

lets

talk



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The Let's Talk book includes a selection of activities to encourage children to talk about their experiences and feelings.

The book is designed for use by social work and family support work professionals with activities for them to do with children, young people and their families. The activities are designed to aid communication both between professionals and family members and between the family members themselves.

Background

Let's Talk is a creative project that involves using the arts to develop innovative services for families affected by domestic violence. The pilot programme, in 2007, involved developing tools to enhance social work and family support work practice and help families affected by domestic violence. All Change artists worked with families and specialist social workers and family support workers to develop tools to aid communication. Families contributed to the development of these tools by participating in a creative workshop programme.

The Let's Talk book has been adapted from a creative toolkit that was developed to help children talk about their experiences of domestic violence and has been successfully used by social workers and family support workers in Islington since 2007. The book is complemented by a creative workshop programme in Islington that has been developed to help families affected by domestic violence improve their communication and confidence.

Guidelines

As a professional, you will need to decide which activities are appropriate for use in different situations and with different families. Many of the activities are designed for you to participate in. The aim of this book is to aid you in your assessment of the family or child. Use the process as a means to open up dialogue and find out more with questions, rather than trying to make decisions based on your interpretation of artwork created. It is not necessary for any of the activities to be completed in any specific timeframe or while you are present. You may want to leave copies of the activities with the family to help them to continue to improve their communication and have fun together in between visits. The activities are flexible and should be open to adaptation by you and the family. They could provide a springboard for the family to develop ideas for other activities that they would like to do together.

The activities are designed to be done on a separate sheet of paper so that the book can be used again and again.

Additional materials required :

- Large paper pad or roll of paper (ideally A3 size or bigger)
- Newspaper/wallpaper/wrapping paper
- Felt tip pens/coloured crayons/paints

The guidance notes cover three areas:

- Outcomes for each activity
- Notes to aid in facilitating the activities
- Issues that you may need to consider when undertaking the activities with children and their families.

Connecting hands



Aim

To find common ground.

Activity

Create handprints on the paper, either by painting each other's hands and pressing them down on the paper or drawing around the outline of each other's hands. You will need at least two handprints for each person.

Find out 5 things that you have in common and connect one of each of your hands together, writing one thing in common between each finger.

Then find 5 differences between you and write these in the same way to join the other hands together.

Materials

Paper

Paints and/or felt tip pens





Outcomes

To introduce yourself to the child and to find some common ground between you and the child or between family members.

An opportunity to facilitate discussion with a child who may be unwilling to talk.

It will provide information that you can come back to in other sessions, such as finding out about their interests.

Particularly useful for building trust at the beginning of a longer-term relationship.

Notes

It is important that you both share your interests and characteristics, so that there is a sense of getting to know each other rather than only the child being asked questions.

Use the activity as a means to initiate communication and establish a relationship between you before discussing other subjects that the child might be less willing to talk about openly

Issues

Helping families to focus on the connections between them could be especially useful if there are currently a lot of arguments. From this common ground you can go on to look at their differences and how these might be accommodated.

Be aware, as a professional, that you are also asked to reveal information about yourself to establish common ground. Therefore, you should consider your own boundaries and lead with neutral topics e.g. similarities in preferences for food, music, colours, etc.

You will also need to consider that the child may not want to identify with you.

House plan

Aim

To encourage children to express emotions and feelings connected to their home.

Activity

Ask the child to draw a map of where they live, mapping out all the different rooms. It can be drawn any way and doesn't need to be accurate or to scale, just how it is seen by the child.

Then ask them to think about how they feel in the different rooms in the home. Ask questions like "Which rooms do you feel good in?", "Where do you spend most time?", "Are there any rooms that you don't like?", "Where might you feel angry or sad?". The child should be encouraged to colour in each room according to how they feel in it.

Once it has been coloured in you can design a key for it together. Draw a flash of each colour at the side and write down the feelings that the child linked with each colour in the different rooms.

Materials

Paper

Felt tip pens or coloured crayons





Outcomes

- This activity is used to build an emotional picture of the home, which can be referred back to. Discuss why the child has different feelings in the different rooms. You might want to repeat the activity to see if the colours chosen change over time.
- The activity is useful in core assessment as the plan can be built up over a number of weeks. Emotional changes during those weeks can be looked at and you can work together on creating a map of the child's ideal for the future.

Notes

- When you introduce the activity ask if the child has done any map work at school. Do they understand what a key is? Make it clear to the child or young person that they are colouring the plan according to how they most often feel in each room, rather than what colour they might like it to be. They are not being asked to think about interior decoration.
- It is useful for the family to work together on activities, so you might ask family members if they'd like to help each other colouring in, once they have decided a colour for a room.
- Let the child complete their plan before starting to ask them questions about what the different colours mean for the key and talking to them about why they have those feelings in the rooms identified. You can work together on the key, you could note down the feelings as the child or young person speaks.
- If the map is left with the family, it can be added to over time.

Issues

- The activity could give you a good idea of family dynamics and how the family members function together, e.g. who eats or sleeps together.
- If the family is currently living in a shelter it will give you an idea of where they have come from.

Inside / Outside

Aim

To explore how the child sees themselves and how they think others see them.

Activity

First of all draw an outline of the child's body. If you have a big enough sheet of paper the child can lie against it while you draw around them, or you can stick the paper to the wall and use a light to create a shadow of the child's body to draw around. Don't worry if the paper is not big enough, you could just draw around the head or draw a generic outline of a person on the paper. The outline does not have to look exactly like the child.

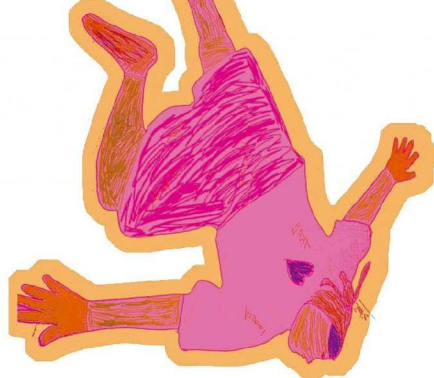
Once the outline is drawn ask the child to illustrate it, filling it in with how they see their personality, their feelings, what they like and dislike, what makes them unique.

You can ask questions to help them, such as: "What colour would your head or your heart be?"; "What words would you use to describe yourself?"; "Draw pictures of what you like doing".

On the outside of the outline ask the child to write what they think other people think of them. Such as parents, teachers, siblings. Ask the child to think about how these people would describe them and what they would say makes them unique.

Materials

Large sheet or roll of paper or newspaper/wallpaper to draw on
Felt tip pens/coloured crayons



Outcomes

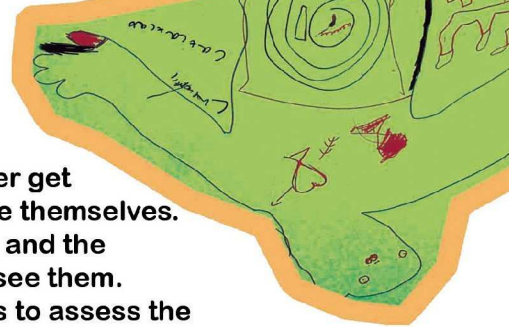
- This activity builds on Connecting Hands to further get to know the child or young person and how they see themselves.
- It can give you an insight into family relationships and the child's perceptions of themselves and how others see them.
- This activity could be useful in initial assessments to assess the child's sense of identity, emotional needs and parental relationships.

Notes

- The idea of characteristics or emotions is complex and it can be difficult for children to describe themselves in this way. You could use the emotions and characteristics listed below as a prompt.
- Encourage the child to consider how different family members see them and, in discussion, to elaborate on why they think this.
- With older children it would be possible to adapt the activity to draw images of other family members, with the child filling in how they think that person sees themselves and how they see them.
- It could be adapted as a family activity where the child describes himself or herself in the inside of the outline and a parent describes them on the outside. In this way, and through facilitated discussion, the child and parent can learn more about how they perceive each other.

Issues

- As the child is asked to identify both how they feel about themselves and how they think other family members think or feel about them, the resulting picture may not be accurate.
- A child who is fearful that they may be taken away from their family might be afraid of saying the wrong thing. Use questioning throughout the activity to assess whether you feel the child is being honest, looking for details and consistency throughout.



My World Tomorrow's World

Aim

To find out about how the child feels about their world now and how they might want to change it for the future.

Activity

Draw 2 large circles on a piece of paper, you can use a plate to draw round to help get a nice circle shape. These are your planets.

One planet will be the child's world at the moment. Encourage them to draw, write and colour to fill up the planet shape to represent everything that is in their world at the moment including good and bad things and things that they like and dislike.

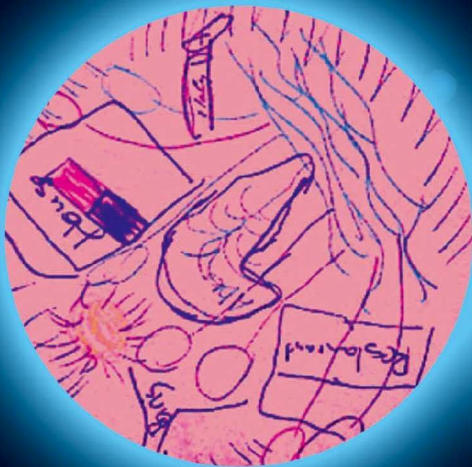
Then they can use the other planet shape to create the world that they would like to be in. It could be a world that they would like to travel to now, or a world for the future, for a year or 5 years time. Encourage the child to consider the possibilities that they might not have thought of yet.

Talk together about the different worlds that have been created. Draw out the comparisons and differences. Ask questions such as "What changes have you made for your future world?" "Where would you place these worlds in your personal solar system?" "How close would they be to the sun, and why?" "What strategies could you use to get from your world now to your future world?" "What form of transport would you use?" "What actions would you need to take?"

Materials

Paper, Felt tip pens or coloured pencils





Outcomes

- To develop an idea of how the child feels about their life and what is important to them.
- For the child to think about the possibility of change and visualise how they would like their future to be.
- For you to discuss with the child which aspects of their life they are happy with and which they are not.

Notes

- The worlds can be illustrated in any way the child likes, they do not have to be drawn, they could be in writing or you could stick pictures or objects onto them.
- The activity can be adapted to look at the future world in 5 years time, next week or over any given time frame.
- Older children can be encouraged to look in more detail at the world they have drawn now and how that could be improved upon for the future.
- You might want to take the world that has been drawn by an individual and then work with the whole family to construct the improved world of the future.
- You can use the activity to develop an action plan of how the child or family are going to get from their current situation to their future world.

Issues

- If a child is in particular distress they may find it difficult to think beyond dealing with their immediate situation in order to imagine a future for themselves. If this is the case you can use the activity to build up a picture over time, exploring ways to change their situation for the better.
- Be aware that the world that is drawn may just be a reflection of a bad day at school or an argument earlier in the day. Questions can be used to find out whether the world they draw reflects a specific issue or is a more general feeling about their life.

Parcel Post

Aim

To encourage the child to open up.

Activity

Ask the child to create a parcel containing a gift and a message to give. They could choose to give it to someone close to them, perhaps someone else in their family, someone else they know, or even to the world in general.

Ask the child to think about the message they would like to pass on, it could be something that they would like to share with others about themselves, or their family. The message can be written any way the like. It might be a rap or poem or a letter. The message can be written on the inside of the wrapping paper or on different layers of paper to reveal it slowly.

Then ask them to think about what gift they would like to put inside the parcel, it could be something real or it might be imaginary. It could be an object or a quality that you think would help the person e.g. energy if they are tired, or laughter if they are sad. Or they might want to give the world outside more understanding. They can draw or make something to represent the gift.

Once the parcel is finished the child can decide whether they would like to give the parcel or if they don't want to share it. If it is given they could think about how the recipient might react.

Materials

Paper to draw or make a gift
Felt tip pens or coloured pencils



Outcomes

- To express something that the child feels is important to say to someone, but which they might not have had an opportunity to say before.
- To discuss why they want to give the particular message and gift to the recipient. In discussion the child has the opportunity to elaborate on the message and talk about why it might be difficult to communicate this message to the recipient.

Notes

- Make it clear to the child at the beginning that they can choose whether to actually give the gift they make or not.
- As a starting point, you might want to use images of a selection of objects and ask the child to choose an object to give from that selection, then you can talk to them about why they chose that particular object.
- You could do the activity twice, first with a light hearted message focussing on how the message is written and then another time where you encourage the child to write something more personal that they might find difficult to say in another way.
- You can offer to act as a scribe for the child if they are too young or not confident in writing themselves, writing down the words for them or the child could draft the message first and then re-write it onto the different layers of wrapping paper, if they wish to.

Issues

- If the child chooses not to give the gift it could be a prompt to initiate a discussion with them around secrecy and being open and honest about their feelings. You could talk about why they feel it's not possible to give the gift or message and what might need to change in order for them to choose to give it.
- If the gift is given you might want to discuss with the recipient why they think they were given this gift or message and how they feel about it.
- Consider if the gift or message suggests a change. Some of the issues revealed during this activity could be emotionally complex.

Let's Talk is a partnership project between All Change, Islington Children's Social Care, Islington Children's Centres and Family Action



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All Change

All Change works to develop and promote the role of the arts in society by bringing artists and people together to develop original, high quality and innovative arts projects, which promote artistic excellence and affect positive change for individuals and communities.

All Change values partnership working and collaboration, innovation and risk taking, creating opportunities for artists and people to explore and articulate their ideas, try new things and exceed their expectations, in an environment that celebrates creative thinking, shared learning and artistic expression.

All our projects are cross artform, led by exceptional artists from all disciplines. Projects result in high quality artistic outcomes, which are shared through events, exhibitions and publishing. Our projects reach people of all ages and backgrounds, especially those who would not usually have the opportunity to participate in the arts.

T: 020 7689 4646 E: info@allchangearts.org W: www.allchangearts.org

Family Action

Family Action has been a leading provider of services to disadvantaged and socially isolated families since its foundation in 1869. It works with over 45,000 families a year by providing practical, emotional and financial support through over 100 services based in communities across England.

Family Action Islington provides outreach family support, group-work, one to one support and whole family activities:

The Children's Support Service - for children age 5-12 and their families

Islington Young Carers - for young carers up to the age of 25

Islington Building Bridges - for families affected by adult mental health issues

Up to half of the children, young people and families we work with have been affected by domestic violence. Most face multiple difficulties including mental and physical health difficulties, poverty, poor housing and social exclusion

T: 020 7241 7609 E: Islington@family-action.org.uk W: www.family-action.org.uk

Islington Domestic Violence Project Team

The Islington Domestic Violence Project Team (DVPT) is a multi-agency partnership working to address domestic violence in Islington. It is a sub-group of the Safer Islington Partnership (SIP). The DVPT is committed to working towards an end to domestic violence and alleviating the effects on survivors, their children and the wider community. To achieve this we continually strive to improve services and responses to anyone affected by domestic abuse.

The DVPT is made up of a wide variety of statutory and voluntary organisations and currently works to the Islington Domestic Violence Strategy 2009-2012.

For more information please contact dvpt@islington.gov.uk

Islington Children's Centres

Islington's Sure Start Children's Centres offer children and their families all the services they need to thrive and make the most of life's opportunities.

These are the services provided by the 16 Children's Centres situated throughout Islington:

- Care and education for children until they start school
- Child and family health services
- Family support

Each Children's Centre houses a nursery and provides access to drop-in and stay and play sessions and health advice and services to help parents before and after the birth of their baby. If parents are looking for advice on training or getting a job, their local Children's Centre can help with that too.

Many Children's Centres run activities for fathers and all Children's Centres encourage all parents and carers to join in to contribute to the life of the Centre and to shape and steer its services.

www.islington.gov.uk/education/childrenscentres



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