

# Folk Game as Sociocultural Means of Preventing Deviant Behaviour

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Folk game is applied as a cultural form creating special milieu for development, correction and prevention in the work with deviant behavior in children and adolescents. A significant cause of deviant behavior is the lack of psycho-emotional experience and of possibilities to gain it. The key component in building social relations consists of experience of considering emotional states of others and of presenting by people their own states and needs for consideration by others. There are special factors determining resources of folk games, apart from cultural form of traditional contacts: imperative and at the same time generalized character of game rules allowing creative activity and improvisation; figurative, semantic and emotional intensity of plots; importance of the game process for participants; free self-determination of participation; equality of all participants in respect to rules.

**Keywords:** folk game, cultural tradition, psychologist, deviant behavior, prevention, game programs.

## Ресурсы народной игры как социокультурного средства профилактики девиантного поведения

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Народная игра применяется как культурная форма, создающая развивающую и коррекционно-профилактическую среду в работе с девиантным поведением детей и подростков. Существенными

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причинами девиантного поведения считается отсутствие психоэмоционального опыта и возможностей его приобретения. Ключевым в построении социальных отношений, выстраивания поведения принимается наличие опыта учета в общении эмоциональных состояний других людей и презентаций своих состояний и потребностей для учета их другими. Особыми факторами, определяющими ресурсность народных игр, помимо культурной формы традиционного общения, являются: императивность игровых правил и одновременно их обобщенный характер, что не сковывает творческую активность, импровизацию в игре; образно-смысловая и эмоциональная насыщенность сюжетов; ценность для участников собственно процесса игры; свобода самоопределения по отношению к вхождению в игру; равенство всех участников по отношению к правилам игры.

**Ключевые слова:** народная игра, культурная традиция, психолог, девиантное поведение, профилактика, игровые программы.

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### **Subject development background**

Educational motivation problems, usual for students both of schools and of universities especially worsened in connection with transition to market economies, ideology of consumption, decreased value of labor process and increased value of products produced, profits received and its consumption. It means that the motive of involvement into educational process is very slightly, quite indirectly related to the initial "consumptive" motive that is cultivated in the consumer society. By expressing figuratively and paraphrasing the words of A.N. Leontyev, we can say that the motive is so far away from the goal of direct involvement in the educational process that it is extremely difficult for move from its position towards this goal [14].

Initially, it seemed that there was an opportunity to solve the problem of motivation by solving the professional guidance task by early (during the first half-year) direct acquaintance of students with various locations of specialists and psychologists and with problems, requests for psychological help. Each of our students gets acquainted with at least ten specialists and their students during the first year by visiting kindergartens (simple and with a lekotek), schools (simple and specialized for children with deviant behavior or with HIA), psychiatric and narcological facilities (for children and adults), psychological centers of various profiles, shelters, institutions of the Federal Penitentiary Service, commission for cases of minors.

The main task is to bring the students into direct contact with the pain of people who are supported by psychologists and thus to contribute to the motivation for mastering the chosen profession. Then empathy and sympathy for those in need of help becomes the driving force of professional training. However, experience has shown that such an emotional charge suffices for a short time. Real professional psychological help tasks are set for the students not earlier than 3–4 years of study. By this time, the motivation usually weakens.

Thus, there appeared a task of retaining immediate motivation from the very beginning and during all the years of training by involvement in some sort of activity already available to the first year students. After consideration of a number of art therapy practices, game and folk practices were chosen as the most comprehen-

sible ones. This choice was made for several reasons. Firstly, it can be easily mastered by students during the first half-year of training. Secondly, this practice, its mastering has actual psychotherapeutic significance for the students (who often were brought up without the use of game practice), and it also contributes to group formation. Thirdly, many authors consider that recently children do not play in the family, in the street, and in children's institutions [1; 10; 18; 24; 22]. A significant decrease in the value of the children's group in the kindergarten is indirectly confirmed by a comparative study of preschool children's value orientations [9]. In our opinion, this is due to the lack of common play-based activities in the group. It appears that from an early age a child is deprived of the environment of communication and development (game), through which the experience of social relations formation has traditionally been transferred. It is the lack of such experience and impossibility of its acquisition that is one of significant causes of underdevelopment, deviating and already deviant behavior among children and adolescents [23]. The importance of play-based activities, which are conducted by our students in experimental groups once a week, was also proved by the participants who characterized such activities as "an hour of joy". As educators noticed, waiting for these 1-hour lessons even allowed children to master the sequence of weekdays more quickly.

Thus, folk games that students can master themselves and pass on to children and adolescents (and also in some cases to adults) are basic psychological practices that are accessible and extremely relevant for the training process of legal psychologists and for a wide application in the field of professional psychology. Obvious beneficial effects of game practice are noted by educators and psychologists of various institutions in which we conduct game programs [28]. For sharing such experience and giving it a professional status a special analysis of factors determining the effectiveness of the influence of folk game practice on the mental state and behavior of children and adolescents is required. These are issues related not only to practical use of the totality of games available to us in the framework of development of game programs for different categories of children (groups of different ages, combined groups, inclusive groups, hearing-impaired, deviant behavior,

deaf and blind children groups), but also theoretical guidelines allowing for sustainable gaming practices.

The six-year practice of legal psychologists training has made it possible to reveal many difficulties and make many finds [28]. It turned out that neither educators, nor psychologists are often familiar with the game reality and easily turn the game into exercises based on this game, depriving the gaming practice of its main advantage — process motivation. There appeared the need to determine what to do in order to create a live game, what can be done in the game and what can not be done for the purpose of maintaining the game atmosphere, i.e. the need to distinguish, emphasize corrective and preventative factors and features of a folk game.

### Folk game features

Cultural and historical psychology has developed different approaches to children's game, which are considered in many works. Among them, one can single out explanation of the nature of children's game as a form of communication (M.I. Lisina [15]), as a form of learning the adults activities (D.B. Elkonin [29]), as the child's development practice (S.L. Rubinstein [20]), including the development of imagination (V.T. Kudryavtsev [13]) and others.

However, traditional folk games rarely fall into the field of view of psychologists, although it is the traditional game that provides the child with the most important experience of "coming into the cultural legacy" [5]. In the opinion of A.V. Chernaya "traditional game is a mechanism for culture reproduction within the time of history" [26]. Significance of the game in the processes of the "ingrowing of the child into culture" (L.S. Vygotskiy [5]), including elements of cultural creation (V.T. Kudryavtsev [13]) is obvious for cultural and historical psychology. However, the content of traditional games, their cultural and historical character are little studied. After centuries of selection, fine-tuning by time, they became custodians and means of translation of features of communication, relations peculiar to the people among which they were born and exist, as a cultural form of maintenance of psychical and emotional shared identity [23; 28]. Thus, the traditional game is a way of appropriation of the historically formed structure of national self-consciousness (V.S. Mukhina et al. [16]), which determines human behavior and communication form.

In our opinion, folk games include not only action-oriented games, but also folk songs (which are traditionally played), and folk dolls (playing with them, including making them — creation) [11], folk tales (visualizing typical model life scenarios).

Within the framework of cultural and historical approach, researchers often consider the game as a condition for the child's mental development, as a way of cognizing by the child of the people environment [1]. It seems that we should pay attention to the cultural

value of the content of the game as it is — both as a cultural form of communication and as a way of translation of traditional communication culture, which a live folk game with its rules and bearers is a custodian of [23; 28].

The totality of cultural content of behavior models that are involuntarily mastered in the game can be attributed to such folk game features of cultural and historical significance. Whereas a normal role-playing game usually provides very specific stories to be played, folk games provide their generalized schematic models. Such games as "Poppy", "Gray hen", "Kite" are the quintessence of national experience, experience of emotional states, relations between participants. It is difficult even to assess all the nuances of experience hidden in folk games. For example, the most famous folk game "Karavai" (karavai is a round loaf), according to the researchers data, contains more than ten reproduced emotional states that can be experienced by both a child and an adult who takes part in the game.

To analyze a traditional folk game, it is necessary to distinguish its features, which are represented as the following dichotomous features, listed in Table 1.

Table 1

#### Traditional game dichotomies

Collectiveness	Individuality
Hierarchy	Parity
Voluntary participation	Compliance with rules
Rigidly predetermined activity	Variability
Integrated system of rewards and punishments	Cultural forms of peace-making, conflict resolution

Within the traditional game, opportunities for a wide variety of behaviors, for example, from individual to collective and vice versa, are created, which allows the child to learn different behavior models and gain experience in selecting an independent individual strategy for different situations.

While playing, children, by building relationships on the principle of parity, recognize their and others' equal rights and responsibilities, accept either the dominant role of the game leader — master, or a low-status role in the game, of a "freshman", unskillful player, etc. This combination of equality and subordination develops children's sense of freedom, respect for common opinion, independence, responsibility, sense of purpose of their actions.

Almost all folk games have a clearly defined scenario, an internal law or rules that are not violated from the outside. However, variability, as a feature of traditional culture, provides players with an extensive opportunity of improvisation.

Voluntariness of participation in the game and simultaneous compliance with its rules and scenarios de-

velop the most important skill of a cultural person to be free in accepting restrictions. Freedom to be good, ability to keep the adopted law of the game regardless of one's own desires is a step towards curbing wilfulness, a preventive and corrective resource in dealing with deviant behavior.

One can see exactly how everything works during the simplest game for kids "Little Cap". In the center of the circle there is a Little Cap sitting on his haunches, and other players perform circle dance around and sing a simple song:

Little Cap, Little Cap,  
You have thin legs,  
You wear red boots,  
We are who raised you,  
We are who fed you,  
We set you on your feet,  
We compel you to dance.

After singing words "we set you on your feet" the circle of dancers comes closer to the Little Cap and helps to stand on feet. Then everyone sings, clapping, "Dance, as long as you want, choose whoever you want". Little Cap dances and then chooses another one to be Little Cap and the game repeats.

What happens to the child sitting in the center of the circle? It depends on the child's character. Most children experience discomfort. For example, a child is hyperactive and wants to be in the center very much. But, after getting inside the circle center, it is because of his hyperactivity, he or she no longer wants to be incapable of moving there and seeks to leave. If an embarrassed child enters this game situation, he or she must also overcome it, because it is rather difficult to be in the focus of attention for such a child. So, what conditions does this game create? First of all, it is short — a game (game duration) is limited to a short song. A child can leave the game until the song starts, but if one stayed, then one must play until the end. Anyone who comes from the circle into the center, understands that it is necessary to suffer for a short time. It is important that the game enables the child to feel shortness of this experience. From the psychological point of view, there is suffering as a state and suffering as an action. Due to the shortness of the game duration, a certain psychophysiological state of depression is transformed into an act. A state transforms into an action of suffering. And that is when the inner work is performed, this work is called by S.L. Rubinstein a "moral act". The child makes the decision on his or her own to suffer, but not to destroy the game, and to freely pass through this rather complicated experience. Almost all round dance games are work with volitional effort. Not for the purpose of achieving success, but for personal development. The child accumulates experience of volitional effort to overcome him- or herself.

Principles that are effective in the folk game in the children's community are essential to the implementation of the folk game educational influence.

*Interactivity* — provides a variety of relations and relationships in game situations, both interpersonal and group oriented.

*Motivation*, expressed as a desire to be accepted into the game, into the gaming community, ensures the *voluntary participation* in the game and its hierarchy. To be accepted into the game means for a child to be accepted into communication.

The game reflects the ability of *identification* and *individualization*, expressed in the ability to "be yourself and be different". The change in the social position in the game, which ensures identification with the position of the other one, is the reason for the development of humane relations "which embody the formation in the child's mind and behavior of values of another person, experience of another person's successes and failures as own successes and failures" [1].

Ideas of justice, kindness and other important human qualities are kept by all the best games. It is interesting that there were almost no moralizing games among the people. Moral requirements are included in the content of games, its rules and traditions" [6, p. 84]. While playing the game, an awakening of the moral sense occurs, inner spiritual work, which enables one to become in the future a developed personality, is carried out.

N.I. Nepomnyaschaya, who studied the game carefully and in details, notes that during the game, as well as during any creative activities, essential features of a person, person's potential is realized. She defines it as a form of life of an individual, believing that only "during the game and creative activities a person can fully realize own potential, own essential (and therefore not filled) needs and opportunities" [17]. This is the potential universality, endlessness of an individual (overcoming the familiar and limited ideas of the world and of oneself — transcending), identification of oneself with other people and individualization of oneself. These features are the basis of spirituality, freedom and love, and, in the author's opinion, are of a spiritual nature.

It is necessary to separately note the psychodiagnostic and psychotherapeutic opportunities of the traditional game in the children's community.

For instance, let us consider the well-known game "Kite". It exists in different variants and is played in different ways, depending on the age of children. When the game is played by older children, two leaders are selected for the roles of Kite (aggressive position — hits, claws) and Duck Mom (protective position — protects, fends off). The rest of players are ducklings. In this game there is a constant change of roles and social positions. The victim (ducklings) then becomes the aggressor (young kites). Kite can become both the Duck Mom and the duckling the next time, in the new game.

Modern children have typical behavioral reactions during this game. Timid children are very afraid of being kids (ducklings), but they also do not like the role of Kite. Quite unexpectedly they find themselves well in the role of Duck Mom. Kite cannot hit the Duck Mom

and she, protected by the rules, fearlessly counterattacks Kite, fends him off. Active and aggressive boys, becoming young kites gently catch ducklings, trying not to scare them, because they froze with fear some time before while being ducklings. In this game, all the players who fully live the positions-roles given within the game are active players. It is significant that Duck Mom and ducklings are a kind of a single whole. Ducklings do not run to scatter, saving themselves, but stay together, wriggling and dodging, they interact with each other, depend on each other and on Duck Mom who protects them.

The way children represent themselves in the situations set by the game, allows us to determine children's features, develop behavioral intervention plans for them. Therewith, traditional games has corrective potential. "Common play-based activities are capable, in the opinion of V.M. Grigoryeva, to fulfill a unique common function to replenish — supplement to the required level of development those aspects of personality that for some reason do not develop in the course of other activities, other spheres of life" [6, p. 87]. Traditional game through the system of relations, cultural context, rules, through the system of rewards and punishments, actualizes internal resources of an individual. Thus, traditional game, providing diagnostic capabilities, can simultaneously change and correct negative forms of behavior and feelings of a child. It reveals problem issues in family and social relations. The game reveals and makes it possible to experience peculiarities of social and regulatory relations. In the process of playing the game one can appraise the formedness of gender-role behavior, features of the child's ideas about the world and the child's place in it.

It is these aforementioned features of the game that were put into the basis of game programs for the prevention and correction of deviant behavior of children and adolescents.

### Folk game resource factors

Factors determining folk game corrective and preventive resources, in addition to **cultural content** which children and adolescents are involved into during the game, are, first of all, **comprehensibility and emotional appeal** of the game. Requiring no special equipment, inventory, but only space, the game is extremely rich in emotionally significant situations. Analysis of 50 games used by us within the training course revealed that participants of these games can experience all basic emotions and about 100 of their shades. The game provides cultural expression forms for aggression, demonstrativeness, anger, fear — every emotion that children and adolescents try to find in vain or with risk to life in an urbanized environment (cruel games with a rope, games with dying, games with affective conditions) [27]. It should be noted that traditional game customs a child from an early age to experience states

close to affect. Most of the games in infancy and early childhood, such as the well-known "Going with nuts", "Bump by bump", jiggling a child up and down, "Magpie", "Patty-cake", etc., end with a false fall, tickling, tingling, e. action that causes the release of adrenaline. Thus the child laughs, demands to repeat this "dangerous" action. Subsequently, children return again and again to these states during games, but through different game actions. These are any lanterns, games such as "Kite" with jumping and grabbing, circling in pairs and alone, silence games, games with punches with hands like "Hiss, pussy cat!", etc. Gradually children can engage into more complex games with a rope, dying and revival, etc.

**The third contributing factor**, or a special condition of the folk game, is, according to the opinion of E.A. Pokrovskiy [19] that we adhere to, **the necessary free self-determination** for participation in the game. As J. Huizinga [25, p. 17] stated, "every play is primarily and first of all a free activity. Playing by order is no longer playing. If there is no other way, it can become some kind of imposed imitation, playing the game playing". Voluntary participation, as it was mentioned above, is the most important feature of the game as such. This triggers the process of self-control in stressful emotional situations and responsibility for own behavior in these situations.

Anyone can freely join and leave the game, but in accordance with the rules that organizationally establish joining and leaving order (you cannot join and leave the game during the game, because it can destroy it). As it turned out, this obligatory condition is difficult to fulfill within educational and fostering institutions, where children are commanded to sleep, eat, practice and PLAY. A child usually has no alternative to playing within space of the institution, this makes such child unfree. Our experience showed that the presence of some ordinary space, alternative to the play space, where children can stay, not involving into the game, is an essential condition for using the game as a corrective and preventive resource.

**The fourth contributing factor is strict adherence to game rules.** This, together with the ultimate motivation for participation in the game, is the most important factor forming the behavior (maximum attractiveness of the proposed interactions subject to extremely rigid rules). This is exactly the factor that generates a lot of collisions within the game and the whole spectrum of emotional states.

According to the cultural and historical theory, mental development is appropriation of ideal forms — culture-based patterns and models of behavior [30]. Folk game offers such regulatory patterns both in the plot to be performed and in the text to be sung. Vocal is a special game resource, peculiar to the folk game.

Folk game, where ultimate motivation, emotional involvement and rigid rules are encountered, cre-

ates ideal conditions for making the Child (I want) with the Parent (I need) and acquire the experience of the Adult (I want what I need) [2]. A child and a teenager, acquainted with the game, acquires the experience and the ability to feel, understand and accept the social norm (rules) as **an imperative** along with its bearers, which is especially important nowadays when “I want” is cultivated and satisfied with the market economy and the ideology of consumption. Such new mental formations, appearing in the game (the ability to accept imperative rules, obey the rules), makes gameplay an essential resource of legal psychology (both legal and penitentiary). This ability, formed within the gaming practice, determines its resources for the prevention of deviant behavior. The proposed concept of preventive work is implemented in such games, it assumes that factors that disturb the adolescents’ emotional balance must not be eliminated, but, such situations where this balance is tested for strength must, on the contrary, be formed for preventive purposes. In these situations, teens, experiencing a storm of feelings and emotions, would be able to cope with them and make themselves stable, by complying with the game rules and experiencing the support of other players [3]. It should be particularly emphasized that what is important is not rules as they are, but rules together with their bearers. This creates special difficulties in organizing the game event, the game initiators need to make efforts so that the game takes place.

**The fifth factor** is the peculiarity of folk game rules. They **have a framework character, suggest improvisation, do not hamper the freedom of self-presentation of individuality of the game participants**. For example, each “Game of Tags” or “Hide and Seek” will have its own unique trajectory of participants in the game, depending on their mood and place of the game event, but the rules of the game will be strictly observed. The presence of this factor allows us to talk about creative nature of the game for each participant. The game is every time created anew and is unique.

Figurative and semantic features of the game actions scenario are of particular importance, as they support procedural orientation of the game participants. Grey han leads its children, the loom in “Shuttle” interacts with shuttles, dough is kneaded and cakes are baked in “Bubble”. This is what distinguishes games from training exercises. You can understand the difference by comparing the practice common with psychologists “Let the places be changed by those who have ...”, and the game “Fruit basket”, where “Wind blows on ...”.

**The sixth factor** is the value of the game process accepted by the participants, **absence in the game**, unlike the trainings or exercises, **of the alienated result**, dictated by external goals. Participants of the game are not focused on any external goals. A modern sports

game that does not meet these requirements often looks like a special heavy sports work, which only indirectly and partially resembles a game. A true game exists for the sake of communication, for the sake of developing relations with other participants, for the sake of experiencing states that are difficult to achieve in other situations, but accessible within the game. For example, affective states. Acquisition of valuable psychoemotional experience and corresponding features in the game is involuntary, there are no sharings typical for trainings. There is a great temptation to take something out of the game, predetermine this something (and in the case of sharing – to note the presence of this “something”). This destroys the game, deprives it of uniqueness of experiences of each participant, devaluates things for which participants joined the play – live direct communication.

**The seventh factor**, or more precisely the obligatory condition associated with obligatory implementation of the rules, is **equal adherence to the rules by all the game participants**, including the organizer, facilitator, assistants, parents, children – all who entered the game (principle of parity). This factor prohibits unchangeability of certain roles for the participants and makes all the roles and, accordingly, their replacement accessible to every player during the game. Folk game is so arranged that the participant, whatever he or she is, cannot stay in any role contrary to own will on according to someone’s desire. For the children’s group, this factor serves as a way of destroying stigmatization of certain children that was carried out earlier. Equality in the game is constantly confirmed by cyclic nature of role changing (you pursue or you run away, you are frightened or you are adore, you take care or you care are taken care of).

This factor plays a special role in the implementation of game programs in the system of punishments execution. Teenagers are very cautiously engage in game programs, only after the third program, most of students of correctional colonies were ready to take part in the games. Opinions of teenagers divided. Some were embarrassed, as it turned out, by the seventh factor of game practice we are considering – equality of participants in terms of roles and rules of the game. According to certain opinions, this situation in the game is fraught with subsequent troubles. Because this rule opposed the established hierarchy of relations, which the regime and way of life of students is based on there. In the minds of adolescents, there was no difference between regime, life based on “criminal concepts” and rules of human relations, which for today (in the conditions of expansion of market ideology) have remained, perhaps, the only reference point in the processes of education and resocialization. These rules apply to folk culture, are not subjected to the influence of social institutions, ideology, and are a part of folk games. A teenager who observes normal and natural

relationships in a folk game and experiences them during the game can get new image and experience of normal relationships between people, which than can be used as an archetype. It is important that, after leaving the colony, a teenager will bring out from an educational institution not only experience of regime life, but also experience of human relations acquired with the help of games.

Absence of experimental data on the effectiveness of professional psychocorrectional work with the use of folk games in regime institutions (correctional colonies, psychiatric hospitals) is determined, first of all, by the novelty of tools developed by the authors in this area. Small but practical experience has already been evaluated by specialists and heads of these institutions. Representatives of Aleksinskaya correctional colony noted that "communication in this format was accessible and useful for students, contributed to the processes of social rehabilitation, development of experience of normal communication with their peers". Scientific and Practical Center for Mental Health of Children and Adolescents named after G.E. Sukhareva (pre-school department) and Psychiatric Clinical Hospital No. 4 named after P.B. Gannushkin noted there was "a great contribution of this practice to the rehabilitation of patients", pointed to its "positive therapeutic effect".

Of course, opinions of practical workers on the effectiveness of folk programs need experimental confirmation, but the obtained effect can be easily explained theoretically. The idea that folk game is a saturated social and cultural environment that positively influences development of all higher mental functions leads to the idea of expansion of practice of professional application of folk games, hence it can be used to correct a wide variety of mental development deviations.

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### Conclusions

Cultural and historical approach can be implemented in the form of deviant behavior prevention work involving folk games possessing a multiple-factor psychoprophylactic resource and creating a social and cultural environment for mental development as the cultural element.

Recent tendencies are the shift of motives from creativity to consumption, reduction of labor and educational motivation, cultivation of individualism, personal success, leading to competition and conflicts of different levels. To counteract them, it is advisable to involve folk games in the professional training programs for psychologists, because through folk games it can become possible to cultivate traditional cultural values among children and teenagers. Folk game in the modern conditions turns from entertainment at leisure time to professional psychopreventive work, which should be specially mastered in the course of professional training by educators and psychologists who primarily work with children and adolescents with developmental and behavioral deviations.

Game training is an optimal form and at the same time content of the initial stage of professional training of legal psychologists, as specialists in the prevention and correction of deviant behavior. It is accessible and motivationally significant for students, and at the same time is meaningful and relevant for the transfer to children and adolescents, especially those with the risks of deviant behavior.

Traditional (folk) game has unique features of the bearer and translator of traditional culture, the values of which are openness, benevolence, sympathy. Acquisition or actualization of such values through the gaming practice ensures prevention and correction of deviant behavior.

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