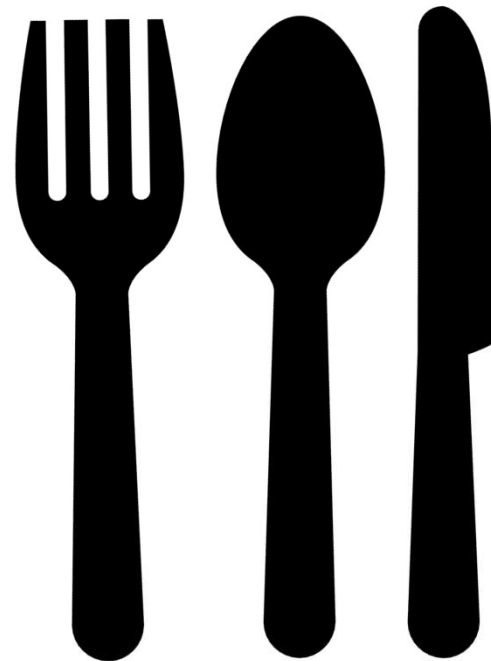


Chart your SPARK



The Silverware Technique

- Offer a fork
- Spoon feed your players
- Twist the knife

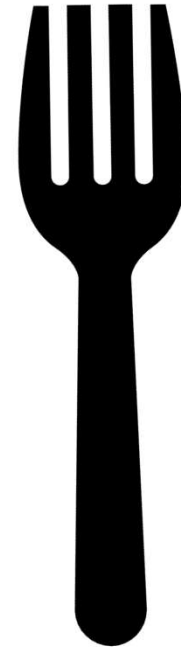


Offer a Fork

- Provide a clear set of choices:

“ Is your character from a big city
or a small town? ”

“ Do you want to climb over the wall
or go through the front gate? ”



Spoon Feeding

- Make a path or option explicit to the players through guided questions or statements:

“ You see the clearest and easiest path to be through the front gate. Do you want to go there now? “

“ How would you find a cleric to help you? “



Twist the Knife

- Prompt player action by using an in-game situation to raise the stakes.

“ As you are looking up at the castle, deciding how to get in to rescue Forano, you see his face high in the castle window. He has a black eye. As soon as he sees you, he puts a hand on the windowpane. Suddenly, he’s dragged away by a guard. You hear the crack of a whip...”

