

Interventions for Children Experiencing Complex Trauma
(Developmental Trauma Disorder)

Preliminary Compilation from Research Project, *Classroom Support for Children with Complex Trauma and Attachment Disruption*

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Introduction

In our work to better understand and support children who have experienced Type I trauma (single-event, post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD]) and Type II trauma (multiple events of an interpersonal nature, complex trauma also named developmental trauma disorder [DTD]) and the caregivers, teachers, counsellors and support staff who help these children, our team has worked to compile interventions and approaches that are designed by to establish safety for such children and aid in lowering distress. The following interventions and strategies were designed by researchers and experienced practitioners and come from various sources that are fully referenced in the appendix.

Caregivers, teachers, counsellors and other helpers are strongly recommended to have a basic understanding of trauma-informed practice before using the following interventions. In all trauma support work, safety is paramount. A safe environment is critical for children with complex trauma reactions, with the establishment of safety the first stage of all trauma work (Aideuis, 2007; Courtois, 2008; Herman, 1997). For children who now see the world in a negative light and do not trust others, interventions can only succeed in a safe environment where self-efficacy and a sense of mastery are fostered (Faust & Katchen, 2004).

The Attachment, Self-regulation and Competency (ARC) strengths-based model developed by Kinniburgh and Blaustein (2005) is a components based framework informed by attachment and traumatic stress theories. With a focus on the rebuilding or building of safe relational systems, the model incorporates enhancement of regulatory capacity, skill building, and stabilizing distress in children and their caregivers. We have arranged the compiled interventions under the

ARC framework so that users of this resource may identify the interventions that fit with childrens' presenting issues of attachment needs, struggles with affect (emotional) regulation, and the need for self-efficacy and self esteem competency.

The goal of trauma-informed practice is to help children live a life less affected by the trauma through identification of emotions, emotional and self regulation, relational skill building, and improved problem solving and decision making abilities (Tishelman, Haney, Greenwald O'Brien, & Blaustein, 2010). We hope that the resources found in this compilation will aid in reaching this goal.

Highly Recommended General Complex Trauma Resources

- Blaustein, M.E., & Kinniburgh, K.M. (2010). *Treating Traumatic Stress in Children and Adolescents: How to Foster Resilience through Attachment, Self-regulation, and Competency*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Courtois, C.A. & J.D. Ford, J.D. (Eds.) (2009). *Treating Complex Traumatic Stress Disorders*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Kagan, R. (2007). *Real Life Heroes: Practitioners Manual*. New York, NY: Haworth Press.
- Levine, P. A., & Kline, M. (2007). *Trauma Through a Child's Eyes*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.
- Warner, E., Cook, A., Westcott, A., & Koomar, J. (2011). *SMART: A Manual for Therapists Working With Children and Adolescents*. Brookline, Mass: Trauma Center at JRI.

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ATTACHMENT INTERVENTIONS

Ability of caregiver/staff to recognize and regulate own emotional experience

Attunement: positive engagement between child and caregiver/staff, ability to recognize and respond to emotional needs driving behaviour

Predictability and consistency to increase safety and regulation of emotion (transition times) (Kinniburgh & Blaustein, 2005)

Psychoeducation for Caregivers

Tips for Caregivers of Traumatized Children

- Children may have difficulty processing what is said because of the cognitive dysfunction temporarily brought on by the experience of trauma. It is important to be patient if they do not get it.
- Let children know that the thoughts, feelings, and physical reactions they are having are normal and will lessen over time.
- Encourage children to talk about those thoughts or feelings or ask questions. Be patient. Children may ask the same questions repeatedly because they need to hear the answer several times for it to take hold.
- Use simple, concrete words when giving information. It is helpful for the parent or caregiver to be the initial source of information to create trust. After providing details, redirect children into an activity.
- Ask children what will help them feel just a little bit better and try to provide it.
- Allow yourself to be curious by asking questions, “What do you think about most since this happened? What is your biggest worry? What is the worst part of what has happened?”
- Children need to feel that their parents or caregivers are in control. It is okay to be sad and to say, “I’m not sure what will happen next, but what I am sure about is I will be with you and we will get through this together.” Follow with a hug.
- Return to family routines as soon as possible to create a sense of safety and control. Give children choices in some of their activities to help restore some sense of power and control.
- If children return to behaviours that they engaged in when younger, be patient. The behaviours are likely to be self-soothing and calming.
- Protect children from exposure to other frightening situations, news about what happened, and reminders of what happened.
- Avoid unnecessary separations between children and family for 2-3 weeks if possible.

(Steele & Malchiodi, 2008, pp. 270-271)

Safety and Security

Parent / Child Safety Activities

Aim

To create safety and security with children

Materials

Paper, crayons or markers

Method

Ask your child to describe or draw his or her biggest worry since the traumatic event. What is the worst part for you now? What helps (or might help you) feel a little better? What or who makes you (or might help you) feel really safe right now?
(Steele & Malchiodi, 2008, p. 267)

Safety Boxes

Aim

To help children feel a sense of safety, express emotions, and understand traumatic events

Materials

Boxes
Magazines, photographs
Tape, glue, scissors
Paper, construction paper, markers, oil pastels

Method

Ask children to collage images of safety, comfort, and protection on the outside of the boxes. On the inside, collage images that represent their fears, anger, sadness, and other experiences of vulnerability. Focus on how the children can obtain comfort or protection. This activity is meant to contain expression of feeling and help children focus on the acquisition of self-help skills.
(Loumeau-May, 2008, pp. 89-90)

Magic Shop

Aim

To help children transform overwhelming or traumatic images into safe ones

Materials

Wands or remote control (optional)

Method

Ask children to bring something frightening from their lives into a magic shop, where they trade it in for something they need. You may ask them to wave a magic wand to turn a monster into a mouse or use an imaginary remote control to change the channel on a scary show to a funny cartoon.

(Haen, 2008, p. 231)

Feeling Good

Aim

To help children build safety, resources, and sensation awareness

Materials

Paper, markers

Method

1. Ask the child to draw a picture of a time when he or she felt (content, satisfied, happy, or excited) recently or before the (accident, abuse, etc.) occurred.
2. Have the child study his or her artwork, close his or her eyes, and locate the place in body where they are able to feel the goodness. Encourage the child to allow that feeling to spread and grow.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 389)

Safety, Security, and Feeling

Tips for Caregivers

To create safety and security with children (infant to 3 years):

- Make regular eye contact

- Hold your child often and plan for “snuggle time” before bed or naps. Rocking in a chair can be very comforting.
- Engage in smiling and laughter with your child
- Play games such as patty-cake and peek-a-boo while holding your child
- Swing your child in a blanket while singing a favourite song
- Read a book or watch a short video together on the couch
- Crawl with your toddler; be excited when he or she crawls towards you
- Talk to your child often; voice recognition is very calming for infants
- If your child enjoys water, play with water in the sink or a small tub
- Let your child help you make his or her favourite food.

Infant to 3 years

Aim

To reinforce attachment and create a sense of connection. This exercise allows your child to begin to understand and manage deep feelings while feeling safe and secure on your lap.

Method

Hold your child on your lap in front of a mirror. Demonstrate facial expressions while you encourage your child to join you. Say, “I feel happy” with an exaggerated facial expression. Then, calling your child by name, say, “[Child’s name] feels happy.”

Continue with other emotions – sad, surprised, lonely, mad, scared, etc.

Repeat this activity often. Try different feelings and expressions, always beginning and ending with positive ones.

(Steele & Malchiodi, 2008, pp. 272-73)

Heartstrings

Ages: 8 years and up

Aim

To explore how children view significant others in their lives, providing insight as to why some people are less close than others

Materials

Markers and paper

Method

Draw a series of evenly spaced circles (one inside the other), the smallest being about two inches in diameter. Four circles are usually sufficient but you may need to add as the child works through the activity.

Have the child write his or her name inside of the smallest circle and draw a heart around it. Then explain to the child that the names of the people most important to him or her are written in the next circle closest to the heart. Then other people who are not quite so close and so on. Some children will find it easier to write out a list of people first and then categorize them on the circles. Discuss the child's reason for putting people in certain positions. This activity may be very useful for children in care or who live with a separated parent.

Variations

My Heart, Your Heart – It may be useful to do this activity twice with the child with the first time looking at how close other people feel to the child and then have the child decide where each of the significant people would place themselves in relation to the child. The two sets of circles may be very different. Discuss with the child why this may be the case.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 35-36)

Memories

Ages 3-6

Aim

To create safety and security with children

Materials

Paper, crayons or markers

Method

Encourage your child to tell you about his or her best memories by drawing a picture or finding one in a magazine that reminds him or her of a good memory. Discuss sensations - ask your child what he or she remembers smelling, hearing, and how his or her body felt at the time.

After discussing several positive memories, suggest that your child think about his or her saddest memory, following the same routine. Remind your child that feelings come and go and everyone can have happy and sad feelings at the same time. Ask your child to tell you in detail about one of the funniest times he or she remembers.

(Steele & Malchiodi, 2008, pp. 273-74)

External / Internal Resources

Aim

To identify external and internal resources

Materials

Two pieces of paper, pen or pencil

Method

1. Take one of the pieces of paper and fold it in half vertically. On one side of the fold, begin to make a list of your external resources; on the other side of the fold, list your internal resources.
2. As you glance at your list, notice which resources “jump out” as the strongest supports for you in times of stress. Take some time to focus on each, one at a time, waiting to feel what sensations and emotions emerge, and where in your body you feel them. Notice if they register as muscular strength, warmth around the heart, power in the belly, “grounding” in the lower body or pelvis, etc. List them or journal about them to emblazon them in your sensory memory.
3. Notice if there are categories of missing or weak resources, such as few satisfying relationships or lack of a spiritual center. Make a list of ways to begin to enrich your life by adding resources to close the gap. For example, if you feel inadequate physically and have little companionship, you might join a dance class. If these activities prove to be a source of more connection to yourself and others, add them to your list.
4. Using the other piece of paper, make a list of your child’s external and internal resources, or help an older child create his or her own lists following steps 1-3. Put an * next to the resources that bring the most comfort during stress. Help your child to deepen their awareness of the sensations that accompany resources. Be careful not to impose your ideas on your child, but instead be open and receptive to their ideas and needs.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 136)

Safety Hand

Age: 3 years and up

Aim

To help children identify safe resources. This activity can be used with anxious children.

Materials

Paper, markers, pen

Method

Trace the child’s hand on a blank sheet of paper. Ask the child to think of five grownups that he or she trusts and can tell if anything terrible happens, or feels unsafe. Write the names of the people down on the fingers of the drawn hand.

For children who are old enough to use the telephone, have them draw a ring on the finger saying, “This is who you need to call.” Add the phone numbers to the picture. Practice reciting the names and phone numbers to help the child remember the safety contacts. Explain that if one person is not available, won’t listen or doesn’t believe them, then move onto the next person until the child finds someone who takes him or her seriously. Remind the child that the hand is always with him or her and the safety contacts are people the child can always talk to.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 77-78)

Feeling Expression

How Big is Your Hurt?

Ages 3-6

Aim

To help children express feelings

Materials

Ribbon or tape measure

Method

Tell your child that you know he or she has been hurt on the inside by this incident. Explain that you care about how he or she feels. Ask your child, “How big is your hurt today?” You can ask your child to stretch out his or her arms as wide as the hurt is big. Take a ribbon or tape measure to measure the length of the hurt. You can cut the ribbon and put it in an envelope or record the number on the tape measure.

Tell your child that in a few weeks you will measure his or her hurt again and that hurt gets smaller and smaller.

Reflect on the following with your child:

It is okay to feel hurt. We all feel hurt sometimes, even grown-ups.

The hurt goes away, just like when it’s cloudy and raining outside, it does not rain forever. The sunny, happy days come out and stay for awhile.

It is okay to cry when we feel hurt.

It helps to talk about our hurt to other people. Who can we tell when we feel hurt?

End the activity on a positive note. Have a snack, read a story, or play with your child.

(Steele & Malchiodi, 2008, pp. 274-75)

Rainstorms

Ages 5-11

Aim

To help children express their feelings and increase their ability to cope with their fears as well as diminish the stress and anxiety. This activity will help your child understand the process of grieving.

Materials

Paper, crayons, pencil

Method

Explain that when we lose someone, we may feel really sad. In time, our feelings of sadness may come more slowly and less often, yet at unexpected moments a sudden rainstorm of feelings may blow in and take us by surprise, even long after the trauma, death or loss occurred.

Using games such as Snakes and Ladders or Candy Land may help your child understand this process. For example, in these games you may think you are making progress, and then you land on a square that sends you backwards.

Remind your child that crying is normal and a good way to pour out our feelings.

Ask your child to draw a picture of a stormy day with big raindrops falling from a cloud. In some of the raindrops, have your child draw or write his or her feelings when crying. Highlight that positive things occur that strengthen us and give us encouragement. Explain that where there are clouds, there are also rainbows and where there are tears, there may also be laughter. Have your child draw a new picture of something hopeful that has happened since the loss. Explain that we can find things to be thankful for even when we are experiencing sadness, fear, anger, or loneliness.

(Steele & Malchiodi, 2008, pp. 275-76)

Journals

Ages 12 and up

Aim

To help children express their thoughts and feelings

Materials

Journal, pen or markers

Method

Invite your child to journal or draw about the following situations. Ask him or her to include what the child or animal does to feel better and/or what he or she would do to make the child or animal feel better.

A lonely, lost kitten that is wet, cold, and hungry

A doll or baby that cannot stop crying

A strong lion that is chased away from the family he grew up in

A magical bandage that could heal any hurt it was used for – how and where might your child use it?

An imaginary suitcase where a child could pack away all hurting memories or problems. What would be placed there?

Do not make comments or corrections on the drawings or to the writing. The memories or experiences expressed belong to your child.

(Steele & Malchiodi, 2008, p. 277)

Play Activities

Child Centered Play

Child-centered and driven play is very important for children in general, but especially to those children who have experienced long-term relational trauma. By providing children with material and objects for play, but then allowing them to direct this play, it gives the child a chance to be the director of their own experience and is empowering for a child that has had much of their power taken away through abuse. It is also important through this kind of play for the teacher/practitioner to validate that the child is capable and effectual in their environment. This bolsters self-esteem, self-awareness, and competence. (Arvidson et al., 2011)

Water play

Aim

To increase a sense of comfort, security, and happiness

Materials

A slow stream of water, a plastic bowl, and small plastic cups

Method

Encourage your child to play at the kitchen sink while standing on a chair.
(Steele & Malchiodi, 2008, p. 275)

Musical Play

Aim

To increase a sense of comfort, security, and happiness

Materials

Music, space to move around

Method

Have children run, hop, somersault, skip, and dance while interacting with them. Sing songs that are fun for the child. Singing communicates a sense of comfort, security, and happiness. (Steele & Malchiodi, 2008, p. 275)

SELF-REGULATION INTERVENTIONS

Working with the child to build emotional vocabulary, helping identify precipitating events, connections with past experiences, and ways of coping

Strategies to help child tolerate and sustain connection to internal states, emotions

Help child communicate about inner experience, identify safe emotional resources (Kinniburgh & Blaustein, 2005)

Feeling Recognition and Identification

Relaxation Fantasy Trip

Age: 7 years and up

Aim

To help children gain awareness about their stance in life and to give voice to their feelings

Materials

Paper, markers, oil pastels, or paint

Method

Read script:

“I’m going to tell you a little story now, and take you on a make-believe trip. See if you can follow along. Imagine what I tell you, and see how you feel while you’re doing it. Notice if you like going on this little trip, or if you don’t. When you come to parts you don’t like, you don’t have to go there. Just listen to my voice, follow along if you want to, and let’s just see what happens.

I want you to imagine you are walking through the woods. There are trees all around and there are birds singing. The sun is coming through the trees, and it’s shady. It feels very nice walking through these woods. There are little flowers, wild flowers, along the side. You’re walking along the path. There are rocks along the sides of the path and every now and then you see a small animal scurrying away, a little rabbit maybe. You’re walking along, and soon you notice the path is rising and you’re going uphill. Now you know you are climbing a mountain. When you reach the top of the mountain, you sit on a large rock to rest. You look around. The sun is shining; birds are flying around. Across the way, with a valley in between, is another mountain. You can

see that on the mountain there is a cave, and you wish you could be on that mountain. You notice that the birds are flying over there easily, and you wish you were a bird. Suddenly, because this is a fantasy and anything can happen, you realize that you have turned into a bird! You test your wings, and sure enough you can fly. So you take off and easily fly to the other side. (Pause to give time for the flying).

“On the other side you land on a rock. You climb around the rocks looking for an entrance to the cave. You enter the cave. When you are inside there is plenty of room to stand up. You walk around examining the walls of the cave. Look around at your cave! Are you surprised? Take a good look at it. Who is there? Are there people there? Are there animals? Or is no one there? How do you feel in this place? Notice how you feel. Look around, walk around your safe cave.” (Pause).

“When you are ready you will open your eyes and find yourself back in this room. When you open your eyes, I would like you to get some paper and markers, and draw your place. Draw your cave as best you can or you can draw your feelings about the place using colors, shapes, and lines. Decide whether you will put yourself in this place and where and how – as a shape or color or symbol. I don’t have to know what your place is all about by looking at your picture; you will be able to explain it to me. You can begin whenever you feel ready.”

You may ask them to write a sentence on the picture which often sums up where they are in their lives.

(adapted from Oaklander, 1988, pp. 3-5)

Story Telling

Aim

To help children explore their thoughts and feelings

Materials

Paper, tissue paper
Paint, crayons, markers
Glitter, ribbon, etc.

Method

This activity can be done individually or in groups.

Ask the children to tell the story of their illness/problem as a fantasy or fairy tale. Invite them to make up characters and outcomes and embellish their story in any way they desire. Then they can present their story artistically in any medium they choose. Groups may decide to create a story together.

This activity can carry over to many sessions if you choose and may become quite elaborate. Monitor the child’s level of distress or anxiety and adjust the activity accordingly.

The initial session can be used to focus on the creation of the story including characters, setting, and plot. A journal may be used to illustrate the major ideas. The following sessions can focus on the creation of the artwork or it may also be presented as a drama using hand puppets.

If the child wants to keep going with the themes, let it play out until he or she feels the story has been completely revealed.

You may need to focus on one aspect of the story if you don't have many sessions. It might also be helpful to read a fairy tale to get started. In a group setting it is important that each child's voice is heard, whether they contribute to the creation of the story or are more involved in the artwork.

(Darley & Heath, 2008, p. 185)

Wish or Worry Doll

All ages

Aim

To help children identify and regulate their emotions

Materials

Tongue depressors, clothes pins, or popsicle sticks

Coloured pipe cleaners cut in half

Fabric which is colourful and varied, approx 2" x 2" squares

Small strips of coloured paper

Clay or model magic

Pens, scissors, glue sticks

Feathers, glitter, ribbon, sequins, beads, googly eyes, and anything that can be glued onto the doll

Method

This activity can be done individually or in a group. The dolls can be made in 20 minutes and debriefed in 10 minutes.

Ask the children to choose one popsicle stick (clothes pin or tongue depressor), one pipe cleaner, one piece of fabric, and one strip of paper.

They can write a wish or worry on the strip of paper. It can be a big or little worry and it is often good to choose something they have very little control over.

Take the paper with the words on the inside and wrap the paper tightly around the stick. Take the fabric and wrap it tightly around the paper. Take the pipe cleaner and wrap it tight around the fabric, twisting once, and leaving the ends out. Now you have made the doll (the pipe cleaner is the arms). Then bring out the glitter and fun stuff and ask them to decorate their doll and make it their own.

The children can take their doll home (stick it on a piece of clay or play dough). Whenever they think about the worry or wish they can ask their doll to hold it for them. For young children, introduce the doll as a helper who will hold the worries so that they have to worry less. You may want to make another doll that is a solution to the worry. For example, they can make a wild dancer doll because it represents a good way to release stress or worry. (Darley & Heath, 2008)

Mood Drawing

Aim

To help children recognize that moods are constantly changing throughout the day

Materials

Paper, scissors, glue, markers
Magazines, little printed cut-outs, ribbon, glitter, etc.

Method

Using art material, ask children to express how they would look if they were a colour, a season, an animal, or a time of day.

Explain that moods are constantly changing (the same as seasons or the time of day). (Darley & Heath, 2008, p. 158)

Happy, Sad, Angry

Aim

This activity encourages children to discuss their feelings and gives permission for children to have feelings such as anger, sadness, and worry

Materials

Markers and paper

Method

Draw three different faces labelled “Happy, Sad, Angry” fairly small and evenly spaced across the page to allow room for writing. Ask children to write different things that make them feel this way. Start the activity with the positive emotion and discuss each example given. After debriefing the negative emotions bring the child back to the positive feeling to end on a happy note.

Other feelings you may want to focus on for children who are anxious include worry, confusion, or embarrassment. Limit the activity to four emotions and have at least one positive emotion. (Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 23-24)

Facemask

Ages: 3-8

Aim

To help children realize people cover up their feelings. This activity may be useful for children who are bullied.

Materials

Paper and markers

Method

Ask the child to draw a face which is happy one way up but sad or scared the other. Make sure the frown looks like a smile the other way up. Write “sometimes when I smile I am really feeling sad inside” around the outside of the face.

Discuss with the child about covering up feelings. Share appropriate examples of when someone has pretended to be happy when they were really sad. Brainstorm ideas about why people may cover up their true feelings.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 27-28)

Feelwheel

Age: 7 years and up

Aim

To help children recognize their feelings about different situations and lead to a discussion about how feelings affect actions

Materials

Markers, construction paper, scissors, split pin brass fastener

Method

Brainstorm a wide range of emotions with the child.

Draw a large circle on the paper and divide it into several pie sections. Limit the number of sections for younger children. Explain to the child how each radius represents one spoke of a wheel. Label each section with a different emotion. Possible feeling words include: excited, scared, embarrassed, proud, confused, happy, angry, sad, disappointed, and guilty.

Cut a piece approximately one-inch wide out of construction paper to make an arrow. Make sure it is wide enough for the fastener and about two-thirds the radius of the circle. Cut the arrow out and attach it to the center with a fastener.

Ask the child to share situations when he or she has felt these emotions or witnessed them in someone else. The child may want to write down examples or draw pictures to describe each feeling. The wheel can be used without an arrow, just point to the feelings instead.

Variation

Feelings Pie – The Feelwheel can be drawn as a feelings pie, complete with pie crust. Follow the same discussion guidelines used for the Feelwheel.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 31-32)

A Pocketful of Feelings

Ages: 7 years and up

Aim

To help children recognize and talk about their feelings, linking them to situations in their lives

Materials

Two pieces of construction paper, scissors, markers, glue, and a large envelope

Method

Make a large paper pocket using one of the sheets of paper and the envelope. You may want to shape the top of the envelope and draw on stitching to make it more pocket-like. Glue the pocket onto the paper and write the child's name as the title. Take the other piece of paper and make a list of a wide range of feelings. Keep the writing fairly small so that each feeling can be cut out to drop in the pocket.

Take turns pulling out a feeling and talk about when the feelings arise. For example, "When do you feel angry?" This can help the child discuss feelings about specific incidents and lead to a better understanding of those feelings and possibly how other people may feel.

The pocket may also be used to discuss feelings of emptiness if appropriate.

Use discretion when sharing personal examples with the child.

Variations

Boxful of Feelings – You may want to make or decorate boxes instead of envelopes.

Acting Out Feelings – The feeling words may be used for children to role-play different situations where the feelings arise.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 34-35)

Drawing Opposites

Aim

To help children to identify uncomfortable and comfortable feelings and understand that feelings can change

Materials

Paper, markers, pencil crayons

Method

Ask children to make two drawings on two separate sheets of paper. One drawing depicts a worry, fear, or whatever prevents them from feeling good; the other shows the opposite – something that brings feelings of comfort, hope, happiness, safety, or ease.

Often children will do this naturally. It doesn't matter which drawing they do first.

When finished, children can share sensations they feel when they look at both drawings. Then they can cover their "worry" drawing with its opposite and notice how their sensations and feelings change.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 393-94)

The Story of Dory

Aim

To help children address emotions through listening and storytelling

Method

“Sit back, relax, and I'll tell you a story.
 The hero, my friend, is a girl named Dory.
 She plays first base on her Little League team,
 To have a new bike was her favourite dream.
 On her last birthday, this girl's dream came true.
 She got a new bike that was bright shiny blue.
 She jumped on the bike and rode down the block,
 Faster and faster, then the bike hit a rock.
 She felt the wheels skid, and she flew off the seat,
 And then she landed real hard on the street.
 She hit the pavement with a big thud,
 Then she saw that her knees were covered with blood.
 She started to cry, but the sound wouldn't come,
 She couldn't breathe, and her body went numb.

When she noticed the blood on her knees,
 Like Oscar Opossum, she started to freeze.
 Later that day, Dory felt bad.
 She also felt sad, and then very mad.
 On her new bike things had happened so fast
 That she could do nothing at all, except crash.
 It wasn't her fault, but she took the blame,
 When she thought of her bike, Dory felt shame.
 If something like this ever happens to you,
 Can you tell mom and dad what you might do?"

Suggestion: Take time to discuss with the child how he or she might deal with a similar situation. Explain the importance of letting the sensations and feelings move freely through the body.

"After you shake, you can jump, you can run,
 You can hide like a rabbit or play in the sun.
 You can kick, you can cry, you can laugh, you can feel,
 You can dance, you can sing, or do a cartwheel!"
 (Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 170-173)

Having an Awesome Attitude

Aim

To help children understand the link between their thoughts and feelings

Materials

Paper, pencils, markers

Method

Ask the child to draw or describe a recent situation in which he or she experienced anxiety (worry). Have the child tell what he or she was thinking that caused the anxiety. What could have he or she thought to make the experience a peaceful one instead?

Next, ask the child to draw or describe a recent situation in which he or she felt peaceful. What was the child thinking that caused him or her to feel peaceful? What could have he or she thought to make the experience an anxious one instead?

Discuss the power of attitude – link thoughts and feelings.

(Schab, 2008, p. 25)

Grief and Loss

Best Memory Picture

Age: 3 years and up

Aim

To help children work through feelings of grief using artwork

Materials

Paper

Pencils, crayons, markers, paint, or pictures

Glue, tape

Method

Ask the child to think of a favourite memory of the person or pet who has died. Discuss how the child could create this memory pictorially.

Possible questions to ask during the task or to debrief afterwards: Why is it their favourite memory? What else does it make them think about? What will they do with the picture? What would the person or pet think of the picture? What will other people think of the picture (does it matter)?

Discuss any other topics that may arise from the picture, such as what happens when someone dies. Reinforce that although the person has died, the memories have not gone.

Variation

Many Memories – This can be used for a collection of memories instead of just one. (Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 107-08)

I Remember Book

Age: 3 years and up

Aim

To help children deal with grief by working on the memory of times and events associated with the person or pet who died

Materials

Exercise book, journal, or folder with pages

Markers, materials to decorate

Pictures or keepsakes

Method

Ask the child if he or she would like to make a book about the person or pet who has died. On a loose sheet of paper, write down a list of memories the child has of the deceased. They don't have to be all good memories, but most often children will focus on these.

The child can write a description of the person including: favourite foods, sports teams, colour and so on. The child may want to include what they had in common or didn't have in common with the person. Discuss what order all the facts and memories should go in – chronologically, by topic, etc. Encourage creativity and allow the child to decide on the format and content.

Once the book is completed, reinforce that although the person or pet has died, the memories can be kept alive.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, p. 109)

Forever Part of Me

Age: 8 years and up

Aim

To help grieving children realize that the person who has died has left behind influences which have changed the child's life and will remain

Materials

Large sheet of paper, markers

Method

Draw a picture or write the name of the person who has died in the top left corner of the paper. Surround the name with things that describe the person (favourite things, strengths, personal qualities, etc). Then ask the child what aspects of the person (from those written down) that the child has enjoyed, and circle or color in those items. Discuss each as you go along.

Next, ask the child to draw a picture or write his or her own name in the bottom right corner of the page. Draw lines or arrows from the chosen aspects of the person who died to the drawing of the child. The child may want to make it look like a large bunch of balloons he or she is holding or a series of strings that go to his or her heart.

Discuss how that person influenced a lot of people and these are the things that influenced the child. These influences will last for the child's life, and are therefore, forever a part of the child. (Hobday & Ollier, 1999, p. 113)

Grief Recovery

Aim

This activity helps children make the completions that are a prelude to letting go

Method

Part A

1. Make a timeline from the time you first met that person or pet until their death.
2. Write several happy memories that stand out as highlights of your relationship above the line in chronological order.
3. Add a few things above the line that you appreciated the most and wish you had expressed while your loved one was still alive.
4. Write several things that your loved one did that upset you below the line.
5. Add several regrets below the line for things you did that upset your loved one.

Part B

List the memories you wrote under the following headings:

Things I miss about my loved one

Thing that hurt me that I'd like to forgive now

Thing I feel guilty about that I'd like to be forgiven for

Thing that I appreciated and never said aloud

(Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 230-32)

The Grief Rap

Older children and adolescents

Aim

To help children identify and express their emotions, recall memories of the deceased, and learn effective coping strategies

Materials

A variety of rhythm instruments or music player

Client preferred live or recorded music

Grief worksheets, pencils

Large piece of paper or dry-erase board and markers

Method

This activity may be done individually or in groups.

Play client-preferred music either live or recorded. Distribute pencils and a prepared worksheet for children to complete that includes the following questions:

What is something your loved one taught you for which you are grateful?

Where were you when you found out your loved one died?

How did you feel when you first found out about the death?
 How did you deal with or express that feeling?
 When you think of your loved one now, how do you feel?
 What is one of the best memories you have of your loved one?

Debrief with the children. Only ask them to share the responses that they feel comfortable with. Following the discussion, the responses on the worksheet will be used to write a rap. Using a drum, play a basic rhythm and ask the children to provide the first line of the rap by choosing one of the responses on their worksheet.

Write the rap on a large piece of paper or dry-erase board. At the end of the session, write the rap on a smaller piece of paper that can be photocopied and given to each child.

For a closing exercise, ask each child to identify at least one person they trust to share their grief emotions until the next session.

(Hillard, 2008, pp. 73-75)

Fear and Anxiety

Things That Can Scare You

Aim

To explore common events that can cause fear or worry in children in a safe environment

Method

This rhyme lists common events that can significantly frighten children. It is important to monitor the child's reaction and pause if you notice agitation, distracting behaviour, or silent withdrawal. Take time to discuss feelings, to draw pictures, to play, and re-establish safety.

“What is it like when things happen so quick
 That there's no time to run, to hide or to kick?
 And you have to tense up and freeze just like ice –
 Maybe that's happened to you once or twice.
 What kind of things can make you feel frozen?
 Here's a list of at least a half dozen:

1. Did you ever get lost at the mall, when you were little, lonely, and small?
2. Maybe you went for a car ride and out of the blue, another car crashed right into you
3. Could be you were sick then along came a nurse, when you saw the needle it made you feel worse
4. Maybe one day your were playing around, when a big earthquake came and shook up the ground

5. Or during recess, the game was a blast, then the school bully shook his fist as he passed
6. They stitched up your knee so you'd be good as new, it hurt a lot, and the needle scared you"

(Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 153-54)

Talking It Out

Aim

To help children identify ways to manage feelings of anxiety or worry

Materials

Magazine pictures, paper, markers

Method

Collect pictures that show something being filled (i.e., blowing up a balloon, putting air in a tire, eating ice cream, filling a cup of soda). Ask the child to describe what will happen in each case if the item is filled beyond its capacity.

Ask the child to draw or answer the following questions:

What are some things that might happen when a person becomes too full of anxiety (worry)?

What are some things that might happen to you when you do not let out your anxious feelings?

What are some ways you can let out your anxious feelings?

How do you feel talking about your anxiety with other people?

Who do you feel comfortable talking to about your anxiety?

(Schab, 2008, pp. 77-79)

Stressful Events and Situations

Aim

To help children identify stressful life events that may be occurring

Materials

Paper, pencils

Method

Create a list of stressful events that occur throughout life. Ask the child to check off all that affect him or her and then discuss.

Examples:

Moving or changing schools

Having difficulty in school with academics

Death of a close friend

Death of a family member
 Change in the family (new baby, new siblings)
 Family crisis
 Family financial problems
 Substance abuse by family members
 Physical and emotional changes of puberty
 Domestic violence
 Living in a dangerous neighbourhood
 Living in a single parent household
 Parental separation or divorce
 Peer pressure
 Personal health problems
 Rejection by family members, friends, peers
 Change in sleeping habits (more, less, time of day)
 Bullying
 Excessive discipline by parents
 In trouble with the law
 Dealing with pregnancy
 Finding a job
 (Mannix, 1992, a)

Coping with Stress

Aim

To help children identify techniques to reduce their stress

Materials

Paper, markers

Method

Brainstorm various ways to manage stressful situations. Ask children what has worked for them in the past. Have them identify the three most effective coping strategies that they can use in stressful situations.

Examples:

Deep breathing

Positive practice (Imagery)

Self talk

Assertiveness

Thought stopping

Learn new skills

Exercise

(Mannix, 1992, a, pp. 432-33)

What is Stress?

Aim

To help children identify and understand stress

Materials

Paper, markers
Magazines (optional)

Method

Explain that stress is a feeling of tenseness and pressure cause by something you are worried about. Provide examples. Ask the children to draw a picture or share a situation that caused them to feel stress. Discuss how they handled the feeling. Where did they feel it in their bodies?

Variations

Picture of Stress – Have children look through magazines to find pictures of facial expressions that indicate stress.

Stress Synonyms – Make a poster with the word STRESS written or drawn in large letters. Have children contribute synonyms for stress and write the words on the poster (i.e. pain, knots in stomach, scared, worry, sweaty, tense, etc.).

(Mannix, 1992, b)

Things to Try

Aim

To help children identify coping strategies to use in a stressful situation

Materials

Paper, markers

Method

Explain that stress is a part of life, but people usually find ways to deal with difficult times in healthy ways.

Discuss or draw different ways to manage stressful situations. Some examples include:

Go for a walk – leave the stressful situation

Do something active. Play basketball or go for a bike ride

Tense and relax. Make your whole body tense up, and then relax it

Talk to a friend

Talk to an adult who can help you – parent, teacher, counsellor, a friend's parent

Prepare – plan ahead

Breathe and think. Take a few minutes to calm down and then make a plan
(Mannix, 1992, b, pp. 117-18)

Peace Is Already Within You

Aim

To help children explore feelings of anxiety

Materials

Paper, pencil crayons, markers

Method

Ask the child to draw a series of floating clouds, and then shade them in using a pale-blue pencil crayon or another light color. The clouds represent the child's natural state of peace. Take a few minutes to sit quietly, breathe slowly, look at those peaceful clouds, and feel that deep relaxation within.

Next, using a darker color or marker, cover up the clouds by writing the names of people, situations, or things that make up the anxiety or worry in their lives. Ask them to write as many stressful things that they can think of. Discuss. Ask them to rate their level of anxiety. Where do they feel it in their bodies? End the activity with deep breathing, focus on the peace within the child.

(Schab, 2008, p. 9)

Worry Box

Aim

To help children identify and reduce feelings of worry or anxiety

Materials

Small box

Construction paper, paper, ruler

Scissors, glue, scotch tape, pens, pencils, markers

Magazines, glitter, ribbon, string, elastics etc

Method

Either make a box out of construction paper or have the children decorate a pre-made box.

Ask the children to write down all their worries and tensions on little slips of paper. These can be put in the box. Some children may want to seal the box with ribbon or string.

Variations

In subsequent sessions, open the box at random and pull out one slip of paper and express the worry through art materials or drama.

Create several boxes: one to hold the good things, one to hold the difficult things, and an empty box for new things to come into life

A group can make one large box and decorate it. Each individual can read their stack of worries aloud to the group if they wish. Group members put their worries in the box, the idea being that the entire group cares for all its members and together they will hold all of the worries for the individuals.

This activity can be adapted to many different situations.

(Darley & Heath, 2008, p. 192)

Anger**What Makes Me Angry****All Ages****Aim**

To help children identify triggers for their anger

Materials

Paper, markers, crayons

Method

Have the children draw or make a list of the people and events that “make” them angry. Debrief when they have completed the activity. Probe for reasons that these particular events or people make them angry. Be sure to validate the children’s feeling of anger.

(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, p. 78)

Where Does My Anger Come From?**All Ages****Aim**

To help children identify feelings in their bodies

Materials

Blank template of the human body or drawings of gingerbread type figures

Markers

Method

Discuss body cues and how these cues let us know where we are feeling angry. Ask children to identify places in their bodies that they first begin to feel tension and anger. Explain that these are important cues letting us know that we need to find ways to express our anger without hurting ourselves or others. Ask the children to label or color in the places on the diagram that corresponds to where they feel their anger.

Brainstorm different ways to calm down when feeling angry. Some different strategies may include: self-talk, counting to ten, deep breathing, or exercise.

(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, p. 79)

My Angry Mask

Ages: 5-12

Aim

To help children understand and express their emotions

Materials

Paper plates, markers, art supplies

Method

Talk about how we wear masks at Halloween to disguise ourselves and that people also wear masks to hide how they feel. Provide examples. Invite the children to make an angry mask using the art supplies.

Once the masks are completed, have the children put them on, and talk about what other kinds of feelings are hiding underneath the mask.

(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, p. 79)

Aggression

Ages: 7-12

Aim

To help children understand the difference between aggression and anger

Materials

Dry erase board or flip chart, puppets

Method

Write the words “anger” and “aggression” on the board or paper. Differentiate aggression from anger through the use of puppets or role playing. Discuss the consequences of aggression. Questions you may want to ask: Why do people behave aggressively? What are the results of behaving aggressively? Does aggression really help you get what you want? Explore other ways to deal with anger.
(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, pp. 79-80)

Angry Picture

Ages: 5-12

Aim

To help children differentiate anger from aggression

Materials

Magazines, newspaper
Large butcher paper for mural, glue, scissors, markers

Method

Divide the mural into two sections, one labelled “Angry” and the other labelled “Aggressive.” You can use pre-cut magazine or newspaper pictures of people who look angry and people who are shown acting aggressively or have children cut out their own. Ask the children to glue the pictures into the correct columns. Discuss the differences in the pictures. Ask the children which pictures make them feel more comfortable. Which person looks more in control? You can also ask each child to pick a picture and to make a cartoon or tell a story about what happens next in the sequence. Be sure to discuss the consequences of aggression with the children.
(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, p. 80)

Anger Game

Ages: 6-12

Aim

To help children identify and manage their anger

Materials

Blank game board (any home-made version will do), dice, tokens, markers
Index cards, markers

Method

Possible questions for the anger game:

How can you let out your anger without hurting someone else?

In this group, who gets the angriest? Why do you think they get so angry?

A time when I stopped myself from hurting someone was when... I did it by...

A time that I didn't stop myself from hurting someone was

What do angry feelings and bad touching have to do with each other?

A friend borrows one of your favourite toys and breaks it. What can you say to yourself to keep from losing your cool?

What are the warning signs in your body that make you aware that you are getting angrier and angrier?

What makes a person become a bully?

Without using words, show how you feel when you get angry.

The angriest that I have ever gotten is when...

I feel angry toward my mother/father when...

How do your parents act when they get mad?

Where did you first learn how to act when you're angry?

Your anger is a way of protecting your fear inside. Is there another way of protecting yourself besides being angry all the time?

Have the children read the game cards and answer the questions on the cards. The child gets a token if he or she attempts to answer the question.

(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, pp. 80-81)

My Angry Animal Workbook

Ages: 5-8

Aim

To help children understand and learn to control their anger

Materials

Workbook

Markers

Method

Design an angry animal workbook. You may want to include the following:

When I get angry I act like a ... (name an animal)

Here is a picture of the animal that I am most like when I'm angry

When my angry... (name of your animal) comes out, I act like this (Draw a picture of when you are acting angry)

The first time my... (name of your animal) came out, I was... years old (Draw or write what happened).

Here is a picture of my angry animal when he/she was the angriest he/she has ever been.

Write or draw what made your angry animal (you) so angry.

These are things I could say to my angry animal to calm it down (make a list).

These are things that I could do to make my angry... (name of your animal) stop acting badly (make a list).

Sometimes my... (name of your animal) protects me from certain feelings (list the feelings)

He/she does this by... (draw a picture or write about how your animal protects you)

Is there another way to let your feelings out without having to use your angry animal so much?

Sometimes my angry animal gets me into trouble. When does this happen? Here is a picture of how that happens.

I know that my angry animal is just a part of me. Here is a picture of me taking charge of my angry animal.

The workbook should be used in small segments with discussion. If the child cannot think of an animal or monster some other image can be used. By using animals as imagery, young children can obtain a concrete picture of their anger so they can learn to control it.

(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, pp. 90-100)

My Special Room

Ages: 7-12

Aim

Guided imagery to help children gain a sense of control

Materials

Paper, markers, pencil crayons

Method

Begin the activity with basic muscle relaxation or deep breathing techniques. Ask the children to imagine that they are in a special room just for them.

Script

“In your very special room are your favourite stuffed animals and other favourite things. You can colour your room in any one of your favourite colours. Feel the thick soft carpet. Look at the wall and see your favourite posters of a special hero, or music group, etc. Put anything you want in your special room to make it feel safe and secure. Anytime you feel angry and out of control, you can come into your safe and special room to gain control of yourself. Your special room can handle all of your angry or out of control feelings. Think of somebody or something you’re really angry about. Imagine that you’re in your special room decorated the way you like, and that you’re getting control of your anger. Feel yourself calming down and relaxing. You feel better now and you are ready to leave your room, knowing that anytime you feel out of control, you

can come back into this room and it will help you get control of your anger. You can leave all of your angry thoughts back in the room.”

You can have the children draw a picture of their special room. You may ask them to share what angry thoughts or feelings they had while they were in their room. It is important for children to understand that they can handle these intense feelings without losing control.

The room is a metaphor for containment. Other feelings such as fear, worry, or sadness may be introduced using the imagery.

(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, p. 85)

Feeling Expression

Exploding Red Light, Green Light

Aim

To help children learn the concept of freezing and self-control. This game teaches children the idea of expressing emotion through sound and movement.

Method

The game is played similarly to the game red light, green light. Players attempt to reach the leader, who calls out “green light” for players to begin moving and “red light” when they must stop. When the leader catches a child moving after red light has been called, the child must return to the starting line. The child is asked to “explode” while returning to the line. Explosions may include yelling, “Boom! Kapow! Crash!” letting out noises of frustration, or challenging the leader. Explosions directed towards the leader gives the children permission and the context to express anger or resistance in a contained activity.

(Haen, 2008, p. 233)

Pet Owners

Aim

To help children work through past trauma by representing it metaphorically in role plays

Method

Ask children to pretend to be pet owners in a veterinary clinic. Each child is asked to create an imaginary pet that is sick and to bring the pet to the doctor’s office. The children talk to the doctor about the pet’s physical sickness as well as its worries or feelings.

As the doctor, ask the children to identify what the pet needs to feel better, and together try to provide the pet with what it needs to heal.

The quality of the interaction between each child and pet is often tied to the quality of caregiving the child has in his or her own life. Often, they give voice to their own symptoms and worries as they describe their pet’s sickness. (Haen, 2008, pp. 239-40)

Talk Show / TV Interview

Aim

To help children work through traumatic experiences through the safety of metaphor and character. This activity helps children reclaim their voices and express their emotions.

Method

Ask children to role play a talk show or television interview on the topic of kid's fears (or a similar topic that provides enough distance from the direct experience).

As the facilitator, be sure to pause the scene if it becomes too intense. Engage children in suggesting new directions or reversing roles.

(Haen, 2008, p. 240)

Resources for Coping

Aim

To help children identify resources used for coping and express their feelings and sensations

Materials

Large paper, paper

Markers

Method

This activity can be done in the classroom, small groups, or individually.

1. Brainstorm different resources the children use that help them to cope. Write the ideas on a large chart for everyone to see. Next, instruct the children to make their own list of "people, pets, places, or things" that help them cope. When finished, invite them to draw a picture of something from their coping list.
2. Examples may include: my dog, cat, grandma, poems, making things, swimming, reading, baking cookies etc.
3. After the children have finished drawing their pictures, have them look over the resource they chose and ask how it makes them feel to look at the picture. Next, have them share the most recent time they were with the person or did the activity they selected and notice how it makes them feel inside. Explore these emotions and sensations. As they close their eyes, have children describe and locate these feelings.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 389-90)

Inside / Outside Masks

Aim

To help children express emotions and identify coping strategies. To help them understand the use of outward defenses as well as the vulnerable feelings inside.

Materials

Masks
 Paint, paint brushes, markers
 Glue, scissors
 Magazines, glitter, feathers, etc.

Method

Explain symbolism, disguise, or becoming a new character with children.
 Ask children to create masks that represent habitual ways they hide feelings or protect themselves. On the inside of the masks, use paint to represent the feelings they usually hide from others.
 Debrief the importance of having defenses, as well as honouring, acknowledging, and sharing their feelings in a safe environment.
 (Loumeau-May, 2008, p. 93)

Tissue Paper Collage

Aim

To help children express their feelings. This activity may be useful for children who are guarded, apprehensive, or superficial in their engagement.

Materials

Paper, variety of colors of tissue paper
 Glue
 Music player

Method

Play ambiguous music in the background.
 Ask children to create a tissue paper collage being as creative as they like. Encourage them to rip different sizes and shapes of tissue paper to glue onto a large sheet of paper. The children may choose to make different designs or a concrete picture.
 Debrief with the children. You can ask questions about their process or have them explain their finished collage.
 (Loumeau-May, 2008, p. 93)

Colours, Curves, Lines, and Shapes

Age: older children and adolescents

Aim

To help children express their feelings

Materials

Paper, markers, oil pastels, or paint

Small object

Method

Ask the child or youth to draw their feelings and responses in colours, curves, lines and shapes. Encourage them to stay away from drawing real things and go into the expression of feeling. Have them look at an object for 5 minutes and then draw the feelings it aroused only in colours, lines, and shapes. Some objects to use may include: a leaf, a plant, a shell, a kitchen utensil, or a toy. You may also have them listen to a piece of music.

Close your eyes and be aware of how you feel, how your body feels. Your moods change, your bodily feelings change. See how it is for you now and then express this on paper.

Sometimes people need training to help them loosen up, to trust their own feelings, and the expression of those feelings. You may ask them to draw a picture of how they feel every day at a certain time that you agree on and have them bring the drawings to their next session to look at together. Be sure to practice the exercise with them the first time.

(Oaklander, 1988)

See Your World

Aim

To help children express emotions and what is important in their life

Materials

Paper, markers, oil pastels, or paint

Method

Ask children to create their world on paper just using shapes, lines, curves, colours – but nothing real.

Close your eyes and go into your space. See your world – what is it like for you? How would you show your world on paper just using curves and lines and shapes? Think about the colours in your world. Will you use dark colours, light colours? How much space would each thing take on your paper? Where will you put yourself in the picture? (Oaklander, 1988, p. 21)

Family Drawing

Aim

To help children express their feelings

Materials

Paper, pencil crayons or markers

Method

Ask children to draw their families as symbols or animals. You may need to provide a couple of examples to help them get started. Perhaps someone reminds them of a butterfly because they flit around a lot or maybe someone reminds them of a circle because they are always around.

“Close your eyes and go into your space. Now think of each member of your family. If you were to draw them on a piece of paper as something they remind you of, rather than real people, what would that be? Start with the one you think of first. If you get stuck, close your eyes and go back into your space. You can use blobs of colour, shapes, objects, and whatever else you can come up with.”

After the picture is completed ask the child to provide a general description. You may want to ask them to make one statement about each person in the picture or have each person say something to the child. You may also ask the child to conduct a dialogue between any two symbols.

Talking through pictures is a lot safer and easier for children.

This same exercise may be repeated over time with new feelings and material expressed each time. You may want to go back and look at the old pictures and talk to the child about what is still true and what has changed for them.

You may also ask children to draw their ideal family in symbols.

(Oaklander, 1988, pp. 26-27)

Free Drawing

Aim

To help children release their emotions, secrets, or desires

Materials

Paper, markers, pencil crayons, oil pastels, or paint

Method

Invite children to draw a picture of whatever they like. Be sure to debrief once the picture is completed.

(Oaklander, 1988)

The Rosebush

Aim

Using fantasy to help children express their feelings and share what is important to them

Materials

Paper, pencil crayons, markers, oil pastels, or paint

Method

Ask children to close their eyes, go into their space and imagine they are rosebushes. You may need to do a lot of prompting and provide a lot of suggestions to help children open themselves up to be creative.

What kind of rosebush are you? Are you small? Are you large? Are you round? Are you tall? Do you have flowers? If so, what kind? What colour are your flowers? Do you have many or just a few? Are you in full bloom or do you only have buds? Do you have leaves? What kind? What are your stems and branches like? What are your roots like? Or maybe you don't have any. If you do, are they long and straight? Are they twisted? Are they deep? Do you have any thorns?

Where are you? In a yard? In a park? In the desert? In the city? In the country? In the middle of the ocean? Are you in a pot or growing in the ground or through cement, or even inside somewhere? What's around you? Are there other flowers or are you alone? Are there trees? Animals? People? Birds? Do you look like a rosebush or something else? Is there anything around you, like a fence? If so, what is it like? Or are you in an open place? What is it like to be a rosebush? How do you survive? Does someone take care of you? What is the weather like for you right now?

Then ask the children to open their eyes when they are ready and draw their rosebushes. You may want to let them know they don't have to worry about the drawing because they will be able to explain it.

You can write the description down. Ask the child to describe the rosebush in present tense as if the child was the rosebush. After the description, go back and read each statement, asking the child if what he or she said as a rosebush fits in any way with their own life. Sometimes children easily identify with the rosebush.

(Oaklander, 1988, pp. 32-33)

Walk like a Turtle, Run like a Bear

Aim

To help children practice modulating different levels of affect.

Materials

A large space to move around

Method

1. Have children line up at one end of the room with enough space between them to move around comfortably and safely.
2. Ask the children to travel to the other side of the room emulating an animal that you call out.
3. Call out an animal name for the children to act as (e.g. bear, tiger, snail, mouse)
4. When the children have all made it to the far side of the room, call out another animal name, trying to choose one that has an opposite type of movement
5. The idea in the animal selection is that you go between animals that run, are big, and are loud to animals that move slowly, are quiet and are small.

The idea behind this activity is to get children to practice modulating different levels of affect as they emulate each animal. By switching between a 'high affect' (e.g. bear) and 'low affect' (e.g. turtle) animal, the children are in essence controlling their own current level of arousal.

(Arvidson et al., 2011)

Expressing Relief

All ages

Aim

To help children express their feelings of relief from pain, tension, or anxiety

Materials

Large piece of paper or poster board, scissors, glue stick
Magazines, collage pictures

Method

Fold the paper in half. On one side have the children illustrate their pain, tension, or anxiety. On the other side illustrate the feeling of relief from the pain, tension, or anxiety.

This activity may lead to discussion and new insight about what might help to achieve relief.

(Darley & Heath, 2008, p. 136)

Slow Mo

Aim

To allow safe recognition and expression of aggressive or hyper-aroused behaviours

Materials

No materials required

Method

This intervention involves getting children to act out their aggressive or hyper-aroused behaviour in an exaggeratedly slow manner. When a child is having difficulty controlling their aggressive actions, the teacher or practitioner asks the child to act out that feeling and state what is contributing to this state very slowly using deliberately drawn out language and actions (the practitioner can model this so it is clear to the child). The child then is able to express how they are feeling, but also get to practice controlling their own affect.

When the child is asked to draw out his/her aggressive feelings, it inherently works against the ramping up of volatile affect. By slowing the aggressive process we are effectively asking the child to learn how to monitor and modulate their level of arousal. After learning the technique they themselves can monitor when they might need to use Slow-Mo and then be able to have control over their aggressive compulsions.

(James, 1994)

Scribble Wars

Aim

To channel aggressive actions into a neutral activity

Materials

Paper and drawing tools

Method

When children are having a disagreement and affect is high, introduce the idea of having a 'scribble war' together.

1. Provide each child with a pencil/pencil crayon/crayon and a piece of paper
2. Set a timer for one minute (or a time otherwise determined to be appropriate)
3. Say "go" and start the timer
4. The children should try to 'outscribble' one another in this time

This works within the high affect that children often display when getting upset. By channelling that energy into a neutral activity like scribbling, they have a venue to act out their high affect in a safe and often fun manner. This can allow them to expend energy in a non-violent or threatening way.

(James, 1994)

Exploding Red Light Green Light

Aim

To allow safe recognition and expression of aggressive or hyper-aroused behaviours

Materials

A large space

Method

1. Organize children as though playing traditional Red Light Green Light, where the children attempt to be the first one to reach the leader. The leader calls out “green light” to let the players know they can move forward and “red light” when they must stop. If a leader catches a player moving after “red light” has been called, that child must start back at the beginning.
2. In this version, while returning to the starting line, the child is asked to explode, through verbal expressions and loud noises.

This activity helps children return to their bodies, while integrating kinesthetic experience with verbal learning. It can be used to discuss self-control or freezing, as well as expressing emotions safely.

(Haen, 2008)

Body Sensations and Self-Awareness

Sensation Body Maps

Aim

To help children identify and describe their emotions and sensations

Materials

Butcher paper, markers

Method

Preschool – 3rd grade

Have the child lie down on butcher paper while someone traces the entire body with a marker. Help the child to make a coding key to describe sensations and emotions that they feel, using a variety of colours and/or markings. Children are instructed to colour and mark different places on their body map where they feel different sensations and emotions using the key.

Examples of coding keys:

Blue = sad

Orange squiggly lines = nervous

Pink polka dots = happy

Black = numb

Purple curvy lines = energetic

Red = hot and mad

Brown = tight

For 3rd graders and older

Have each child make a “gingerbread” person shape on a large sheet of paper. Ask them to make their own coding key on the bottom of the paper. Have them fill in their body map to indicate the location of any sensations and emotions they are feeling in the moment. Be sure to encourage the expression of both comfortable and uncomfortable feelings.

Variation

A simple version of this for very young, shy, or learning-disabled children is to have them choose two colours for their coding key: one colour for comfortable (feelings they like) and the other for uncomfortable feelings (ones they don't like). The outline of the gingerbread person can be pre-made by an adult.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 392-93)

Detective or Scientist**Aim**

To increase awareness of the experience of emotion within the body.

Materials

Pen, paper, computer with internet for research

Method

Search with a child to find out the what's, when's, why's and how's of feelings. Encourage a child to play detective or scientist and research an area of feelings and emotional regulation. For example, what things happen in the body when you get scared or angry (fast heart rate, flushed skin, hairs inside ears standing up etc.). Find out the origins of why people get 'cold feet' or dry mouths or goose bumps. Research what happens with neurotransmitters in the brain.

By encouraging children to research the why's and how's of emotions, they learn about that emotion while engaging in study and research. Learning the physicality of emotion can help children who have been impacted by complex trauma identify emotions in their own bodies. By researching what emotions do to our bodies, we can more readily identify when they are happening to us and what impact they have.
(James, 1994)

Typical Day Sensation and Emotion Graphs

Aim

To help children gain awareness of their sensations and feelings

Materials

Paper, ruler, pencil, markers or pencil crayons

Method

Ask children to reflect on today, yesterday, or another day earlier this week that seems like a typical day. Invite them with their eyes open or closed to take a peek inside their body and trace their feelings (emotions and sensations) as they change from the time they awaken until they go to bed. Have them write a list of six to eight feelings. Instruct them to include both comfortable and uncomfortable feelings. You might ask the group to brainstorm a variety of feelings to increase awareness.

Once they have made their own lists of their typical feelings, they draw a horizontal or vertical bar graph with the same number of bars as the number of feelings they have listed. Each bar is labelled with one sensation or emotion. The bars are then coloured to represent how much of the day is spent with each of these feelings. For example, if the child feels nervous most of the day, colour the bar almost full.

A template “check-in” graph can be used as a shortcut that can be labelled and coloured as a daily or weekly feelings barometer. Children who routinely experience only unpleasant feelings can be helped to find resources that bring a balance of at least some pleasurable feelings. It is important for children to learn that sensations and emotions can change, even though their life circumstances remain the same.
(Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 393)

The Magic in Me

Aim

To help children feel grounded

Method

This activity can be done with the whole class, a small group, or individually. Have children stand up with sufficient space around them to move their arms like swaying branches. Read the following poem as the children pretend that they are big strong trees, with roots for their feet that grow deep into the earth.

The Magic in Me

“We’re going to play, but before we begin,
I want you to find your own magic within.
Just take some time to feel and to see
All the great things that your body can be.
Pretend you’re a tree with your branches so high
That you can reach up and tickle the sky.
What’s it like to be strong like a big old oak tree?
With roots in your feet and your leaves waving free?
Now you’re connected to the earth and the sky
It may make you laugh, it may make you cry.
It doesn’t matter when you go with the flow
With your branches up high; your roots way down low.
Hear the breath in your body, if you listen it sings.
Now you are ready for whatever life brings.”

Suggestion: Pause here to give children time to stand up tall, stomp their feet, and feel their “roots” as they connect to the ground. Have them wave their arms, feeling themselves bend and sway with resilience as the wind blows their “leaves and branches.”
(Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 334-35)

Choo-Choo Stomp

Aim

To help children feel stable and grounded

Method

This is a group activity.

Have children form “trains” of eight to ten by resting their hands on the waist of the person in front of them. Have the trains take very short vigorous steps, lifting their feet only a few inches from the floor and bringing them down in a satisfying thump. Move around the room with energy and momentum of a locomotive. Have the children chant “choo choo stomp stomp” or “stomp stomp choo choo” enjoying until slightly tired.

This exercise brings energy down to the feet and lowers the center of gravity to create stability very quickly. It also creates strength, presence, and attention.

For variation, have all “little trains” couple together to form one “big train” like a conga dance line. You can also have children drop their hands so that each child can be his or her own train, moving singly.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 335-36)

A Simple Centering Exercise

Aim

To help children feel centered and grounded

Method

Have children stand (with or without music), feel the connection of their feet to the floor, then bend their knees to lower their center of gravity, creating a feeling of greater stability. Next have them sway, shifting their weight gently from side to side, from foot to foot. Direct their awareness to the sense of going off balance and coming back into balance by finding their center of gravity. After they have explored this movement for a while, have them repeat the exercise and share the sensations they feel in each position.

Children can point to the place in their body where they feel centered. For most, it will be in the area near the navel and about two inches inside the body. Next, the children can repeat the above, this time moving forward and backward instead of from side to side.

Young children can pretend to be a toy top moving about in a circle with their hands on hips. As the “top” slows down, it wobbles until it finally rests, stopping completely.

(Levine & Kline, 2007)

Focused Breathing

Aim

To help children gain body awareness through a simple breathing meditation

Materials

Small slips of paper or Post-Its, pens

Method

1. Children are given a large “Post-It” on which they number from 1 to 5 and write the following:
 1. Inhale
 2. Pause
 3. Exhale

4. Pause
 5. Changes noted
2. With eyes open or closed, children simply follow their breath, carefully tracking the route, rhythm, and length of the inhale and exhale. They also notice whether or not pauses occur between the inhale and exhale. Next, they are asked to observe whether the length of the inhale / exhale is even or uneven, and what they notice about the pauses. There is no right or wrong way to do this. The exercise is designed to bring focus and awareness to the breath without attempting to change anything.
 3. Begin with a three minute routine at the start of each session. Work up to 5-10 minutes (depending on the child's age and capacity). After the breathing meditation, you can have the child use the Post-It to make brief notes of their observations.
- (Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 344-45)

“Hook Ups” from Brain Gym

Aim

To help children who have trouble calming down after a fight or verbal confrontation

Method

Cross one ankle over the other in whatever way feels comfortable. Next, the hands are crossed, clasped, and inverted. To do this easily, stretch your arms out in front of you, with the back of your hands together and thumbs pointing down. Now lift one hand over the other, palms facing, and interlock the fingers. Then roll the locked hands straight down and in towards the body so that they eventually rest on the chest with the elbows down. This complex crossover action serves to balance and activate the sensory and motor cortices of each hemisphere of the cerebrum.

While they are in this position, direct children to rest the tip of their tongue on the roof of the mouth behind their front teeth. This action brings attention to the mid-brain, which lies right above the hard palate. This configuration connects emotions in the limbic system with reason in the frontal lobes of the cerebrum, thus giving an integrative perspective from which to learn and respond more effectively.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 345-46)

Noticing Sensations

Aim

To help children deepen their awareness of body sensations

Method

“Find a comfortable place to sit. Take some time to notice how you are feeling physically. Pay attention to your breathing. Are you comfortable or uncomfortable? Where in your body do you register your comfort level? What do you notice? Are you aware of your heart beating or your breathing? Perhaps you are more aware of muscle tension or relaxation or the temperature of your skin, perhaps sensations like “tingly”. When you feel settled enough to go on, try the simple exercise below.

Imagine it’s a pleasant day and you’re driving down to the beach with your favourite music playing. You’re not in a rush because it’s your day off. Take a minute to notice how you are feeling before you read the next paragraph. Note the sensations in various parts of your body, such as your belly, limbs, breath, muscles, and skin.

Suddenly, from out of nowhere, a hot-rod motorist cuts in front of you, nearly causing a disastrous collision. Furthermore, he is rude and shouts profanities at you as if you had done something to cause the mishap. What are you noticing in your body right now?

How were you feeling when you started the exercise? Pay attention to changes. What feels different? Where does it feel different? Are you warm, hot, or chilled? Do you feel tension or constriction anywhere? Notice changes in heart rate and respiration. When you check your body to feel your reactions and sensations in the present moment, you have entered the realm of the reptilian brain.

Now take a little time to let any activation settle. Look around the room, being aware that you are safe and that the visualization was only an exercise. Place both feet on the floor and direct your attention to something in the room that brings comfort, such as a flower, photo, or a favourite possession. Notice how you are feeling in your body at this moment.”
(Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 89-90)

Sensation Vocabulary Box

Aim

To increase vocabulary to describe body sensations

Materials

Paper to list or cards for each sensation, box

Method

Create a list or cards for different body sensations. Discuss each sensation and note that sensations are different than emotions. They describe the physical way the body feels. Non-verbal children can be invited to point to where in their bodies it might feel shaky, calm, or where the pain is, etc. Store the body sensations in a box to reflect back on.

Examples:

Cold/warm/hot/chilly
 Twitchy/butterflies
 Sharp/dull/itchy
 Shaky/trembly/tingly
 Hard/soft/stuck
 Jittery/icy/weak
 Relaxed/calm/peaceful
 Empty/full
 Flowing/spreading
 Strong/tight/tense
 Dizzy/fuzzy/blurry
 Numb/prickly/jumpy
 Owie/tearful/goose-bumpy
 Light/heavy/open
 Tickly/cool/silky
 Still/clammy/loose
 (Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 91)

The Magic in Me

Ages: 3-11

Aim

To help children connect with their body through centering and grounding

Method

“We’re going to play, but before we begin,
 I want you to find your own magic within.
 Just take some time to feel and to see
 All the great things that your body can be.
 Pretend you’re a tree with your branches so high
 That you can reach up and tickle the sky.
 What’s it like to be strong like a big old oak tree?
 With roots in your feet and your leaves waving free?”

After reading the above verses to a child, ask them to stand up and pretend that they are the “big old oak tree” or their favourite tree, if they have one. Give them the time to stomp and explore their connection with the ground. They can pretend that they have long roots growing out the bottom of their feet deep into Earth. Ask them to tell you how it feels to have roots that go deep into the ground.

The verses continue:

“Or you can be like a river that flows clean and free...
 From high in the mountains right down to the sea.

Your breath can flow through you, just like a river
 From your head to your toes, feel yourself quiver!
 Now you're connected to the earth and the sky
 It may make you laugh, it may make you cry.
 It doesn't matter when you go with the flow...
 Your branches up high, and your roots way down low.
 Hear the breath in your body, if you listen it sings
 Now you are ready for whatever life brings!"

After the child (or children) explore their connection to the ground, alone or in a group, have them pretend that the wind is blowing through their leaves and branches. Encourage them to hold their arms up high, sway to and fro to find their center; and move their arms, feeling their resilience. You might have them bend their branches from side to side, noticing how close to the ground they can get before they lose their balance. Have them find their center again and again. You might play music at various speeds so they can experience different paces and rhythms. (Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 140-141)

Sensation Treasure Chest

Aim

To promote cognitive growth and sensory awareness

Materials

Paper, pens or markers
 Bag, box, or can
 10-12 objects with different textures, shapes, and sizes

Method

1. Find an empty box, can, or bag in which to hide about 10-12 objects.
2. Select items that have distinctly different textures such as: a feather, a piece of sandpaper, a variety of rocks of different shapes, sizes, and textures, a cotton ball, a slimy toy, a piece of satin or silk fabric, steel wool, etc., and hide them in a box.
3. Have the child close his or her eyes, pick an object, and try to guess what it is by the way it feels.
4. Once all objects have been identified, have the child touch each object then tell how it feels on his or her skin (tickly, cool, heavy, etc.).
5. Next, have the child compare the rocks of different weights by holding them in his or her hands and noticing how the muscles feel when a rock is very light, light, medium, heavy, and very heavy.

6. Ask the child to notice the difference he or she feels in the body when touching something slimy as compared to something soft etc. Is it in his or her arms, tummy, throat, or on the skin?
7. Have the child make up some questions for you, and take turns continuing to compare and contrast sensations.
8. Make a list of the sensations that were discovered.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 91-92)

Exploring Sensation and Pendulation

Aim

To help children deepen their awareness of sensations. This activity will acquaint children with a variety of sensations that occur in different situations. It moves from the pleasant to the unpleasant and back again to provide an idea of what it feels like to pendulate.

Method

“Take time to get comfortable in your chair. Notice where your body is touching the seat; notice how the chair supports your body. Settle into the chair. Notice your breathing and how you are feeling and your overall sensations. As you slowly follow the story below, take time to notice the sensations, thoughts, and images that come up. Some will be subtle and others obvious. The more attention and time you take, the more your awareness will grow.

Now, imagine that today’s your birthday. Even though it’s a special day you feel lonely. You don’t want to be alone so you decide to go see a movie. You start to get ready. As you reach for your wallet you have a dreadful feeling as you notice it is missing. What are you feeling? Take some time to notice feelings, sensations, and thoughts in your body and your mind.

If you feel dread, what does it feel like? Where do you feel it in your body? (Common places to experience sensations are: solar plexus, chest, and throat). Do you feel a tightening or a sinking sensation – perhaps queasiness? Do you notice any temperature changes in your hands? Do they feel sweaty, hot, or cold? Is there any place you feel unsteady or wobbly? And notice how these sensations change over time as you attend to them. Does the intensity increase or decrease; does the tightening loosen or change to something else?

As you settle, the thought comes to you that: “Oh, perhaps I left my wallet in the other room.” Imagine that you go and look there. You check out the other places you might have left it. You can’t find it and you begin to get a bit frantic. Again, focus your attention inward and take time to notice your bodily sensations, your feelings, and your thoughts.

Now, you slow down a bit and your thoughts become a little clearer. You begin to hunt for the wallet more methodically. Is it in the drawer? Maybe when I came in I left it over there on the table... but then I went to the bathroom... you think... could I have left it in the bathroom? (Pause

here to notice sensations.). However, while you're looking, you are interrupted by the ring of the telephone. You pick up the phone. It's your friend and she tells you that you left your wallet at her house. You take a big sigh of relief! Feel that and notice how you smile as you think about your previous frantic state of mind.

Your friend tells you that she's leaving shortly, but she'll wait if you come right now. So you walk briskly to her house. Feel the strength in your legs as you walk briskly. You knock on the door and there's no answer. You knock a second time and there's still no answer. You begin to think that you must have missed her. You begin to feel a bit irritated. After all, she said she would wait and you came as quickly as you could. Where do you feel the sensation of irritability? What does it feel like? Take your time and notice the range of sensations just as you did before. How do you experience the irritability? Where do you feel it? What does it feel like? From the back of the house, you hear your friend's muffled voice. She's telling you to come in. You open the door and it's really dark. You slowly find your way in the dark. You begin to make your way down the hallway. Notice how your body feels as fumble through the darkness trying to get to the back of the house. You call again to your friend, but you're interrupted by a chorus of voices yelling, "Surprise!"

What are you feeling in your body now, in this moment, as you realize it's a surprise birthday party for you?!"
(Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 94-95)

Tracking Sensations with a partner

Older children

Aim

To help children develop an awareness of their present state with a focus on noticing how sensations change moment by moment.

Method

The object of this exercise is to "track" sensations, with your partner being the safe container. Choose someone you feel comfortable with and sit across from each other. As images, thoughts, and feelings come and go, make note of them and what impact they have on your sensations. Your partner follows your lead and helps you to expand the details of your sensations and keep you moving forward through time by a few gentle invitational words keeping pace with your rhythm. Then switch places. Your partner will practice tracking sensations and you will practice creating safety, expanded awareness, and movement towards increased fluidity and flexibility. Allow 10-15 minutes each and discuss what you discovered afterwards.
(Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 107)

Masks

Aim

To help children try on different personas

Materials

Coloured paper or store bought masks

Scissors, glue, elastic or string

Pencil, markers, pencil crayons

Glitter, feathers, ribbons, small cut outs, letters, anything that can be glued to the mask

Method

Have children select pre-cut or bought masks or begin making an original design. Encourage them to decorate their mask however they like.

When they are finished, have the children put on their masks and ask them: Who are you? What do you sound like? How might you move, now that you are a witch, or monster, or prince, or wizard etc?

(Darley & Heath, 2008, p. 156)

Different Bubbles

Aim

To learn to alternate between states of high and low activity and affect

Materials

Bubble blowing supplies

Method

The objective in this activity is for children to practice blowing bubbles of different sizes. Ask the children to try and blow large bubbles. They will soon discover that to do this they must use a long, slow, soft breath. Next, ask children to try and blow small bubbles. In order to do this the children will have to use forceful quick breaths. Get the children to alternate between blowing big bubbles and blowing small bubbles.

By using their breath to make the bubbles bigger or smaller, they are learning control over their physical state, which can be translated to using physicality in order to control their own affect. By alternating these states, teachers and practitioners can assist in children learning how to go back and forth between physical and emotional states by modulating their own breath.

(Arvidson et. al., 2011)

Favourite Season

All ages

Aim

To help children engage all of their sense memory to awaken their experience

Materials

Paper, coloured construction paper, tissue paper
Markers, oil pastels, crayons, glue, scissors

Method

Ask the children to choose a time of day and/or season of the year that they like. Some questions to ask include: What do they see and feel? Taste? Touch? Hear? What are the colours? Weather? Shapes? Are there associated memories?
(Darley & Heath, 2008, p. 70)

Collaborative Body Scan

Aim

To help children who are physically ill or in need of relief from pain and suffering. This activity is about process and not a finished piece.

Materials

Paper, markers, oil pastels

Method

Through guided imagery or dialogue, help the children locate the pain or discomfort in their body. Have them describe their pain. You might ask them to rate the intensity of the pain by measuring it on a scale from one to ten.

Ask them to draw their pain – give it colour, shape, and movement. Some questions to ask include: What is the shape of the pain? What is the colour? Is there just one colour? How intense is the colour? This is an exercise where they can communicate with themselves and express their feelings.

Variation

A second part of the activity might be to have the children imagine what is needed to help lessen the pain and/or cure the symptom.

(Darley & Heath, 2008, p. 122)

Collage

Aim

To help children gain sensory experience and express emotions. A collage can be worked with in many ways. The process of making the collage or later sharing the collage may be more significant for the child.

Materials

Paper of all kinds - tissue, construction paper, gift wrapping paper, old greeting cards, newspaper
 Various textures of cloth – cotton, wool, flannel, lace, burlap
 Soft things – feathers, cotton, furry pieces
 Rough things – steel, wool, sandpaper, sponge
 Other things – yarn, string, egg carton, aluminum foil, bottle caps, leaves, shells, ribbons, seeds of all kinds, pebbles, tongue depressors, cork etc.
 Magazines, photographs, calendars, colouring books, old story books
 Scissors, stapler, hole punch, string, scotch tape, masking tape, glue, paper fasteners
 Poster board, drawing paper, heavy cloth

Method

Have the child create a collage. You may want to ask the child to give the collage a title after it is done.

(Oaklander, 1988, pp. 80-83)

Sensory Activities

Aim

To help children gain sensory experience and express emotions

Materials

A variety of tactile objects such as sandpaper, velvet, fur, rubber, ribbon, paper, wood, rock, shells, metal, play dough etc.

Method

Touch and talk about how each thing feels and what it reminds you of in your life. Discrimination of tactile sensations is an important cognitive function.

Variation

Put a variety of objects into a bag. You may want to include: a pencil, a paper clip, a button, a small toy car etc.

Ask the child to find a specific item without looking. For example, find something you write with, find something that starts with the letter p, and so on.
(Oaklander, 1988)

Bowl of Jello

Aim

To help children expand their awareness of their inner sensations

Method

“Can you pretend you’re a big bowl of Jell-O?
Red, purple, green, or even bright yellow?
Now make believe someone gives you a jiggle
And you start to **shake** and **tremble** and **wiggle!**
As your fingers tremble, feel your heart pound,
Now feel the shaking go down to the ground,
Feel the **trembling** in your arms, the warmth in your chest,
Don’t try too hard; you’re doing your best.
In your belly and legs, feel the **vibration**,
Let it flow like a river, it’s a pleasant sensation!
Feel the energy **move** from your head to your toes,
Feel the strength in your body, as the **good feeling grows.**”

Suggestion: Continue by making up your own verses with the child. Through this heightened body awareness, the discharge of energy necessary to return to a normal state can occur safely and playfully.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 153)

Emotional Regulation and Self-Soothing

Mandalas

Aim

To help children relax and self-regulate

Materials

Pre-made drawing of mandalas
Pencil crayons, markers

Method

The process of colouring or drawing mandalas can provide a sense of centering or balance within.

(Sanders-Martin, 2008, pp. 127-29)

Sharing Your Worries

Aim

To help children regulate their emotions

Materials

Balloons
Bed sheet (optional)

Method

Ask children to imagine a worry or concern that they would like to blow into the balloon. Have them allow the tension to flow into the expanding balloon as they slowly exhale (you may need to inflate the balloon for young children).

This activity combines deep breathing for relaxation with the imagery of externalizing a worry. Once children have inflated their balloons, they can play with them however they like. This can illustrate how they can share their worries and have fun. Children may choose to toss them in the air, play catch, or bounce the balloons.

If you are doing this as a group or family activity, invite everyone to place their balloon on a large sheet spread out on the floor. Have the group lift up the sheet to carry these worries together. They can raise and lower the sheet while walking in a circle or shake the sheet to toss their worry balloons into the air.

At the end of the activity some children may decide to keep their balloon, exchange them with others, or pop them.

(Echterling & Stewart, 2008, pp. 203-04)

Script for Focused Breathing (for young children)

“Remember how our bodies feel when we’re stressed or thinking about things that remind us of the bad things that have happened? Our bodies get tense and tight, our hearts might start pounding, we’re breathing real fast or maybe it’s hard to catch our breath, and we might get headaches or stomach pains. We can reverse those feelings by practicing focused breathing. Deep focused breathing is easy to learn, and we’re going to do it now. The idea is to take slow, deep, controlled breaths, and to focus your attention on the breath going in and out. It helps if you breathe in a way we call ‘belly breathing.’ That means that your belly goes out as you take a breath in, and it goes in as you breathe out. One way to know if you’re doing this right is to hold your hands over the lower part of your belly. [Demonstrate.] If you’re lying down, you can put a little stuffed animal or book on your belly and check to make sure it is going up as you breathe in and down as you breathe out. Let’s practice doing that a few times.” [Practice.]

“Now we are going to add counting and what we call ‘focusing’ to the breathing. First, the counting: One way to do this is to take a deep, slow breath in, and as you exhale, say the number ‘five’ to yourself slowly, until all the air is out of your lungs. Then inhale slowly and deeply and say ‘four’ to yourself as you exhale. Keep going until you get to zero. Some kids find that it helps to do this belly breathing for several minutes, or even longer. If you decide to try that, you

can count to five to yourself with every breath in, then count down to one as you exhale. If you keep breathing in this slow, controlled way, I think you'll notice that you feel more relaxed. Do you have any questions about how to do it?"

"The final part of this belly breathing is to focus your attention on the breath going in and out of your lungs. Imagine the air filling up your lungs all the way down to the bottom, and then all of that air coming out. As you pay attention to your breathing, you might notice that other thoughts come into your head [for younger children "You might notice your brain talking to you about other things."] Don't worry if this happens; it's normal for that to happen. But what I want you to try when that happens is to return your focus to your breathing. Try not to be distracted by these other thoughts when they happen, just recognize them as thoughts that you have, and tell yourself that they can wait for later for you to pay attention to them."

"Are you ready for this? I'm going to do it, too. Let's try to close our eyes and start slow belly breathing. We'll try to do it for 3 minutes. If you stop in the middle or feel silly or self-conscious, that's OK, just start where you left off. I'll let you know when the 3 minutes are up." [Do belly breathing for 3 minutes.]

"How did that feel? Did you feel calm or relaxed while you were doing that? You can practice this at home during the week if you want to. It's a really nice way to fall asleep, and you can also do it when you're feeling worried, tense, or scared. Let me know how it works for you." (Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2006, pp. 77-78)

Script for Meditation (for older children)

"Remember how we practiced belly breathing and focused on the breaths we were taking? Was that relaxing for you? Now we're going to practice something very similar, which you have probably heard of before. It's called meditation, which is an ancient practice that Eastern religions have used for centuries.

"I know this may sound funny at first, but if you pay attention, you will notice that your brain likes to be busy. If you just sit quietly, you will see that thoughts start coming into your head automatically. And we usually respond to these thoughts with other thoughts. Like if I think, 'I don't know what to do about dinner,' I might start thinking, 'Oh, I better go shopping. I don't think there's anything good to eat at home...' on and on. Instead of doing that, in meditation, you would observe that thought, not judge it or feel like you have to do something about it, and then focus back on being in the moment. What you will find is that these random interrupting thoughts begin to happen less often and are less intrusive when they happen. This takes practice, though; it doesn't happen all at once."

"One way to keep focused on the present moment is to pick a phrase [in Eastern terms, a mantra] that makes you feel calm and peaceful and to repeat that to yourself as you focus on your breathing and on the here and now. Some kids pick a soothing word, such as peace or love or another one-syllable word. Other kids use a phrase from a song they like, or a prayer. Is there any phrase that makes you feel peaceful and relaxed?" [Help the child come up with a mantra.] "What we are going to do is practice mindful meditation here. Get into a comfortable position. Now close your eyes, and we are going to relax our bodies. I am going to talk calmly and very slowly as you focus on relaxing all the different parts of your body. I want you to relax your muscles, starting with your feet and moving up your legs. The feeling of relaxation is now moving up past your knees. Now relax your thighs and butt. Now focus on relaxing your stomach and your back and chest. Focus now on relaxing your shoulders, your neck, your arms,

your hands, and your fingers. Now relax your head. Now start belly breathing, and slowly as you exhale, say your special word or phrase to yourself. Don't be concerned when other thoughts come into your mind. Just see that they are there and return calmly to your breathing and to your special word or phrase. Let's keep doing this for about 5 minutes. I will tell you when time is up, so don't worry about when to stop." [Practice meditation.]

"Ok, let's slowly finish, open our eyes, and sit quietly for a minute. How did that feel? Was that relaxing? I want you to try and practice this for 5-10 minutes every day, and let me know how it goes. I think you will find that your body will feel more relaxed, and when stressful situations or thoughts do come up, you will be able to cope with them more calmly as your practice this more. (Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2006, pp. 78-80)

Script for Progressive Muscle Relaxation

"Let's review how your body responds to stress and trauma reminders. Your heart starts beating faster, your breath is faster and shallower, and your stomach and head might feel all tense and tight. What happens to your muscles during stress? They tense up and get ready to respond to danger by fighting, fleeing, or freezing. Any of these responses require your muscles to tense, just like you were about to start a race in the Olympics. And that is not a feeling that is relaxing to most of us. So we want to reverse that tension in our muscles by purposely relaxing them. And by doing this, we can also reverse some of the other stress responses in our breathing and heart. So let's get started."

"We are going to relax our entire bodies, starting with our toes and working our way up to the tip of our heads, getting rid of every bit of tension as we go, until it comes out the top of our heads and floats away into space, leaving us relaxed and calm. This is a great way to fall asleep at night, and if you like, you can practice it laying down or sitting in a comfortable chair. Where would you like to practice it here?"

"Stretch out your body as much as is comfortable. Now, I want you to focus your attention on the toes on your right foot. Are you focused there? I want you to tense up those toes as tight as you can, keeping every other part of your body relaxed. Can you do that? This is so you can feel exactly where those toes are in your body. All right, now I want you to slowly relax them, until you can imagine them being as limp as a Raggedy Ann doll or a piece of wet spaghetti. Take a deep breath and imagine the oxygen going all the way to those toes as they relax completely. Okay, now I want you to focus on the rest of your right foot. Tense it up as tight as you can. Feel it? Now relax it slowly, keep relaxing it, until it feels totally limp and calm. Take a nice deep breath and feel the relaxation spread throughout your foot. Now focus on your right calf. Tense it up as much as you can. Now relax slowly, until it feels totally relaxed.

[Proceed to relax the right thigh and buttock, the left toes, foot, calf, thigh, and buttock, right fingers, hand, arm, shoulder, left fingers, hand, shoulder, lower back, moving up the spine to the upper shoulders, the neck, the scalp, the chin, mouth, cheeks, eyes, forehead, top of head.]

"Now let all the tension flow out of the top of your head and float away into space. Keep your eyes closed as you feel your whole body relax. If any part still feels tense, tense it all the way up now, then slowly relax it all the way until it is totally relaxed. Now take some deep belly breaths and keep breathing" [continue breathing for 1-2 minutes.]

"How does your body feel now? How do your muscles feel? If this is relaxing to you, practice it at home and it will become easier and work even better as your body becomes more used to relaxing itself."

(Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2006, pp. 81-82)

Blowing Bubbles

Aim

To help children regulate emotions using deep breathing techniques

Materials

Bubbles

Method

Invite children to softly, slowly, and gently blow air to make bubbles. You may also ask them to try blowing hard or fast.

Discuss what happens if they blow too hard when trying to blow bubbles.

(Echterling & Stewart, 2008, p. 204)

Old Rag Doll

Aim

To help children learn the difference between being tense and relaxed using basic progressive muscle relaxation

Materials

A floppy rag doll or saggy teddy bear

Method

Talk with the child about the rag doll. Shake it gently and watch how limp and floppy it is. Ask the child to draw or color a picture of a rag doll and above it write, "An old rag doll is..." Use the child's words to write adjectives all around the picture. Some descriptors may include: "loose, floppy, saggy, limp, and droopy." Include the word relaxed and together practice looking very relaxed like the old rag doll.

Complete the progressive muscle relaxation script with the child. Encourage him or her to hold the tension, think about it, and slowly let it go.

Script

"First, wrinkle up your face

Keep it like that then...

Gently let it go until you look like...

An old rag doll

Now shrug your shoulders up to your ears
 Keep them like that then...
 Gently let them go till they feel like they belong to...
 An old rag doll

Make your arms like a strong man act
 (Show off those muscles)
 Keep them like that then...
 Gently let them go till they feel like they belong to...
 An old rag doll

Take a deep breath to tighten up your chest
 Keep it like that then...
 Gently let it go till it feels like it belongs to...
 An old rag doll

Pull your tummy in to make it feel really tight
 Keep it like that then...
 Gently let it go till it feels like it belongs to...
 An old rag doll

Stretch out your legs till they feel really tight
 Keep them like that then...
 Gently let them go till they feel like they belong to...
 Guess what?
 AN OLD RAG DOLL”
 (Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 61-64)

Through the Rainforest

Ages: 6 years and up

Aim

To help children relax using visual imagery

Method

Open with a discussion about the child’s favourite places and experiences. Encourage the child to remember calming places where he or she felt happy. Introduce the relaxation exercise, explaining that the child is to imagine he or she is in the rainforest. Invite them to think about the smells, noises, scenery, and animals as you read the sample script.

Sample Script

“We are going for a walk through the rainforest. Are you ready? It’s time to put on your special sweatshirt – one arm up, stretch through the armhole, other arm up, and stretch again. Now feel how cozy and comfy the sweatshirt is and gently shake your arms as you settle into it. This is a very special sweatshirt which helps to protect you and make you feel very cozy and safe, but not too hot.”

[Read the next text more slowly now]

“Let’s walk gradually down the hill until we reach the trees. Listen carefully and you can hear the birds singing high in the branches above you... It is very peaceful in this place. The flowers look beautiful... and the sun is just coming through the trees and shining on them... You feel happy and content. You come out into a clearing where there is some grass and you see a little squirrel scurrying along. You sit down on the grass to watch the squirrel... He stops to look at you and when you stretch out your hand he comes to you and you stroke him. The squirrel has a lovely smooth coat and he loves you stroking him... After a while you put him down and then he moves away to carry on looking for his food. You get up and walk slowly along. The sun is shining and you can hear the ocean in the distance... Before long you find you are walking on golden sand and there are beautiful palm trees overhead... You lie down on the warm sand listening to the gentle sound of the ocean... You can hear the waves as they tumble onto the sand. You feel very rested and content... It feels as if you are floating on a cloud as you listen to the gentle sound of the waves. It is beautiful and peaceful and you feel really happy here... You float on the cloud across the land, over the green grass where you saw the squirrel. You land gently by the rainforest... and you find yourself walking easily back through it. A monkey swings lazily from branch to branch above you... What else do you see? ... (Pause). What else do you hear in this special place? ... (Pause). Stop awhile and listen and watch the beautiful creatures of the rainforest.”

[Resume normal reading speed]

“When you are ready come out of the forest back to where we began. Take off the special sweatshirt, stretching up with one arm, then the other as you pull it over your head. Take a few deep slow breaths and carry on feeling content and relaxed as you come out of the relaxation exercise.”

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 64-67)

A Me Calendar

Aim

To help anxious children know what is happening ahead of time and provide the opportunity to discuss it with the family

Materials

Several sheets of paper (depending on how far in advance you want to go)
Ruler, markers, tape or glue

Method

Write down dates with days of the week in a calendar format. Start with a few days prior to the current date, asking the child to share what's happening during the week. Use the current week as an example, write down a few of the things the child has done so far. Leave enough space for the child to illustrate events if he or she prefers. You may need the caregiver's assistance to help fill in upcoming events.

Encourage caregivers to hang the calendar up at home and review it regularly with the child.

They may want to put stickers next to fun or favourite upcoming events. Suggest the child writes a "T" for talk next to any events that cause worry or anxiety. The caregiver should allow time to discuss the "T" events with the child to reduce any worries or concerns. The child may want to put a sticker over the "T" when he or she is no longer worried about the forthcoming event.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 68-69)

Spirals

Age: 9 years and up

Aim

To help children identify stress and coping strategies to reduce their anxiety

Materials

Two sheets of paper, pencil, markers

Method

Ask the child to draw two spirals on separate sheets of paper. As the spiral gets bigger, leave enough space to write between the curves. Title the first spiral, "Becoming More Stressed" (adapt to fit the child's language). Begin writing from the outside of the spiral into the center using a recent stressful incident from the child's life. For example, "was upset at school because friend wouldn't play with me. I thought what did I do wrong and felt really bad, then I started to worry that no one would play with me."

Next, take the second spiral and label it, "Becoming Less Stressed." Start from the center – write, "I felt really stressed" in the center and then carry on writing. For example, "but I remembered that I have fun playing alone too. I thought about how I liked playing alone sometimes and that I can practice my skipping. I thought again, "I can cope and I enjoyed skipping alone at recess." On the outside of each spiral write, "STRESS or WORRY FREE."

Discuss the two spirals with the child. Brainstorm different coping strategies they can use to reduce worries or stress.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 69-70)

The Battle

Age: 6 years and up

Aim

To help children identify their resources and supports to help them overcome a problem

Materials

Construction paper, markers

Method

Discuss resources, coping strategies, and supportive people in the child's life who can help him or her overcome challenges or a specific problem. Also discuss how other factors may work against the child. Liken this to a battle and encourage the child to make a drawing with soldiers on either side of the paper. Make sure there are more soldiers on the helpful side. Each soldier will represent a support person or strategy which is instrumental in helping the child cope with or resolve a problem. Some examples may include, "Major Mom, Chief Distraction Technique, Lieutenant Remembering, or Private Relaxation." On the unhelpful side, include anything that holds the child back such as, "Major Anxiety or Corporal Lazy."

Encourage the child to draw arrows, cannons, shields and other appropriate weapons between the two groups of soldiers. Make a list of each soldier on the helpful side and discuss how to best use each one.

This exercise may be very useful in working with children experiencing extreme anxiety or obsessive compulsive characteristics.
(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 89-91)

Clear Thinking

Ages: 7-14

Aim

To help children recognize and differentiate between helpful and hindering thoughts. This activity provides opportunities for children to practice positive thinking.

Materials

Paper, markers

Method

Discuss negative or worrying thoughts with the child that can contribute to low self-esteem. Once you have collected a few of these, draw 2-3 jagged shapes or silly creatures with arms, legs, and eyes, down one side of the page. These characters represent the “Unhelpfuls” or “Pull Me Downs.” Using the child’s experiences, draw a speech bubble and write the unhelpful thought.

Next to each of the “Unhelpfuls” have the child draw the “Helpfuls” or “Cheerfuls.” These are represented by cloudlike creatures with friendly faces. Each unhelpful thought needs 1-2 helpful thoughts to match it. You may need to brainstorm helpful thoughts with the child. Be sure to use the child’s language.

Discuss how the helpful thoughts need to start floating into the child’s mind whenever unhelpful thoughts or worries arise.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 92-93)

Relaxation

Aim

To help children learn relaxation techniques

Method

Children do not need to lie down for relaxation. Bending and stretching the body can help them to relax.

Examples:

“Pretend you’re a snowman. Some children made you and now they have left you to stand alone. You have a head, a body, two arms sticking out, and you stand on two sturdy legs. The morning is lovely, the sun is shining. Soon the sun becomes so warm, you feel you are melting. First your head melts, then one arm melts, then the other. Gradually, little by little, your body begins to melt. Now only your feet are left and they begin to melt. Soon you are just a puddle lying on the ground.”

“Let us pretend that we are candles on a cake. You may choose which color you like. First we stand up tall and straight. We look just like wooden soldiers. Our bodies are stiff like the candles. Now the sun is coming out very warm. You begin to melt. First your head droops... then your shoulders... then your arms... your wax is melting away slowly. Your legs droop... slowly... until you are all melted into a puddle of wax on the floor. Now a cold wind comes along and it blows “wh...wh...wh” as you stand up straight and tall again.”

(Oaklander, 1988, p. 124)

Sharing Your Worries

Aim

To create a combination of relaxation (deep breathing) with externalization imagery (visualizing the worries leaving the child). Completing tasks with the sheet as a group can help to show supports and resources for worries and concerns.

Materials

A balloon for each child, a large sheet

Method

1. Give each child a balloon and instruct them to blow it up using long, slow, deep breathing.
2. As they blow, have them imagine a worry or concern they have, and blow that stress into the balloon.
3. Have the children gather around a sheet, place the balloons on top, and have them lift the balloons with the sheet. The sheet can be lifted, lowered, or bounced, sending the 'worries' in the air as a team.

Echterling & Stewart (2008)

Self-Talk

Age: 9 years and up

Aim

To promote positive automatic thoughts in specific problems areas by helping children understand their thought patterns and rehearse positive statements

Materials

Paper, strips of cardstock (approximately one inch by three inches)
Markers

Method

Identify specific areas the child is thinking in a negative way. Make a list of the negative thoughts down one side of a sheet of paper, spaced well apart. The list should not be exhaustive because you will need to come up with a greater number of positive alternatives.

Using the child's language, organize the negative thoughts into clusters. For example, "lacks confidence, perfectionist, lacks trust in others." Ask the child to think of as many positive "self talk" statements as possible. Write these statements down on separate pieces of cardstock that are small enough to fit in a wallet. Ask the child to select the five most important self talk statements and keep them somewhere close so he or she can read them for inspiration when things get tough. More self-talk statements may emerge in future sessions and the cards kept close may need to change.

Variation

Daily Courage – For children who keep a diary, encourage them to come up with a positive self talk statement each day that fits with the happenings of that day.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 101-02)

Letting Go with Clay

All ages

Aim

To help children let go of an unwanted thought or feeling; it may also be something concrete that they wish to get rid of.

Materials

Fast-drying clay

Method

Through conversation or guided meditation, ask the children to identify something they wish to let go of. Using the clay, they can depict what they wish to get rid of. When the children are finished invite them to smash the piece and symbolically let it go. It may be that they aren't quite ready to destroy their work or let it go. Let them know that when they are ready, they can break it or throw it away. Some questions you may ask: what was it like for them to smash it? How did it feel?

Young children are unable to think abstractly so you might have to help them figure out what they want to get rid of such as a tummy ache, sadness, or worry. It is fine to guide them and offer examples.

(Darley & Heath, 2008, p. 151)

Horse Lips

Aim

To release tightness around the mouth and relax the brainstem

Method

With your lips loosely together, blow air vigorously between them. That's all there is to it. Repeat until your lips tickle.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 386)

Talking Funny

Aim

To relax the tongue; as this action flexes both the palate and dura across the base of the brain to the occiput, it pumps and relaxes the brain, causing the free flow of cerebrospinal fluid, which helps us to feel freer, more relaxed, and less bound up by our circumstances.

Method

Press the tip of your tongue against your lower teeth. Relax your tongue so that it feels like it fills up your whole mouth. Now try to talk! Any topic is OK, from serious stuff to funny stuff to talking about your problems. Allow the fullest laughter you possibly can.
(Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 386-87)

Tongue Stretch

Aim

This exercise relaxes the root of the tongue and the brain stem

Method

Simply stick out your tongue. Then grasp your tongue with clean fingers on the tip and gently pull as far as it will go.
(Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 387)

Yawning

Aim

Yawning relaxes your throat, palate, upper neck, and brain stem. It helps to come down out of your head so you can experience sensations. It improves digestion by increasing saliva production. It also increases the production of serotonin, a neurotransmitter that tends to balance mood, calming you if you're hyper or lifting you up if you're gloomy. And it helps balance the flow of cerebrospinal fluid which helps keep the brain and spine flexible.

Method

Take a deep breath in. At the top of the breath, open your mouth wide, lift your soft palate, and make yawning sounds. If it doesn't work right away to evoke a real yawn, it means you are trying too hard. Relax and do it again, this time without trying!
(Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 387)

Jiggling

Aim

To relax joints, pump the diaphragm, and increase energy by stimulating metabolism and loosening us up when we feel stiff or rigid

Method

Stand with feet about hip-width apart and knees slightly bent. Bend and straighten your knees just a little. Repeat over and over again until you find the rhythm to “jiggling.” Let all your bodily parts hang loose and flop to the rhythm of your jiggle. Let your limbs shake and internal parts jiggle. Let your brain jiggle too!
(Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 387)

Humming

Aim

To awaken the body and improve body image
Sound moves by compressing and expanding whatever it is moving through. When you make the sound all through your body, the pulsation of opening and closing presses and awakens the body. Muscle, fluid, nerves, vital organs, and bone are all being massaged. As the sound moves through your body it dissolves blocks that are stuck, creating a wave-like pleasant feeling of all body parts being connected and working together, thereby improving body image.

Method

This can be done in any position, but it is recommended to learn first by lying down comfortably. Create a voiced sound: Hmmm. Let the sound move through your body as a vibration. The key is to pay attention to the sensations of the vibration. They are more important than the sound. Allow the felt pulse of the sound (the vibration) to move throughout your whole body. The more relaxed you become, the further the sound will travel. See if it can move out into your arms and hands, down through your torso, and into your legs and feet. Let it move into your head and up into your brain. Hum and rest. Alternate between humming and resting.
(Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 388)

The Sleeping Crocodiles

Ages: 3-7

Aim

To help children learn to self-regulate while having fun

Method

This is a group activity.

1. Divide the class into two groups: the crocodiles and the crocodile hunters. The crocodiles lie face down on a carpet pretending they are swimming or sunning themselves peacefully until they hear the hunters enter the “swamp” area.
2. The hunters are instructed to sneak up on the crocodiles, carefully stepping over them and scurrying about while the facilitator plays music. The crocodiles now pretend they are sleeping. They are told to settle down, close their eyes, and get very quiet with calm breathing so they don’t get caught. When the music stops, the hunters tag any crocodile they move even the slightest bit or opens its eyes.
3. The hunters change places with the sleeping crocodiles and play another round. Children who got “tagged” because they stirred, opened their eyes, or made noise do not trade places. They practice being “sleeping crocodiles” again.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 399-400)

Fight/Flight/Freeze Response

Scary Things Hairy

Aim

This activity helps children feel strength in their bodies to defend themselves against threat. To help children identify the resources of power and strength using animal imagery.

Method

“A long time ago, before there were cars
 Before we had TV, people watched stars
 We huddled together inside of a cave
 It was cold, it was dark, and we had to be **BRAVE**.
 We had to stay hidden, outside it was scary.
 With saber-tooth tigers and other things hairy.
 They tracked us down when out we’d go
 ‘Cause they could run fast, and we ran too slow.
 Sometimes that hairy, giant-toothed bunch
 Pounced down upon us and had us for lunch. (Ugh)
 We found fire and then we had heat
 But still it was hard to get something to eat.
 So we invented weapons and tools
 Then **We** could start making some of the rules.
 With weapons and tools we went out in the sun

We hunted and gathered and even had fun!
 And when the saber-tooth tiger came near
 We chased him away by throwing our spears.
 Now it's time for you to pretend
 That you live in the wild with family and friends!
 Feel the **strength** in your legs and the spear in your hand
 As you chase the saber-tooth over the land.
 Can you feel it right now, that spear in your hand?
 What's it like when you throw it, where does it land?
 Throw it right now **with all** that you've got
 Feel the **power** in your ARM, like a giant slingshot.
 Feel the **power** in your LEGS; it grows as you run.
 Your legs are strong and jumping is fun.
 Do you get the feeling your legs are like springs
 When you chase a tiger, or other big things?
 What does it feel like inside when you're **BIG** and
 You're **STRONG**?
 When you can chase animals all day long?
 It's lots more fun than when they're chasing you
 Or maybe you think that might be fun too!"

Suggestion: Stop at any verse to play "pretend" along with the child or group. Be sure to allow plenty of time for experiencing the powerful feelings in their arms and legs as they pretend to chase the tiger. You might have them jump or run in place, imagining a time when they felt their body's strength and power. Ask the child to describe these feelings. The idea here is not merely for the child to run or visualize running, but rather to take sufficient time to notice the sensations in their muscles, heart, lungs, and so on. Children love to flex their muscles to "show off." Give them a chance to exaggerate their strength and tell you about a time they felt victorious. (Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 142-44)

How Fast Can You Run?

Aim

To help children engage their innate "flight" resources, which will enable them to feel the power, exhilaration, and the crucial energy discharge of a successful escape from danger.

Method

"Charlie Coyote is ready for lunch
 Being quite clever, he follows a hunch
 He crouches down quietly in the tall grass
 Then patiently waits for a rabbit to pass.
 Rapid T. Rabbit bounds the trail
 She stops to eat clover, then washes her tail

Up jumps coyote, he makes a great leap
 Hoping to catch Rapid Rabbit asleep.
 Rapid moves quickly, with a jig and a jog
 With a zig and a zag, then she hides in a log.
 Coyote is clever, Coyote is tough
 Coyote is fast, but not fast enough.
 Have YOU ever had to run fast to escape?
 Can you feel your LEGS, their strength and their shape?
 You have a body that's healthy and strong.
 You can jump high and you can jump long.
 Feel the power in your arms, they swing as you run
 Feel the b-e-a-t of your HEART and the warmth of the sun.
 Feel the breeze on you face; does it tickle your hair?
 Feel your HANDS and your KNEES as you fly through the air.
 Now you have come to a safe hiding place
 Take a deep breath because you won the race!
 How does it feel in your TUMMY and CHEST
 Now that you've found a safe place to rest?
 Pay attention to all the movement within
 How does it feel right after you win?
 Be aware of your breath, it comes then goes out,
 When you feel great, you might even shout!"

Suggestion: The verses above can be used to deepen awareness of two important elements of trauma – the bodily sensations of escape and safety. In the first part of the rhyme, allow time for children to deepen the sense of power as they feel the instinctual forces of running and jumping (and any others that emerge such as ducking, twisting, kicking, zigging and sagging etc.). When children associate movement with strength and the power to avoid threat, they develop self-esteem that comes from their core. This builds into the kind of confidence that remains even when children are under stress because it has become an automatic “motor memory”. In the second part of this rhyme, children get the chance to pause to experience what it feels like to be safe inside their body.

“Do you feel the tingling and the warm energy?
 Where do you feel it... can you show it to me?
 When you feel glad, you're full of happiness
 Can you tell me, inside you, where your happiness is?
 When you get scared what does that feel like inside?
 Where is the feeling that makes **you** want to hide?
 Does your throat get tight, is breathing a strain?
 How about your tummy, do you feel any pain?”

Suggestion: Pause to take time to explore body sensations and have children point and/or name the different parts of the body where they feel safety and where they feel fear. If the fear takes more room than the safety, find ways to help the child feel safer and spend time developing “islands of safety” inside.

The last part of the rhyme helps move sensations stuck in discomfort. These verses give specific suggestions for what a child can do if this happens.

“If you pay attention to the places you point to and name
 Does it change how they feel, or do they stay the same?
 If they stay the same, here’s what **you** can **do**
 To help the stuck feelings **move** right out of you
 [You might even close your eyes for a minute or two]
 See if there’s a color or shape you can name,
 As you watch it closely, it becomes like a game.
 Your feelings may move from place to place.
Watch the fear go without leaving a trace.
 Imagine that you’re at your favourite place,
 It’s **quiet** and **safe** in your own **special space**.
 Who would like to be there with you?
 Your mother, your father, or Winnie the Pooh?
 Your brother, your sister, your dog, or your cat?
 Or perhaps Dr. Seuss, with his cat in the hat.
 Would you like to be held by someone, just right?
 You can RELAX and breathe easy as they hold you tight!
 Or, would you like to have someone close by
 Just in case you get MAD; or you need a good cry.
 Sometimes crying can make you feel better,
 It’s just like laughing, only it’s wetter!”

Suggestion: To help children release uncomfortable feelings that seem to stay stuck (ie, pain in the tummy), use the verses along with the following suggestions for releasing the sensations. With eyes open or closed, have the child focus on the sensations for a minute or two. Gently ask if the “knot, owie, pain” or whatever they are experiencing has a size, shape, color, or weight. Allow sufficient time between questions for the child to feel and process images and sensations. Next, guide them to the present moment by asking how it feels now. Continue, proceeding slowly until you notice the “stuck energy” beginning to open up by observing the child’s body language for subtle shifts in breathing or posture.
 (Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 145-48)

Oscar Opossum

Aim

To help children learn that their “freeze response” is a very important survival mechanism

Method

The rhyme Oscar Opossum shows children how he temporarily freezes to protect himself.
 “Oscar Opossum is slow as molasses
 He plods right along, while everyone passes

When he sees coyote, he can't run, so instead
 He rolls up in a ball and pretends that he's dead!
 Oscar escapes, you see, by lying quite still
 Not like the rabbit who runs up the hill!
 Oscar has all his energy BOILING inside
 From holding his breath to pretend that he died.
 Can you pretend that you're Oscar rolled up in a ball?
 You're barely breathing, and you feel very small.
 It's cold and it's lonely as you hold on tight
 Hoping coyote will not take a bite!"

Suggestion: Pretend with the child that you are both being chased by something bigger and faster than you. Ask the child what he or she wants to be chased by (ie. tiger, monster). Stop running and instead, roll up into a tight ball holding as still and quiet as possible to “trick” the creature into passing you by. Take time to explore sensations without talking and hold still for as long as you can so there is a sense of release and relief when you finally let go, get your breath back, and let all your muscles relax.

The verses continue with questions to help explore normal emotional responses that may arise before and after coming out of the “freeze response.”

“Do you remember ever feeling this way?
 You wanted to run, but you had to stay.
 Were you SCARED, were you SAD, did it make you MAD?
 Can you tell what you felt to your mom or your dad?”

Suggestion: Children may open up with their true feelings and thoughts after you read the above verse. Validate all emotional expressions that may emerge.
 The Charlie Coyote and Oscar Opossum verses continue:

“You Don’t Have To Be Afraid

Oscar Opossum has to lie low
 But inside his body, he’s ready to blow.
 When Charlie Coyote finally takes off
 Oscar Opossum **gets up** and **shakes off**.
 See Oscar **tremble**, see Oscar **shake**
 Just like the ground in a little earthquake.
 After he trembles and shakes for a while
 He feels **good as new**, and walks off with a SMILE!
 Coyote has gone, now **get up** and run [whisper]
 But **first** you might **tremble** and **shake** in the sun.
 Before long you can jump, you can skip, you can stomp
 Or play in the meadow and have a good romp.
 Feel the blood flow through your HEART and your CHEST
 Now you are **safe** and now you can **rest!**”

Suggestion: Have the children pretend to shake and tremble, first exaggerating the movements by dramatizing them. After some fun active movement, have them sit down and rest, noticing the energy and flow inside their body. This will help them to feel more subtle sensations that will most likely be pleasant and warm.
(Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 150-52)

The Wolf Comes At Midnight

Aim

In this game, children get the opportunity to feel oncoming threat in small increments. As threat increases, they experience extra time to prepare and choose defensive strategies.

Materials

Masking tape, chalk, yarn

Method

Make a designated half circle with the yarn, tape or chalk to represent the wolf's cave and designated safe places for the children to run towards. The teacher announces he or she is the wolf and goes to the cave (may appoint a child to act as the wolf). The children gather around the wolf standing in the cave approximately 3-5 feet in front of the wolf. The wolf can wear a mask or tail, to help differentiate the roles as wolf and teacher.

The children are instructed to ask, "What time is the wolf coming?" The wolf responds in a deep dramatic voice, "The wolf comes at midnight." The children then ask, "What time is it now?" And the wolf responds, "Eight o'clock."

At this point carefully monitor the children to see if anyone is overly excited or experiencing distress. Then, the wolf turns back into the teacher and suggests taking a moment to notice how they are feeling in their body. This helps children switch their focus from the external threat to their internal sensations, resulting in nervous system discharge.

When the children are reasonably settled, the wolf stirs the pot of activation once again. The children ask, "What time is the wolf coming?" The wolf answers, "The wolf comes at midnight." "What time is it now?" "Nine o'clock, you better get ready!"

At this time the teacher needs to help the children prepare a plan rather than just run away. Suggestions may include: have the children look around to orient to their surroundings, searching for a safe place; look around and find a friend to help them escape; run in place or back in forth to feel the power in their legs as they prepare to run. This step is very important because it brings to conscious awareness the power they have to execute a plan instead of just scattering in all directions. The orientation is a significant aspect in repairing traumatic activation as it introduces incremental excitement, discharge, and settling. It also provides time and space that weren't available when the children were originally overwhelmed. As the children experience with creative new escape plans, there will be a reduction in feelings of anxiety.

Repeat the same process, hour by hour until you reach the midnight hour. When the children ask, "What time is it now?" the wolf replies, "It's midnight... It's my time!" The wolf runs after the children as they run to their safe places.

Once everyone is safe, the teacher gathers the children and the focus is shifted internally. The children are asked to identify their sensations. Once everyone is settled, the teacher can ask, “Who feels safe now?” Ask the children to locate where inside themselves they feel safe and what the sensation feels like.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 402-403)

Coyote Chases Rabbit

Aim

This game is designed to facilitate the flight and fight response

Materials

Two balls of different colours and sizes

Method

This is a group activity.

The facilitator and children sit on the floor in a circle. The teacher holds up one ball that is the rabbit. Then the rabbit gets passed around the circle hand to hand, starting off slowly. The children are encouraged to gradually increase the pace and to feel their internal sensations as the rabbit “runs” from child to child.

The second ball is then introduced as Mr. or Ms. Coyote and starts the second ball chasing the rabbit. The pace increases naturally as the excitement of the chase escalates.

The game can become more complex for older children by changing the directions. The idea is not to win or lose but to feel the excitement of the chase.

Have the children rest and check-in, asking the children to identify their sensations. Also, ask them who feels more like the coyote and who feels more like the rabbit. Resume the game, having the children switch roles so that they pretend to be both the rabbit and the coyote for a different experience.

Have the children stand up and feel their legs and their connection to the ground so that they can discharge activated energy throughout their bodies. Those who feel weak or lack energy can pretend to be bunnies and hop around.

At the end of play, children are monitored to make sure that none are frozen or dissociated. Have the child do a grounding exercise to help him or her become more present.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 424)

Nightmares

Drawings from Dream Time

Aim

To help children who have bad dreams or nightmares

Materials

Paper, markers, pencil crayons

Method

This exercise is useful in small groups or individually.

Ask children to tell what they remember about their dream. Then invite them to choose one part of the dream that stands out most vividly. After they draw it, have them tell about the various parts. Pay attention to the inanimate objects. It is important not to interpret the dream. Instead, encourage the children to imagine or pretend that they are the various objects and creatures in the drawing as they make the images come alive and interact with each other in drama or dialogue. Listen to the meaning the children give to the symbols, and help them embody the various characters as they work their way through to process incomplete sensations, feelings, images, or thoughts. For example, if a child draws two samurai warriors with swords walking side by side, ask him or her to imagine what it's like to be one of them – perhaps starting up a conversation with the other.

The child can dramatize or report the actions and feelings of each. Be sure to notice and ask the child about the setting (desert, mountains etc.). Often the child will draw the problem and solution in the same picture. Sometimes the solution is tiny or hidden at first.
(Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 394-95)

COMPETENCE INTERVENTIONS

Build understanding of link between actions and outcomes, how to consider and evaluate choices

Working on sense of self and internalized negative self-concept

Awareness of discrepancies between age and stage of development, work on unique developmental tasks such as motor skills, social skills, responsibility and independence (Kinniburgh & Blaustein, 2005)

Balance Reflexes

Roll-Around

Aim

To improve balance reflexes

Materials

Fitness or gym ball

Method

Use a fitness ball appropriate to the size of the child. Have the child kneel down in front of the ball and lean his or her entire torso over the ball with tummy facing down and arms hanging over the ball. Other children form a circle around the child and act as spotters to help him or her regain balance. The facilitator places a firm hand on the child's back and slowly pushes the child forward on the ball. Observe how the child protects him or herself from falling or rolling off the ball. Continue with several turns until the child begins to involve more of the body in a relaxed but alert manner. Watch for areas in the body that are stiff or frozen. As the child becomes more relaxed, he or she will use the body more efficiently.
(Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 408)

Push Me Around

Aim

To improve balance reflexes

Materials

Fitness ball, soft mats or pillows

Method

Using a fitness ball, have the child sit upright on the ball with feet spread shoulder-width apart for stability. Have another child on each side of the ball and lots of pillows or soft mats on the floor. One of the children very gently taps the child on the ball towards the child guarding the other side. The guards catch the child if he or she is unable to balance. This goes back and forth until the child on the ball is balancing easily. If the child feels dizzy or uncomfortable in any way, stop and track sensations until the child feels settled.

Variation

Have the child on the ball close his or her eyes if he or she is fairly good at balancing. (Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 408)

Coordination

Lazy 8's for the Eyes

Aim

To help children improve hand/eye and eye/hand coordination

Method

Lazy 8's are done by training the eyes on a moving thumb as it traces an invisible infinity sign in the visual field.

Have children hold either thumb at eye level in the mid-field of the body at approximately an elbow length from the eyes. For maximum muscular activation the movements should be s-l-o-w and conscious. Holding the head still but relaxed, just move the eyes to follow the thumb. Move the thumb directly up the center of the mid-field to the top of the visual field and then counterclockwise out, around, and down to the left side. As the thumb reaches the lower mid-field of the visual field, bring it back up to the center and clockwise out, around, and down the right side. This should be continued in an even flowing movement at least three times with each hand. Then both hands should be clasped with the thumbs forming an X. While focusing on the center of the X, again follow the clasped thumbs through the Lazy 8 pattern.

Cautionary Note: When working with severely traumatized children, working with the eyes can be highly stimulating. It is important to introduce this work very slowly, perhaps only making one loop at first. Stop immediately if the child complains of eye pain or fatigue. Have them rest their eyes and notice what sensations, feelings, thoughts, or images come up.

Variation: "Lazy 8's for Writing" Have the child try with chalk on a board or on the sidewalk, making them as large as they can. Use the eye exercises when appropriate, work up to completing the figure eight with ease three times with each hand.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 338)

Ball Buddies

Aim

To improve coordination and social skills for young children or for developmentally challenged children of any age.

Materials

Ball

Method

Ask children to sit on the floor (about three feet apart) facing each other in pairs. Instruct them to spread their legs open to catch the ball as it is rolled towards them. Each child takes a turn to roll and catch the ball, continuing the game back and forth. As their coordination improves, make it more challenging by having the children move further apart. Encourage them to look at their partner to make sure they are ready to catch the ball.

Variation

Have older children pair with younger children to learn pacing and patience.
(Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 409)

Rollerball

Ages: 4-10

Aim

To help children combine and develop motor and cognitive functions

Materials

Two or three balls

Method

A simple game that can be played with three or more children. Have the children call out the name of the child that they are rolling the ball to. After the children do this for a while, a second ball is introduced requiring more coordination and flexible orientation.
(Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 410)

Skill Development and Personal Resources

Costs and Benefits

Age: 10 years and up

Aim

To allow children to express their motives for continuing a specific behaviour. This activity helps children assess the possible advantages and disadvantages of changing a behaviour.

Materials

Paper, pens, markers
Erasable board for older children

Method

Divide the page into two with a line and write the headings “Costs” and “Benefits” or “Advantages” and “Disadvantages” at the top of each section. Along the other axis, write the problem behaviour and one or more alternatives. Limit the number of options so it doesn’t get too complicated. Under each heading, ask the child to write a list of pros and cons. Also, have the child write down his or her feelings about each option. You may want to discuss fears and comforts of familiarity with the child.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, p. 56)

I Can Help

Age: 3-13 years

Aim

To help children change patterns of difficult behaviour into more helpful behaviours. This activity helps children take responsibility for their actions.

Materials

Paper, markers

Method

Identify the types of situations or events that lead to a problem behaviour. Help the child recognize the antecedents and brainstorm different strategies to respond to those signals or triggers. Plan strategies to decrease the problem behaviour pattern.

Make a star chart for the child to monitor his or her progress. Title it, “When... (trigger or signal happens), I can help by... (new strategy).” Have the caregivers reward the child for the new behaviour.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, p. 73)

Road Map

Adolescents

Aim

To identify areas of progress and strengths as well as areas of difficulties

Materials

Paper, pencil, markers

Method

Ask your child to draw a road on a large piece of paper and to put his or her current age at one end and birth date at the other end. The space on the right side of the road is for places lived or visited, schools attended, or other important places. The space on the left side of the road is for the good and bad things that have happened along the way. Talk with your child about good and bad things that have happened. Your child can draw or write the events on the paper.

Debrief at the end of the activity. Acknowledge that the trauma is just one part of life and that good things have happened too. Despite the trauma, your child continues to move forward and accomplish new things. Your child is a survivor.

(Steele & Malchiodi, 2008, pp. 278-79)

Escape Routes

Age: 8 years and up

Aim

To help children recognize how their actions can influence or effect outcomes

Materials

Large sheet of paper, markers (at least two different colours)

Method

Discuss a situation that resulted in the child getting into trouble or being upset. Break this down into very small components including the child's feelings and those of others. On a large piece of paper, write down the first component and draw a box around it. Put an arrow to the next component. Continue with one event following another. Leave enough room around the edge to add further boxes later.

Depending on the child's age and interests, you can describe this as being a series of caves leading to a disaster or stairs leading to a dungeon. Explain that you are going to find ways out of the caves to come out into a safe area.

Once you have all the boxes leading from one to the other, you will have ended with the point where the child is in trouble. Make this box stand out with "TROUBLE" written in large letters. The child may want to draw fire or dragons around this.

Now draw a box labelled "ESCAPE" or "NO TROUBLE." The idea is to draw safety ropes or escape routes from danger to points of safety.

Go back to the first box and follow events through to help the child find places he or she could have chosen a different way of behaving. Make a door or escape route out of the box. Ask the child to suggest what he or she should do at each event. Make as many escape routes as possible, and explain that the closer to the disaster or dungeon the more difficult it is to escape. Have arrows going from all the escape routes to the box labelled "ESCAPE or NO TROUBLE."

This activity helps children to think about and experiment with different ways of reacting which can lead to new patterns of behaviour.

Variations

Escape to Safety – This can also be used a protection exercise to help children find ways to escape difficult situations.

Family Escape Patterns – This exercise can be used to look at how the whole family can change the pattern. Use a large sheet of paper and different colours to represent each family member's escape routes.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 97-99)

Sculptures

Aim

Useful for children who are clumsy or awkward or have experienced little success in their lives

Method

Have groups create sculptures together to reflect on different themes. Children physically take on brief poses that reflect different feelings and situations.

(Haen, 2008, p. 233)

Practice Makes Perfect

Age: 3 years and up

Aim

To increase children's self-efficacy by learning to cope with difficult situations in a positive manner

Materials

Paper, pens
Puppets for variation

Method

When teaching children a new skill in problem situations, they need to see it, talk about it, and practice it. It is important for children to be actively engaged throughout this activity. On a sheet of paper write, “How to” for appropriate or positive behaviours related to the problem. Explain there is more than one way in dealing with a situation. Discuss all the possible solutions with the child. Next, role play the different situations with you acting as the child first. You can think aloud about why you are doing what you are doing, modelling appropriate behaviour. Ask the child to give you feedback on how you are doing and rehearse this several times so the child learns appropriate responses. Now it is the child’s turn. Begin by asking the child to pretend situations, switching roles. Use easy situations at first to help the child gain confidence. Provide 3-4 positive comments for each constructive criticism. Be sure to rehearse the same scenario until it is confidently carried out. Make the real-life practice more challenging over time. The child may want to record his or her progress using a start chart.

Variation

Puppet Practice – Use puppets with younger children.
(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 75-76)

No!

Aim

This game helps children learn to say “No” to an exploitative approach

Method

1. Brainstorm rules that seem to encourage children to do things they might not want to do.

Examples:

Be nice to people
Don’t hurt people’s feelings
Don’t be rude. If someone speaks to you, answer
You are responsible of taking care of other people
Think of others’ needs before your own
Don’t question adult authority
Obey the babysitter

Rules like these, when named, discussed, and acknowledged, lose power. Everybody can make choices about when it might not be good to follow these rules and when it’s better to say “No.”

2. Practice saying “No!” Start by having the child and adult take turns asking pretend favours. Start with a simple “No!” answer that the partner must accept. Adapt the difficulty level as children become more skilled by saying things like “What’s the matter, don’t you like me anymore?” and see where it leads. Be sure to give children chances to say “No” to adults.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 256-57)

Comfort Squares

Ages: 3-12

Aim

To help children put a boundary on unwanted behaviour that occurs on a regular basis

Materials

Index cards, markers

Method

Discuss how often the target behaviour occurs and then decide with caregivers and the child how often within an hour/day/week the behaviour will initially be acceptable. It needs to be within relatively easy reach for the child to succeed.

Make a set of cardboard squares using the index cards. The child will use these as tokens, each square representing one occurrence of the target behaviour. Explain to the child that he or she will be working towards doing the behaviour less. The child will only be able to do the behaviour if he or she has a token to give to the caregiver first. The child is given all of the squares at the start of the time frame and reminded that each time he or she performs the unwanted behaviour, it will cost one square. Once all the tokens are gone, he or she can’t do the behaviour anymore (during the set time frame).

Once the child is managing with the number of squares allowed, he or she receives a prize and the game is reviewed to reduce the number of squares. Ask the child how many squares he or she thinks is needed. As each goal is reached the child receives a prize and then the number of tokens is reduced until the behaviour ends.

This activity may be useful for children with the following struggles:

Getting out of bed after bedtime

Playing too many video games

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 39-40)

Beat the Bell

Ages: 4-14

Aim

To help children speed up the completion of a task or a set of tasks by providing a challenge

Materials

Alarm clock, kitchen timer, or a bell

Method

Select a task (putting away toys) or set of tasks (getting ready for school) which the child must complete. Specifically define what counts as proper completion. Have the child and caregiver agree on the amount of time to complete the task. This needs to be a few minutes less than the child already takes. Determine the reward for the task completion prior to the start of the program.

Be enthusiastic and make it a game to motivate the child. Say, “Ready, set, go” and start the timer. If the child beats the timer, he or she gets a reward; if the child does not make it in the allotted time, then he or she misses out on the reward. If the child tried hard but didn’t finish in the allotted time, provide a smaller reward for effort. You may need to adjust the time frame.

Variations

Television Race –Television shows can also act as a buzzer and reward. For example, allow the child to watch morning cartoons once he or she is ready for school.

Break My Record – Older children may enjoy being timed, trying to beat their personal best. (Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 47-48)

Personal Pursuits

Age: 4 years and up

Aim

To build rapport, introduce topics, reinforce new skills or review progress

Materials

Large sheet of construction paper, markers
12 pieces of card stock (approx 3 inches per square)
Counters, dice

Method

You can either have the game board ready or make it with the child.

Draw a long and winding road to cover the large sheet of paper and divide it up into squares. In a few squares write, “Move up one” or “Extra turn.” Add one each of “Move back one” and “Miss a turn.” Add a large star or asterisk to every few squares, and draw in the “Start” and “Finish.” Make up a series of small cards which address the issue relevant to the child. Include more positive than negative cards. Place the cards in a pile on the game board. Have the child draw a star or asterisk on the back of each card like the one on the game board.

Using counters and dice, play Personal Pursuits. As each player lands on a star or asterisk, he or she must pick up a card and follow the instructions. Each card has a reason for the instruction (i.e. counted to 10 when mad) and this subject can be raised for more general discussion about coping skills/child's behaviour.

The game can be used to cover many different topics. Limit to one theme at a time unless the game is used to review overall progress near the end of therapy.

Examples

Anxiety – (Talked to mom – Move up 2); (Played with my sister – Move up 1); (Cuddled with dad – move up 3); (Didn't tell my parents about my bad dream – Back 2)

School – (Did all my homework – Move up 3); (Didn't tell teacher I was bullied – Back 2)

Toileting – (Told mom I had to go to the washroom – Move up 3); (No accidents all day – Move up 4); (Forgot to go before we went shopping – Back 3)

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 83-84)

Clay

Aim

To help children who are insecure or fearful gain a sense of control or mastery through clay. It is a medium that can be erased and that has no clear cut rules for its use.

Materials

Clay

Method

Ask children to close their eyes as they do this.

“Notice with your eyes closed, your fingers and hands are more sensitive to the clay and can feel it better. When your eyes are open they can get in the way of your feeling the clay (Try this both ways to check this out). If you need to peek once in awhile that's fine; then just close your eyes again. Take a couple of deep breaths. Now follow my instructions:

Feel the lump of clay as it is now – make friends with it. Is it smooth? Rough? Hard? Bumpy?

Cold? Warm? Wet? Dry? Pick it up and hold it. Is it light? Heavy?

Now I want you to put it down and pinch it. Use both hands. Pinch it slowly... now faster. Take big pinches and small pinches.... Squeeze your clay, now smooth it. Use your thumbs, fingers, palms, back of your hands. After you smooth it, feel the places you have smoothed.

Bunch it up together in a ball... punch it. If it gets flat, bunch it and punch it again. Try your other hand too... bunch it up, pat it, slap it... feel the smooth place that you made after slapping it.

Bunch it... tear it into big pieces, small pieces. Bunch it up, pick it up and throw it down. You may peek for this... do it again. Do it harder, make a loud noise with it. Don't be afraid to hit HARD.

Now bunch it up again, poke at it with your fingers. Take a finger and make a hole in the clay. Make a few more holes, feel the sides of the hole you made.

Bunch it up and try making lines of bumps and little holes with your fingernails and feel those things you make. Try your knuckles, the heel of your hand, you might even want to try your elbows.

Now tear a piece off and make a snake. It gets thinner and longer as you roll it. Wrap it around your hand or a finger. Now take a piece and roll it between the palms of your hand and make a little ball. Feel that ball and now bunch it all up again. Sit for a moment with both your hands on the clay. You know it pretty well now.”

Some questions to debrief afterwards: What did you like best? What did you hate doing? How did it make you feel?

(Oaklander, 1988, pp.69-70)

Junk Sculpture

Aim

To help the child reveal their secret places through creative absorption. This activity may be effective for children considered clumsy or uncoordinated.

Materials

Wood, nails, hammer

Glue, tape, stapler

Small objects

Gold or silver spray paint (optional)

Method

Collect junk from home, garages, or school. Have children select what they want from a communal box. On individual blocks of wood they can glue, tape, nail, or staple objects until they have made an original creation. You can spray the sculpture with gold or silver paint to complete the work of art.

You may want to make up fantastic stories about the pieces or analyze particular items in the creations.

(Oaklander, 1988, p. 79)

Future Direction

Future Profile

Age: 10 years and up

Aim

To help children consider how things may be different in the future. This activity considers how change is inevitable and is partly under one's control.

Materials

Paper, ruler, pens or markers

Method

Draw a timeline in one direction on a sheet of paper and a number of relevant areas of development down the other axis (ie. My friends, school, where I'll be living, having fun, my responsibilities, etc.). Along the timeline, write approximate time zones such as 3 months, 6 months, 1 year, and 5 years. Different time zones and areas of development will be appropriate for each child.

If the child tends to leap ahead with life, not planning steps along the way, then begin with the furthest time away and fill in the other areas later.

Discuss the timeline with the child: What feelings arise? What might be the most difficult? What does the child look forward to the most? This is an opportunity to discuss goal setting with the child.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 103-04)

Past, Present, Future Hopscotch

Aim

To help children overcome being stuck in the past and to begin to explore the concept of time in a way that restores movement. This game encourages children to sequence from the past into the present moment with a new idea of a possible future.

Materials

Chalk or masking tape

Method

Draw a hopscotch grid with chalk or make one using masking tape.

Children alternate between hopping on one and two feet. The game begins by having the children name an event as they hop. If the event is present time, they hop and land on both feet. If the event they name reflects the past, they hop backwards on one foot. If the event is in the future, they hop forward on one foot. The idea is to keep thoughts and feelings moving rather than be stuck in the past.

If the child only shares unpleasant experiences on each turn, especially for the future, encourage the child to alternate between pleasant and unpleasant future images. Only give this guidance when children are "stuck" in the past or see a grim future. Encourage them to imagine some things that might make them feel better.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 404)

Before and After

Aim

To help children understand how their responses to trauma and/or death has changed over time.

Materials

Paper, markers, pencil crayons

Method

Ask the children to divide a piece of paper in half. On one side have them draw what they remember as the most difficult part of the trauma or death. On the other side of the page, have them draw what the most difficult thing is now.

Discuss thoughts and feelings with the children.

Be sure to end the session positively – focus on strengths or accomplishments.

(Loumeau-May, 2008, p. 95)

First Steps Forward

Age: 10 years and up

Aim

To help children realize they can work towards goals for the future by taking small steps

Materials

Paper, markers, pen, ruler

Method

Discuss what the child wants in the future.

At the top of the paper write, “First Steps Forward” and divide the sheet into four columns. Head the first column, “Future Goals” and the next three, “Step 1”, “Step 2”, and “Step 3.” Choose a few long term goals where something the child does now will make a difference. Write these goals in the first column, and then discuss what the child can do now. Break the ideas down into very easy, relevant goals. These first steps set the goals to be achieved by the next session.

Review progress over time.

Variation

Stairway to My Future – Have older children draw a staircase to represent the different steps to reach a long term goal.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, p. 105)

Dreams and Aspirations**Aim**

To help children explore, plan, and hope for the future

Materials

Writing and drawing paper
 Paint and brushes, markers, pencil crayons, pens

Method

Lead a relaxing guided imagery that allows the child to consider his or her dreams and aspirations. The child can begin with journaling or with paint and markers. Discuss. For young children, begin with a discussion of what they want to be when they grow up. Explore their reasons and motivations.
 (Darley & Heath, 2008, p. 129)

Family Crisis Crest**Aim**

To help children transform their crisis into a survival story

Materials

Blank template of a crest, markers, pencil crayons

Method

This activity may be done individually or in group settings.

Invite children to create their own family crisis crest using the following guidelines:

1. An animal that symbolizes family traits that have helped them through difficult times.
2. Images that represent the family's roots and potential for growth (ie. tree or flower).
3. A symbol that portrays the crisis event (ie. mountain or fire)
4. A symbol that expresses the family's hope for the future

(Echterling & Stewart, 2008, p. 199)

Survival Diary**Older children****Aim**

To help children focus on their strength, determination, and courage during a crisis. To give voice to their stories of survival.

Materials

Journal, pen

Method

Encourage children to journal about how they have been facing challenges, managing the changes in their lives, and making sense of what is going on.
(Echterling & Stewart, 2008, pp. 199-200)

Growing Garden

Aim

To help children understand resilience, adversity, and the support friends and family can provide while moving into the future.

Method

The growing garden is a story you can create about flowers that grow up to live in a healthy garden.

Script

Ask the children to pretend to be tiny flower seeds under the soil (children can curl up in a tiny ball). The sun warms the soil and the rain falls down on the seeds (tap your fingers on the children's heads and shoulders). The seeds soak up the rainwater and begin to get bigger and bigger (children uncurl) and a stem begins to sprout (children raise one hand over their head and continue to uncurl).

The stem grows and grows and leaves start to appear on it (children slowly stand up and spread their arms for leaves) Then a lovely blossom begins to bloom on the flower (children make big smiles). A big storm comes, and the rain and wind come to the garden (children sway and bend). The storm ends, the sun appears, and all the flowers admire the strong and beautiful flower friends in the garden (children nod and smile at each other).
(Echterling & Stewart, 2008, p. 206)

Rebuild Your Village

Aim

To help children begin the process of rebuilding their lives. This activity promotes a sense of direction and hope for the future.

Materials

Paper, construction paper, markers
Blocks, toys (optional)

Method

Acknowledge the crisis that occurred and any losses for the child. Brainstorm ideas about how to rebuild or heal. Create a list or draw a picture to represent all the possible different strategies. This activity is useful when there has been a disaster to an area (ie. school, home, or a community).
(Echterling & Stewart, 2008, pp. 206-07)

Hope Quilting Bee

Aim

To identify hopes and dreams for the future

Materials

Construction paper, pencil crayons, markers
Tape

Method

This is a group activity.
Invite children to draw things that give them hope during difficult times. Some possible questions to ask include:
What are your hopes and dreams for the future?
If you could look into a magic mirror, what would you be doing, feeling in 6 months, etc?

Once the children have finished their pictures, tape the pieces together into a hope quilt.
(Echterling & Stewart, 2008, p. 207)

Self-esteem/ Self-concept

Good Things About Me

Age: 4-12 years

Aim

To promote self-esteem and emphasize the positive aspects or qualities of the child

Materials

Coloured paper, markers or a pen

Method

Have the child write his or her name at the top of the page. Divide the remainder of the page into six boxes. In each of the boxes write aspects of the child's life such as, "At home, In school, My friends, Hockey, Guitar Lessons" etc. Leave room in each box to write at least one sentence. Ask the child for one good thing in each aspect of his or her life. Focus on the child's positive attributes. Discuss how the child is unique in his or her achievements and abilities.

Variation

I Am a Winner – Ask the child to think about all the things he or she can do, talents, interests etc. Fill the page with all the things that are good about the child.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 131-32)

Importance Jars

Age: 9 years and up

Aim

To help children build positive self-esteem by sharing their values and perceptions of what is important in life

Materials

Small jars or paper, scissors, glue, markers, pens

Method

Use three small jars or draw three jars on a piece of paper taking up most of the page. Write the headings, "Not Important", "Important", and "Very Important" over the jars. Create a list of different things for the child to rate the importance.

Some examples include:

Having Fun

Being Helpful

Being Honest

Loving your Caregivers

Having Good Manners

Making Choices for Yourself

Doing as You're Told

Eating Well

Having Money

Being Smart

Being Beautiful

Trusting People

Growing Up

Having Friends

Feeling Comfortable

Cut out the items, adding or omitting as appropriate. Ask the child to paste or put the items into the jar that describes how he or she feels about each one. Explain that there is no right or wrong answer. It does not matter if one jar is full and the other is empty. Ask the child to include any additional items. Discuss the child's reasons for each choice and emphasize the importance and uniqueness of his or her responses.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 133-34)

Reframes

Age: 12 years and up

Aim

To help children change negative thoughts into more positive thoughts

Materials

Set of blank cards, pens (black or dark blue and a silver or yellow pen)

Method

Explain that there is more than one way of viewing a situation. You can role-play a parent-teacher meeting where the child has to imagine the thoughts of the teacher, the parent, and the child being discussed. Discuss how one event may be interpreted in a number of ways. Explain that events can be interpreted in a good or bad way, and that the child's negative thoughts may be reinterpreted more positively.

Write the child's negative thoughts on a card and frame it with the black or blue ("feeling down") pen. Ask the child to write on the back of each card one or more positive "reframes."

The child may need some assistance with this but keep your input to a minimum. Frame these with silver ("every cloud has a silver lining") or yellow ("a bright idea"). Help the child recognize that a problem can be seen as an opportunity waiting to be discovered.

Give the child blank cards to take home. Encourage him or her to pay attention to any negative thoughts. Use the cards to write down the negative thought and provide a reframe on the other side.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 136-37)

I Believe

Age: 12 years and up

Aim

To help children strengthen their identity. This activity is useful for children who have lost sight of who they are (ie. multiple placements in care or sudden death of a caregiver).

Materials

Paper, markers

Method

A form of sentence completion where every sentence begins with “I believe...” Some examples you may want to include:

I believe...

My strengths are

My areas of weakness are

My family is

School is

Parents are

Money is

The future is

Discuss the child’s beliefs in a nonjudgmental manner. Explain that people have different values and beliefs which make everyone unique.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, p. 138)

Permissions

Age: 12 years and up

Aim

To reduce self-criticism and increase courage

Materials

Paper, pen or markers

Method

Discuss self-criticism – Explain how no one is perfect and discuss having the courage to change. Explain how loving ourselves and giving permission to be the person we want to be can help us. Ask the child to share different areas he or she wants to work on and together design a set of permissions.

Some examples may include:

It is Ok to make mistakes

It is Ok to give my opinion at home and in class

I deserve to have my own space

Write the permissions down on paper and discuss each one so the child understands the reasoning behind them.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, p. 140)

Best Achievements

Age: 5 years and up

Aim

To focus on positive achievements to build confidence and enhance self-esteem

Materials

Paper, pen, stickers

Method

Ask the child to write his or her name in the center of the sheet of paper. Surround the child's name with all his or her best achievements (include what the child is good at, prizes he or she has won, what was learned in the sessions etc.). The child may want to include pictures as well. Discuss the child's achievements. Focus on how effort can lead to positive change. As you discuss each achievement put a star or sticker of the child's choice next to it. (Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 143-44)

Way of Life

Age: 8 years and up

Aim

To help children recognize how they have changed or to review progress

Materials

Paper, pens or markers

Method

The past, present, and future can be drawn as a pathway of life as it has been up until now, and then as a meadow for the future. The children can fill the pathway with pictures or short descriptions of how things were (ie. flowers, rocks, or storms). The open meadow can be filled with plans for the future. Debrief at the end of the activity. (Hobday & Ollier, 1999, p. 146)

My Life So Far

Age: 8 years and up

Aim

To have a record of significant and meaningful life experiences including losses and achievements

Materials

Folder or journal, paper
Pens, markers, photos, magazines, art supplies
Glue, tape, scissors

Method

This may take several sessions. It is basically a Life Story Book, with the child making a record of significant events and the feelings connected with them. The story also focuses on who the child is now.

The child may want to include: family trees, schools attended, house moves, holidays, hobbies, friends and so on. Encourage the child to make illustrations, include photos and keepsakes.

It is important to end each session with a positive feeling where the child is now.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 149-50)

What If Game

Aim

To check understanding and to practice planning for a variety of situations

Method

Ask children how they would react in various situations.

Some sample questions to stimulate children's thinking:

What if your bicycle got a flat tire and someone offered to give you a lift home?

What if a bully took your ball and told you to follow him to his garage to get it?

What if the new neighbour down the street asks if you can keep a secret?

(Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 255)

Face Off or Space Invaders

Aim

This game helps children understand their own body space and boundary needs

Method

Two children stand face to face, back up from each other, and then walk towards each other until one of them becomes uncomfortable with the closeness. They can point to or name the place in their body that feels uncomfortable and describe what the sensation feels like. They can then be encouraged to make a movement and sound or word that lets the other child know they do not have permission to come closer. Have them continue until their body language clearly shows that they really mean it.

Children may act silly and bump into each other, but they can tell the point where they are too close as a sign to protect their “space.” Have them try the same, side by side and back to back, to approach each other from different angles. After children explore body space boundaries with each other, they can practice with an appropriate adult if they wish. The adult might play different roles, first pretending to be a stranger, then an acquaintance, and then someone well-known, such as a parent or friend.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 255-56)

External / Internal Resources

Aim

To help children identify their external and internal resources

Materials

Two pieces of paper, pen or pencil

Method

1. Take one of the pieces of paper and fold it in half vertically. On one side of the fold, begin to make a list of your external resources; on the other side of the fold, list your internal resources.
2. As you look at your list, notice which resources “stand out” as the strongest supports for you in times of stress. Take some time to focus on each, one at a time, waiting to feel what sensations and emotions emerge, and where in your body you feel them. Notice if they register as muscular strength, warmth around the heart, power in the belly, “grounding” in the lower body or pelvis, etc. List them or journal about them to emblazon them in your sensory memory.

3. Notice if there are categories of missing or weak resources, such as few satisfying relationships or lack of a spiritual center. Make a list of ways to begin to enrich your life by adding resources to close the gap. For example, if you feel inadequate physically and have little companionship, you might join a dance class. If these activities prove to be a source of more connection to yourself and others, add them to your list.
4. Using the other piece of paper, make a list of your child's external and internal resources, or help an older child create his or her own lists following steps 1-3. Put an * next to the resources that bring the most comfort during stress. Help your child to deepen their awareness of the sensations that accompany resources. Be careful not to impose your ideas on your child, but instead be open and receptive to their ideas and needs.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 136)

The Scribble

Aim

To help children express outwardly something of their inner selves

Materials

Butcher paper, pen or pencil, markers

Method

First, have the child use his or her whole body to make a drawing movement in the air with wide rhythmic movements. You may ask the child to pretend there is a giant piece of paper standing in front as wide and as high as his or her arms will stretch. Ask the child to imagine crayons in each hand and to scribble on this imaginary paper, making sure every part of the paper is touched. This body exercise helps loosen and free the child to do a less constricted scribble on the real paper.

Next, ask the child to draw the real scribble, sometimes with eyes closed, sometimes with eyes open. Then examine the scribble from all sides with the child. Look for forms that suggest a picture and then complete the picture.

The child may find several small pictures or outline and colour in a large picture of a cohesive scene. Ask the child to talk about the forms he or she sees, to become them, or tell a story about the picture.

(Oaklander, 1988, p. 37)

Drawing

Aim

To help children express their inner thoughts and feelings

Materials

Paper, markers, pencil crayons, oil pastels, or paint

Method

Draw the part of you that you like best, least; your inner self, your outer self. How others see you. How you wish they would see you.

Other useful topics for drawing or painting:

Draw a picture of when you were a baby

Draw a picture of your headache

Draw a picture of where you'd like to be if you were magic

Draw a picture of your dream

Draw a picture of your nightmare

(Oaklander, 1988)

Boundary Exercise

All ages

Aim

To help children understand boundaries

Materials

Large paper, markers

Method

Draw together in pairs on the same sheet of paper. Draw in silence for 5-10 minutes, either abstractly or concretely.

Discuss the experience. Ask about any feelings that arose regarding boundaries, styles, and imagery. What did it feel like to have your partner change your picture; go over your lines, etc.?

What do you know about your partner from the experience?

(Darley & Heath, 2008, p. 112)

Desert Island

Age: 6 years and up

Aim

To help children gain insight into what is important in their life

Materials

Large pieces of paper, markers

Method

This activity may be done in groups or in pairs.

Prepare an island out of paper (with some inlets) before the session or have the children work together to create their own island. It may be helpful to set a time limit for this portion of the activity.

Ask the children to imagine they are going to a desert island and will not be able to leave. They need to bring everything that they will need to live on this island. Pass out markers and ask them to draw and/or write what they will need.

This activity will give you insight into the individuals as well as the group dynamics. What do they think is important in their lives? How do they divide up the space? Do they intrude on others? Do they build fences? Who is isolated? Who wants to live in a village? Do they share resources, such as a river? Does cooperation live in the group or are the participants more individually motivated?

The process is just as important of the final map, so it is helpful to take notes as the island grows. (Darley & Heath, 2008, p. 126)

The Positive Box

Ages: 5-11

Aim

To improve children's self image

Materials

A box, pencils, small pieces of paper

Method

This activity can be done individually or in groups.

Ask each child to write his or her name on a slip of paper, fold it, and put it in a box. Explain that you are going to take turns saying nice things about one another. Pull a child's name from the

box and have each child say something positive about the person whose name was pulled out. After pulling out all the names from the box, ask each child to share three of the nicest comments that were said about them.

It can be difficult for children to give and receive compliments, particularly those with low self-esteem. There may be giggling and distractions.

(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, p. 54)

What I Like About Myself

Ages: 6-13

Aim

To increase self-esteem

Method

Explain what it means to like yourself (ie. that you accept yourself and have qualities that you like). Tell the children that this game will help each of us identify things that we like in ourselves and others. Go around the circle and ask the children to state something that they like about themselves and something that they like about the person next to them.

Debrief with the children about their feelings during the activity. Some questions you may want to ask: Is it hard to identify things that you like about yourself? How do you feel when you say nice things about someone else? Do you agree with what was said about you? Can you accept the things other people say they like about you?

(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, pp. 54-55)

It's Me

Ages: 7-10

Aim

To help children gain awareness and a positive sense of self

Method

Ask the child to complete the following statements:

Sometimes I think I'm...

I really am...

People don't like me when I...

Something I'd like to try is...

The thing about me I'd like to change is...

The best thing about me is...

Something I have in common with others my age is...

Something I feel strongly about is...

I wish I...

When I'm alone, I...

When I'm with friends, I like to...

An important decision I've made is...

Include additional statements. Questions to discuss: What were the hardest statements for you to answer? Why? Which was your favourite statement? Did you learn anything new about yourself? (Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, pp. 55-56)

My Inner Critic

Ages: 7-12

Aim

To help children become aware and in control of their inner critics

Materials

Paper, pencils, markers

Method

Explain that we all have a part of ourselves that says mean or critical things to us. Provide examples, "Bob you are fat. Pat you are dumb," etc. You may want to include examples about yourself. Ask the children to make a list of the mean things their inner critic says to them.

Younger children may need help with their lists.

Explain that when they hear their inner critic saying mean things, they can tell it to stop.

Encourage them to visualize a stop sign and then replace the mean thing with a positive self-statement. For example, if your inner critic says, "You are bad, for touching your brother. You would say, "Stop!" and replace the idea with, "You made a mistake, you are still a good person."

Young children's self-critical statements are generally about appearance and intellect.

(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, p. 55)

Me Badge

Ages: 4-8

Aim

To help children express what is important in their lives

Materials

Construction paper, markers, scissors, tape

Method

Use a blank template of a badge or have children make their own. Explain that these are special badges that will tell something special about their lives. Ask the children to draw pictures or answer the following questions on their badge:

What's something you like to do?

What is something you are good at doing?

What is something that is very special to you?

What is something you do at home to help your family?

Have the children share the information on their badges. You can compare badges and highlight any differences or similarities.

(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, pp. 59-60)

Personal Power Shield

Aim

To identify strengths and competencies, and encourage personal growth

Materials

Cardboard, paper, colouring materials

Method

1. Have each child create a cardboard shield, or have paper with an image of a shield on it.
2. Have each child decorate his or her shield with drawings or words which represent what makes them feel powerful or strong, what makes them feel happy, and something they have learned.
3. Use the shield to discuss the concept of resiliency and growth.

(Malchiodi, Steele, & Kuban, 2008)

Shift in Perception

Aim

To assist in developing a sense of self

Method

1. Ask children to imagine the way that others' see the world
2. For concrete examples, ask children to imagine what the world might look like to an ant, an elephant, a dog, and alien, a rock, a tree etc.
3. Ask the child/children to compare this with how they see the world

This activity can help to develop sense of self and competence by contrasting one's own perception of the world with those of other beings and things. This provides a more concrete way of cognitively understanding self-perception.

(James, 1994)

Changing Negative Thoughts into Positive Ones

Ages: 8-10

Aim

To change negative thoughts into positive ones

Materials

Dry erase board or flip chart, paper, markers or pencils

Method

Choose a situation that is likely to generate similar feelings in a group, such as being told to clean up your room or having to do homework. Write the situation on the paper, and then ask the children to answer the following questions while you write down their responses:

What are my feelings in this situation?

What are my negative thoughts?

What are some positive thoughts about this situation?

Do I have any new thoughts that will help me with the situation?

As an alternative, you may want to have the children write their responses on paper and read them aloud.

Review the positive thoughts with the children, having them repeat them out loud as if they were trying to convince a friend who was discouraged.

Once children are more familiar with the concept of changing negative thoughts into positive ones, have them choose their own situations that bother them or make them feel bad about themselves.

(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, pp. 72-73)

Five Things I Do Well

Ages: 5-12

Aim

To help children identify their strengths and areas to improve on

Materials

Paper, markers or pencils

Method

Ask children to fold a piece of paper in half lengthwise, then open it again. On one side, have them list five things they do well. On the other side, they are to list five things they would like to do better. Compare lists.

Some children may have difficulty listing their strengths so prompting may be necessary. (Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, p. 73)

Counter It

Ages: 9-12

Aim

To help children learn to reframe negative thoughts into positive ones. This activity can also be used as a diagnostic tool.

Materials

Paper, markers

Method

Review the idea of negative thoughts or insensitive beliefs. Provide an example, such as “If I’m losing this game, I’ll quit.” Explain that we can replace these beliefs with more positive ones, such as replacing “I’ll quit” with “I can still have fun. Will it do any good to quit? I’ll only hurt myself.”

Ask children to think of a question or statement as a way of showing how the following sentences don’t make good sense. Have them come up with a more sensible statement:

You should feel bad because everyone doesn’t like you.

Missing an answer to a problem makes you stupid.

If you can’t figure that out you’re dumb.

If you don’t do this for me, I’ll tell everyone how awful you are.

I think your jacket is ugly.

I’m afraid to call Bob – what if he says he doesn’t want to play with me?

If I have to sit by her, I’ll die.

I’m a bad person because I touched someone.

(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, pp. 73-74)

Strength Book

Ages: 5-11

Aim

To help children raise their self-esteem and gain a sense of mastery

Materials

Folder, journal, or several blank pages and paper fasteners

Markers

Method

Make a booklet or use a journal of some type. Have the child title it “My Strength Book” with his or her name on it. As a weekly ritual at the beginning or end of the session, have the child draw or write one strength he or she has. You might ask younger children to draw something that is special about them.

You can help the child focus on internal strengths as they become more familiar with the exercise.

(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, p. 75)

“Me” Book

Aim

To increase self perception

Materials

Camera, sketch book, magazines, scissors, craft supplies

Method

1. With permission, take pictures of each child and have several printed.
2. Give each child a sketch book to fill.
3. Provide children with magazines, scissors (age appropriate), paints, sparkles, paper for poetry or sentiments, pens, felts, crayons etc.
4. Ask each child to create a book filled with things about them, including pictures of themselves and creative output from the materials provided.
5. Debrief with each child by asking them if they would like to explain their book to you (always give the option to keep it private)

The rationale behind the “me” book is to have a concrete and positive vessel that the child can consolidate and clarify their perceptions and feelings of self. By putting these images and feelings down into a book, they have the opportunity to express their sense of self and a book to reflect on in future when sense of self seems more fuzzy. (James, 1994)

“What I Like” Song

Aim

To help children increase understanding of their sense of self and unique perspective

Materials

CD player, paper, pen

Strategy:

1. Have the child think of a list of things that they like and do not like
2. Play a tune either on an instrument or CD player or show the child the tune to sing acapella
3. An example of a tune would be the melody to “Let's Call the Whole Thing Off” (i.e. You say tomatoes and I say tomatoes except 'I like tomatoes I don't like potatoes’)
4. If done in a group, have each child take a turn to sing their portion of the song that reflects their likes and dislikes.

This song activity focuses on the particular likes and dislikes of each child. The practitioner should frame the activity and point out that many of the likes and dislike of children are different and part of what makes us unique. This can help solidify some sense of self in children who have experienced trauma and often not been able to express their own likes and dislikes previously.

(loosely adapted from Arvidson et al., 2011)

'What makes you....?' Collage

Aim

To help with naming and identifying emotions and situation that lead to those emotions.

Materials

Paper or Bristol board, magazines, pencils, flip chart

Method

1. Bring large pieces of paper/bristol board and a variety of magazines/publications to

class/session

2. Give each child one large piece of paper and help them divide it into four sections with pencil/pen
3. Brainstorm feeling words with the children (use a flip chart so the children can see)
4. Ask each child to choose four feeling words from the brainstorm, asking them to pick two 'positive' and two 'negative' emotions and write them in the four sections.
5. Allow the children to choose different scenes and pictures from the material provided and make a collage of what makes them feel each emotion.
6. Ask each child about their experience with the activity and to describe what some of their pictures mean in their experience.

This activity helps children to identify their feelings and what contributes to how they feel. It can be a concrete way of interpreting and visualizing feelings that is observable and not just based in language. By processing with the children, we can get a better understanding of what emotions look like to a particular child and they gain clarity around what emotions can mean to them.

Escape Stories

Aim

To help children identify their personal strengths and resources

Materials

Paper, markers, pencil crayons

Method

1. Ask children to share “Escape Stories”. How did they manage to find safety? Did someone help them or were they alone? Were they able to do anything to help themselves? How did they let grownups know they needed help?

Focus on two elements:

What the child did to survive (ie. ran away, hid, shouted, cried for help)

Who or what helped them (ie. friend, doctor, life vest, parent, pet)

2. Have the children draw and color their “Escape Scene.”
3. Ask them to study their drawing and find the part that brings them a feeling they like (ie. powerful, strong, brave, proud). Have them locate the sensations that accompany these feelings in their bodies. Allow plenty of time to experience them and notice if the good feelings spread to other places.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 390)

(Adapted from Lanktree, & Briere, 2008)

Spider Traps the Flies

Aim

To give children a physical sense of their body's boundaries and sense of limits

Method

Designate areas approximately eight to ten feet in diameter using masking tape to accommodate groups of about ten children each. One child is selected to stand in the middle and be the spider. The other children represent the flies and surround the circle, standing just outside the designated boundary.

When the child in the center is not looking, the other children step inside the circle, challenging the boundary, trying not to get caught. The spider in the middle tries to tag the children that enter the web. Those flies that are captured then join the spider's team on the inside. The game ends when all the flies are inside the "spider's web." Repeat the game as often as desired.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 403)

Power

Ages: 8-12

Aim

To help children learn about personal power

Materials

Paper, markers or pencil crayons

Method

Ask the child to draw what he or she feels power means and then to explain what power means to him or her. Children will often identify men with muscles or superheroes.

Help the child differentiate "outside" power from "inside power", meaning brains versus muscles. You may want to use an analogy by asking, "Who has more power, King Kong or the President? Why?" Highlight that there are many different kinds of power, and it is possible to have more than one.

Discuss using "inside power" before using "outside power".

(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, p. 82)

Empathy Skills

Learning to Differentiate Needs from Wants

Ages: 6-11

Aim

To help children conceptualize the difference between wants and needs

Materials

Dry erase board or flip chart, markers

Method

Ask children to identify their basic needs (ie. physical needs, safety needs, love and friendship needs). Write them down in one column. In a second column, make a list of things that the children want to have.

Discuss the difference between what one wants and needs. Brainstorm different ways to get what you want and need.

(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, p. 184)

What Would You Need If?

Ages: 6-10

Aim

To help children identify their needs

Materials

Dry erase board or paper, markers, pens

Method

Write the following words on the dry erase board or paper, and encourage the child to complete each question:

What would you need if...

You were lost?

You were stuck in an elevator?

You were sick with the flu?

You were bullied?

You were sexually abused?

Add your own questions and encourage the child to add his or her own.

(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, p. 184)

What Do They Need?

Ages: 5-8

Aim

To help children identify the needs of others

Materials

Magazine pictures of people in various situations
Paper, markers, pens (optional)

Method

Show the pictures to the children one at a time. Ask the children to tell you, draw, or write down what the people in the picture need.

This activity may be slow and more difficult than expected.
(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, p. 186)

Identifying the Feelings of Others

All ages

Aim

To help children recognize and identify the feelings of others to increase empathy

Materials

Cut out magazine pictures of people in various situations

Method

Show children the pictures one at a time. Ask them to verbalize the feelings they think the person in the picture has and the reasons that the person may feel that way.

(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, p. 186)

Victimizing Others

All ages

Aim

To build empathy; this activity helps children understand how their actions affect others.

Materials

Puppets for younger children

Method

Encourage children to make up short scenarios related to the following topics:

Bullying

Fire setting

Hurting an animal

Verbally abusing someone

Ask one child or group of children to be the victim, and the other, the victimizer. Discuss how it feels to be a victim and/or victimizer, and how victimizing affects other people. Focus on how the other person feels in each role play.

For young children, it is helpful to first do a role play using puppets to show them how to proceed.

(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, p. 187)

From a Victim's Point of View

Ages: 10-13

Aim

To help children develop victim empathy

Materials

Paper, pencils

Method

Ask the child to write or describe exactly what he/she did from the victim's point of view. Tell the child to pretend that he/she is the victim. Then say, "Write or role play what happened, how it felt, and how you feel now."

This is a difficult exercise, and may need to be repeated several times in order to break through the child's denial. It is important that a trusting therapeutic relationship is established before introducing this activity.

(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, pp. 195-96)

Letter of Apology

All ages

Aim

To help children learn to take responsibility for their actions and make amends to others

Materials

Paper, pencils

Method

Brainstorm different ways the child might make amends to the person(s) they hurt. Encourage the child to write a practice letter. Discuss what might be included in a letter of apology. Some ideas may include: how the writer feels now, mention of what happened, why it happened (including “I don’t know” if applicable), whose fault it is (absolving the victim), and concern for the victim.

Letters should be very personal – not a general message you would find in a greeting card. Younger children and those who have difficulty with this task will need additional help. When completed ask the child to read the letter aloud.

If done in a group, encourage group feedback as to whether the letter or making amends seem sincere. Be sure to repeat the activity until sincerity and caring are evident.

In most cases, the letters should be placed in the child’s file, rather than mailed to the victim. (Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, p. 196)

Appreciating Others

Ages: 5-12

Aim

To help children learn how to act upon feelings of empathy

Materials

Paper, markers, pens

Method

Discuss how positive statements can demonstrate caring and empathy. Brainstorm statements that show appreciation and caring. Have children draw or make a list of different ways they appreciate themselves, their best friend, and their mom/dad.

Discuss how it feels to show appreciation and caring to important people in your life. (Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, pp. 196-97)

My Appreciation and Caring List

Ages: 6-12

Aim

To help children build empathy

Materials

Paper, markers, pencil crayons

Method

This activity can be taken home and completed throughout the week. Be sure to tell their caregivers the purpose of the activity so they can remind their children to fill it out.

Fold a piece of paper in thirds lengthwise. Title the page, "My Appreciation and Caring List." Label one column, "Who I Showed Caring For," title the middle column, "What I Said to Them," and label the third column, "What I Did for Them."

Ask the children how it felt to show caring and appreciation towards others. Discuss how people responded to their attempt to show empathy. Were the responses positive? Was it difficult to show caring and appreciation?

You may want to get their caregiver's feedback on how the activity went.

(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, p. 198)

What Would You Do If?

Ages: 8-12

Aim

To help children learn perspective taking and build empathy

Materials

Index cards, markers

Method

Copy the following questions onto index cards:

What would you do if...

If you lost a game at school, what could someone say to make you feel better? What could you say to someone who has lost a game at school?

If you were not sharing, how would you want someone to tell you? How could you tell someone that he/she is not sharing?

If you made a mistake on your math test, what could someone say to make you feel better? What could you say to someone who has made a mistake on the math test?

If someone did not like what you did to him/her, how would you want that person to tell you?
How could you tell someone that you don't like what he/she did to you in a way that is not hurtful but makes your feelings clear?

If you were afraid to go to sleep at night, what could someone say to make you feel better? What could you say to someone who is afraid of going to sleep at night?

If someone is angry at you, how would you want him/her to tell you? What could you say to someone with whom you are angry?

Discuss each response with the child.

(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, pp. 201-02)

Social Skills and Resources

Music Making

Aim

To assist with identifying with/working with other children; increase ease of expressing emotions verbally

Materials

Musical Instruments

Method

1. Provide children with a number of different instruments (drums, keyboards, xylophones, maracas, etc.)
2. Start by playing a simple tune for those children with melodious instruments (i.e. Hot Cross Buns, Boogie Woogie). It will be helpful to colour-code keyboards and xylophones so playing is straightforward.
3. Help the children who have chosen percussion instruments with a simple beat to begin with.
4. If the combination is overwhelming for the children, focus on one type of instrument.
5. Have the children practice the simple tune until they feel comfortable and confident.
6. Have the children play together with the practitioner, starting slowly and going back to practice if children feel they are making mistakes.
7. Allow the children to improvise sounds and tunes, asking them to be mindful of the other sounds they are hearing.

Because it is often difficult for children who have experienced complex trauma to express themselves verbally, music can be a mode of non-verbal expression. Additionally, by getting the children to play along with the practitioner and/or other children, they are able to listen to what others are playing and then play in synch with others. This fosters both self-expression and learning of reciprocal, collaborative relationships. (adapted from Hussey, Reed, Layman, & Pasiali, 2007)

Group Drawing

Aim

To promote group cooperation, expression, and communication of feelings

Materials

Butcher paper, markers or pencil crayons

Method

This activity may be done with a small group or yourself and the child.

Draw a picture together on the same sheet of paper just using shapes, lines, circles, and colours.

Observe what happens and discuss the experience afterwards.

There may be a fight over space on the paper and it is interesting to see how this problem is solved. Does one give way to the other? Is there an argument? Does one invade the other's space? Older children can be asked to do this as a silent exercise.

Some questions to discuss: How did it feel to be pushed out of your space? Do you ever feel this way in life? Do you feel that way at home?

The children's process is often indicative of their process in life.

(Oaklander, 1988)

The Pit

Age: 11 years and up

Aim

To help children recognize there are others who will help them when they are struggling, but they must act too.

Materials

Paper, markers, pencil crayons

Method

Draw a line with a large U-shape in it to represent a hole or pit. Ask children where they see themselves. Describe the bottom of the pit as feeling dreadful and the top of the pit as feeling fine. Ask them to draw a stick figure where they feel they are. At the top of the pit, draw all the people who can help them get out of the pit. Draw a rope between these people, dangling into the pit, just out of reach.

Discuss ways the children can reach out and take hold of the rope. Translate the analogy into how they can help themselves and make the best of the help offered. Do not leave the drawing until the figure in the pit is firmly grasping the rope.

This activity may be useful for children or youth who feel alone or stuck in behaviours resulting in exclusion from others.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 54-55)

Friendship Goal

Ages: 6-10

Aim

To improve social skills

Materials

Paper, markers, pencils

Method

Discuss the importance of having friends and how to make friends. Ask children to make a plan on how to make more friends by completing the following:

Something I do that makes me a good friend

Something I'd like to improve in to be a better friend

How I will do it

When I will try it

Follow up with the children at the next session. Discuss whether the plan that they decided on worked or not. You may want to ask: How did it work? What I'll try differently next time.

(Cunningham & MacFarlane, 1991, p. 201)

Qualities of a Good Friend

Aim

To improve social skills and help children identify important qualities in a friendship

Materials

List of qualities of a good friend, pencils

Method

Prepare a worksheet for children to rank qualities that are important to them in a friendship.

Which of these qualities do you think is important in a friendship? Rank each item from 1 to 5 (1 = most important).

Is popular

Has money

Is a good listener

Can be trusted with secrets
 Has creative ideas
 Doesn't talk behind your back
 Is usually happy
 Is a good student
 Gets lots of attention
 Is funny
 Has good ideas for things to do
 Is interesting
 Understands how you feel
 Is respected by other people
 Is good at sports
 Comes through in a crisis
 Loyal, keeps on being your friend even when you're not around

Ask the children to share a positive experience they had with a friend. Then ask them to talk about how a friend helped them through a difficult time.

Have children read over the list of suggested qualities on the worksheet and rank from 1 to 5 (1 is the highest) those they feel are most important. They can add qualities to the list.

Debrief once the activity is completed. Possible questions to ask include: Why did you choose the qualities that you did? Which did you think was the most important quality? Do you think you possess that most important quality in being a friend towards others? Are you as good a friend to others as you expect others to be to you?

(Mannix, 1992, a, pp. 30-40)

Conflicts with Others

Aim

To help children identify situations which may cause conflict between people and lead to stress

Method

Discuss feelings associated with having an argument or misunderstanding with another person.

Ask the child to draw a picture or share a time when he or she felt stressed because of an experience or conflict with another person (ie. friend, sibling, caregiver, or teacher). Discuss reasons why someone may "take it out" on another person.

(Mannix, 1992, b, pp. 111-12)

Handling Conflict with Others

Aim

To help children identify appropriate ways to handle conflict with others

Materials

Paper, markers, pens

Method

Discuss having conflicts with others and explore the feelings associated. You may ask: how do conflicts make you feel? Can you control what other people do to end the conflict? (no). Can you control what you do to handle the conflict? (yes).

Explain that there are different ways to handle stressful situations.

Discuss the following scenarios with the child. Identify whether the statements will help end the conflict or make it worse.

Well, if you don't want to share with me, that's fine. I'll do something else.

You want to fight me? Fine. I'll go get a hammer and you'll see a real fight.

Don't laugh at me for having glasses. Your braces and pimples make you look like something from outer space.

I won't say anything to her. I'll just turn and walk away.

QUIT YELLING AT ME! STOP IT! I DON'T LIKE YOU YELLING ALL THE TIME!

Brainstorm many different ways to resolve conflicts with others. Make a list or create a poster illustrating the different ideas

(Mannix, 1992, b, pp. 113-14)

Another Point of View

Aim

To help children identify different points of view in situations

Method

Explain that sometimes people have different points of view. Ask the children if they have ever been in a situation where they saw something differently than their parents or a sibling? Provide an example.

Introduce different topics that not everyone feels the same about. For example, some people may like certain things and others do not. Possible topics may include: cats, riding your bike in the street, eating chocolate, riding a rollercoaster, etc.

Ask the children to identify two different points of view about each topic.

(Mannix, 1992, b, pp. 310-11)

Oops, My Mistake

Aim

To help children identify ways to handle a situation when they have made a mistake

Materials

Paper, markers, pencil crayons, pencils

Method

Explain that everyone makes mistakes. Ask the children to draw a picture or share a time when they really messed up or made a mistake. Questions to ask may include: What did you do to correct the situation or make things right? How did you feel? Explain that a mistake is something you wish you could take back or do over correctly.

Discuss the following examples of children who made mistakes. Brainstorm ideas about what each person should do next to make things better.

“I called the new girl stupid, now I feel bad.” (say I’m sorry, ask her to play)

“This library book is overdue! And I ripped a page. What should I do?” (pay the fine, repair the page)

“Young man, you are an hour late! I told you to come straight home.” (say I’m sorry)

“I got this answer wrong.” (try again, ask for help)

Variation

Cartoon Problems – Have the child think of a mistake he or she made and draw a cartoon depicting the situation. Brainstorm possible solutions.

(Mannix, 1992, b, pp. 312-13)

Your Mistake This Time

Aim

To help children identify ways to handle a situation when another person has made a mistake in judgment

Materials

Paper, markers, pencil crayons (optional)

Method

Ask the children to draw a picture or share a time when they were blamed for something they didn’t do. How did they feel? How did they handle it?

Discuss the following scenarios. Ask the children to pretend that someone is making a mistake. How would they help that person stay out of trouble and keep themselves out of trouble too?

How could you handle this situation if someone else made a mistake?

Your mom thinks you broke her favourite vase, but it was your little sister who did it.

Your teacher marked an answer on your spelling test wrong, but it is correct.

A boy tells you that it's all right to take money out of his father's wallet, but you heard the father say that the boy couldn't have any money.

Your friend tells you that you're going the wrong way to the park, but you know you're right.

(Mannix, 1992, b, pp. 314-15)

Having Fun Together

Aim

To help children identify several ways people have fun together

Materials

Paper, markers, pencil crayons (optional)

Method

Ask the children to share some ideas about what they like to do with others. What are some fun things they like to do alone? Is it more fun to do things with other people? Which things?

Explain that when they do things with someone else, it is called cooperation.

Discuss the following activities. Ask the children if the activity is more fun with a friend?

Alone? Or sometimes either?

Playing softball

Building a sand castle

Making lemonade

Riding a bike

Shopping for shoes

Playing cards

Swimming in a lake

Working on a puzzle

Variation

Have the children divide a piece of paper in half. On one side, have them draw an activity they enjoy doing with someone else. On the other side, ask them to draw something they enjoy doing alone. Debrief.

(Mannix, 1992, b, pp. 302-03)

Learning from Each Other

Aim

To help children identify activities or skills that can be learned from another person

Materials

Paper, markers

Method

Ask the children to draw a picture of something they know how to do that maybe not everyone can do. Or what is something they do particularly well? How did they learn to do it?

Identify different people who could teach the child the following skills:

How to ride a two-wheel bike

How to swim

How to cut the grass with a power mower

How to bake a cake

How to play guitar

(Mannix, 1992, b, pp. 304-05)

Shuddering Snakes and Likable Ladders

Age: 4-11 years

Aim

To help children differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. This activity promotes good social skills.

Materials

Large sheet of construction paper

Markers, ruler, dice and counters

Method

Make a grid on the construction paper with a minimum of 30 squares. The START box should be in the bottom left corner and the FINISH in the top right corner. Ask the child to draw snakes and ladders on the grid. Be sure not to end the snakes where the ladders start or vice versa. At the bottom of each ladder write the behaviours you are trying to promote (ie. shared my toy), and at the top of the snakes put the unacceptable behaviours (ie. slammed my door).

Game Rules

Use the same rules as Snakes and Ladders. The players move their pieces around the board in a race to the finish. When they land on snakes (they slide down to a lower square) and ladders (they climb to a higher square). Take turns to shake the dice and move the piece according to the number shown. The game ends when one player reaches the FINISH exactly. A throw higher than the number needed to land on the last square, requires the player to back up the difference.

Variation

Up and Down the City Road – Some children prefer to use roads instead of snakes and ladders. You can add in crashes, and arrows to show the direction. Use toy cars instead of counters for this version. This game can be adapted in many ways to match the interests of the child. (Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 80-81)

The Wall

Age: 7 years and up

Aim

To help children understand how their actions can create emotional barriers. This activity is useful with behaviours such as telling lies or stealing.

Materials

Paper, markers
Toy bricks or modelling clay

Method

Ask the child to draw a picture of a significant adult on the left side of the page and a picture of him or herself on the right side of the page. Make sure there is a gap between the two pictures. Explain that there is nothing to stop the drawn adult and child from having fun, laughing, and listening to each other. Ask the child what might stop that from happening. Discuss the problems they are having and then draw in a brick for every difficulty identified. Draw the bricks one on top of the other. If only one problem exists, draw a wall instead of bricks.

Discuss how these things make it more difficult for the caregiver and child to see each other clearly and trust each other. Talk about how this stops them from having fun, spending time together, etc. Once the wall is drawn, discuss ways to get over each difficulty. As each brick is discussed, it can be crossed out (smashed or dissolved).

Fold the paper so the wall does not show – this will bring the two figures closer together.

Variations

Brick Wall – Use toy bricks to build a wall and take each brick away as you discuss different solutions.

Over the Wall – Use modelling clay to make bricks. A figure for the caregiver and child may also be made. When discussing the solutions, squash the bricks and move the two figures closer together.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 51-52)

What Is A Friend?

Aim

To help children identify characteristics of a friend

Materials

Paper, markers, pencil crayons

Method

Brainstorm what is a good definition of a friend. Make a list of all the qualities that represent a friend. You may want to group the responses into “someone who does” and “someone who is.” You can also discuss things that a friend would not do such as, talk behind your back or take your toy without asking.

Variation

This Is My Friend – Ask the child to draw a picture or bring a picture of his or her best friend. Talk about his or her friend and why it is a good friendship.

(Mannix, 1992, b, pp. 306-07)

Personality Differences

Aim

To help children identify personality or temperament characteristics of others

Method

Explain that personality characteristics are what people are like on the inside. Provide examples. List as many personality characteristics as you can in one minute. Some examples may include: bossy, kind, fun, selfish, funny, etc.

Ask the child to listen to the following descriptions, and identify what word describes their personality characteristic?

Examples:

Ronald never shares his toys with anyone. He grabs them away from other people and says, “MINE!” (Selfish)

Sally talks to new kids when they come into the class and don’t know anyone. She knows it’s hard to be new and not have any friends. (Friendly)

David doesn't like to meet new people. He looks down at the floor and doesn't say anything.
(Shy)

Claudia pulls people's hair and makes them cry. Then she runs away laughing. (Mean)

Kitty notices that a little girl can't reach the toys on the shelf. She picked the little girl up and helped her reach the toys. (Helpful)

Mike is always yelling, even when he isn't mad at anyone. "Quiet down!" The teacher is always telling him, "Shhhh!" (Loud)

(Mannix, 1992, b, pp. 290-91)

Bullying

Aim

To help children express feelings of anger or rage (bullying) in a narrative

Materials

Paper, markers, pencil crayons

Method

Structured drawing assignments may include:

Draw how you feel about school

Draw what you don't like about school

Draw a picture of you interacting with the bully

Draw what you would like to do to the teacher you are having the most difficulty with

Draw a self portrait

Discuss different strategies to deal with the bully. Develop a safety plan.

(Safran & Safran, 2008, pp. 149-50)

From My Heart to Your Heart

Aim

To help children connect to others and promote a sense of community

Method

Invite children to divide into pairs. Demonstrate how you want them to encounter one another, "From my heart to your heart, I wish you well" while pointing to your own heart and then pointing to your partner's heart. Then go onto other body parts such as elbows, toes, or knees (ie. From my elbow to your elbow, I wish you well).

Be sure to discuss personal privacy and respectful gestures

(Echterling & Stewart, 2008, p. 196)

Helping Hands

Aim

To help children explore how they have been making a positive difference during difficult times

Materials

Paper, pencil, markers

Method

Discuss how all of us need and offer helping hands to one another.

Ask each child to draw an outline of his or her hand. In each finger they can draw or write the name of a person or organization that has helped them during a difficult time. They can also make another helping hand to describe five ways that they have been helpful to others.

(Echterling & Stewart, 2008, p. 197)

Mirror Exercises

Aim

To promote connection to others

Method

Ask children to divide into pairs. One is the leader and the other is the follower (then reverse roles). Ask them to mirror the movements and sounds of each other.

(Haen, 2008, p. 234)

Passing Game

Aim

To promote connection in a group of children

Materials

Ball, teddy bear, or toy

Method

Have children sit on the floor in a circle passing a ball or toy from member to member. Ask them to “pass the object to someone they’d like to check in with or someone they think understands how they feel, etc.”

(Haen, 2008, p. 235)

Conquering Soldier

Ages: 8-12

Aim

To help children increase motivation to change by identifying helpful people and strategies

Materials

Paper, markers

Method

Discuss different strategies and supportive people who help the child deal with a problem. Make a list of strategies the child has used before.

Have the child draw one soldier alone, taking up the whole sheet of paper. It is best if this is a Roman foot soldier wearing a helmet and carrying a sword. Next, use the list to give names to the helmet, sword, shield, footwear, and the other parts of armor. For example, "Helmet of Helpfulness, Sword of Speaking to Mom, Boots for Believing You Can Do It." Use the child's language.

Encourage the child to take the completed exercise home and put it up somewhere as a reminder of how to deal with problems. Some children like to mark each item whenever they have remembered to use it.

Variation

Safety Soldier – This can also be used as a protection exercise. The child can decorate the soldier with ways to protect him or herself such as, "Sword of Screaming No, Sandals to Run Away."

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 94-95)

The Empowerment Game

Aim

To restore grounding and a sense of empowerment and group solidarity

Method

Divide the children into two parallel lines facing one another with approximately twelve feet between them. One is designated Line A; the other Line B. Instruct Line A to march towards the other line holding hands and stomping feet in unison. As they march together building self-confidence, they chant, "I HAVE THE POWER! I HAVE THE POWER. YOU MAY HAVE THE POWER, BUT I HAVE THE POWER!" The children are told both teams have equal power and this is not meant to diminish the other team's power. The idea is that Line A and Line B take turns so that the children all have a "felt experience" of their own strengths and resources through movement and voice when they work together in teams.

When Line A reaches Line B they repeat the chant marching in place, while Line B listens. Then Line A returns to their starting place and Line B takes their turn chanting, marching, and moving towards Line A. Repeat the exercise. This time have the children drop their hands with a snap and engage the power and strength in their upper body by rhythmically pumping their arms in coordination with their legs as they march and chant. The children should be encouraged to increase the volume of their chant with their movement, so they can feel the growing power of using their own voice.

Next, draw the children together in a circle, directing their awareness to their internal sensations. Be sure to give plenty of time to rest and settle.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 425)

The Parachute

Ages: 5-12

Aim

To promote a sense of community

Materials

Parachute, 2-3 lightweight balls that are two different colours

Method

1. Lay the parachute flat on the floor, and have children sit around the outer perimeter. Next, ask them to make eye contact with each of the children and any adults who are placed near children who might need the most containment or support.
2. Each child grabs the edge of the parachute and pushes and pulls, with emphasis on feeling the tension of the parachute and the strength of their muscles and collective effort.
3. Next, have them stand up and feel their feet and lower legs as they bend their knees to get a sense of their grounding and connection to the ground. Young children can stomp their feet or march in one direction as they hold on.
4. Ask the children to notice the body sensations that they feel. Then do a group check-in asking: Who feels strong in their arms? Who feels strong in their legs? Who feels weak, tired?
5. Have the children make waves with the parachute. Invite them to pay attention to the strength of the whole group. As they move the parachute, it activates their energy and level of excitement. Be sure to take some time for rest and grounding.
6. Have the children make waves again and toss one of the balls on top of the parachute. The group works together to keep the ball bouncing without falling off. Add additional

balls to make this activity more challenging. Remember to have the children sit in a circle, rest, and debrief by sharing sensations, and settle down.

7. Finally, ask the children to run in place and feel the power in their legs, the ground, and experience the flee response. Have them stop and make eye contact with children across the circle and say hello. They can raise the parachute and run underneath the canopy, making contact again by saying hello in unison for more bonding.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 400-01)

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