DIANA COHOLIC

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Helping Children to Develop Mindfulness, Spiritual Awareness and Self-Esteem

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Helping Children to Develop Mindfulness, Spiritual Awareness and Self-Esteem

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Most importantly, we are all indebted to the children and young people, and their families, with whom we have worked with over the past several years. Ideally, research is a 'win-win' process for everyone involved. While we hope that the children have gained something valuable and useful from their participation with us, we certainly have been privileged to work with them. They have been instrumental in helping all of us to develop our knowledge and skills in facilitating holistic arts-based methods. The children's insights, intelligence, humour, creativity, resilience and energy make my work interesting and meaningful. For that and for all of the support that I have received over the last several years from many people, I am very grateful.

Introduction

Holistic arts-based methods are effective for various reasons. In general, these methods are fun, non-threatening, inclusive and strengths-based. By way of these methods, children can learn new skills and coping strategies, shore up their defences, develop a deeper understanding about themselves and others, and improve their self-esteem. A wide variety of helping and health practitioners and educators could utilize the material in this book in order to enhance their own practices and/or to develop their own arts-based group and individual programmes. Although the majority of this book's discussion focuses on using arts-based methods in a group, they can be easily adapted for use in individual counselling and for other contexts, such as in classrooms and psychoeducational programmes. For example, I have used some of the methods discussed in this book in my university teaching to teach social work students how to utilize arts-based methods with others, to help the class get to know one another, and to provide opportunities for students to explore their own self-awareness.

The holistic arts-based methods described and discussed in this book have emerged from a programme of research that is exploring the usefulness and effectiveness of these methods for the improvement of self-awareness, self-esteem and resilience in children and young people in need. Most of this research has taken place within the context of group work. However, we have also tested the methods in individual practice, and both methods of

practice are effective. In fact, for some children, working one-on-one with a helping/health practitioner or educator might be more appropriate and helpful.

The arts-based activities are presented throughout the book according to the topic of each chapter. For instance, Chapter 5 focuses on group work and describes interventions that are especially relevant for group work, such as developing group cohesion and support, and closing a group session. The reader will find, on p.7, a list of all the holistic arts-based methods described in this book. The reader should also note that most of the activities in this book could be used at any stage of a group or individual practice with a child. Understanding feelings and expressing them in positive ways is always part of our approach in working with children and young people in need, as is teaching mindfulness-based practices. As children and young people learn some basic foundational skills, such as identifying and paying attention to their feelings, the methods change in their complexity and depth. For example, when first beginning a holistic arts-based programme, children in need may only be able to focus on their breathing for a few seconds. By the end of the group or individual process they can sustain this attention for longer periods of time, and they can understand the purposes behind being able to focus on what one is thinking, feeling and doing.

The interest in arts-based methods and holistic interventions is widespread and growing across helping and health professions. While both areas have a burgeoning research literature and a need for research that examines the effectiveness of these practices, interventions that combine a holistic perspective with arts-based methods are not as common. This may simply be a reflection of the state of development in these areas as arts-based and experiential methods are an excellent way to access, express and process transpersonal issues, thoughts, experiences and feelings. Some experiences and feelings are difficult, or even impossible, to describe in words, but they can be captured and expressed in an arts-based creation or activity.

We believe that the methods described and discussed in this book have something important to offer children and young

people, especially those that are struggling with their life situations and are at risk of poor long-term functional outcomes. Children who become clients of child protection authorities and/or end up in mental health systems have often suffered some form of abuse, neglect or major instability in their lives and the life of their family. They may have been abandoned by their parents, witnessed violence and drug use, and not had enough food to eat. We know that many children are resilient, but we also know that these types of experiences harm children and affect their abilities to cope and function in school and at home. They also shape how children feel about themselves and think about the world. Consequently, they have many needs that include, but are not limited to, building healthy coping strategies, improving self-esteem, developing self-awareness, learning social skills, and understanding how to focus and relax.

We use the term 'arts-based methods' to denote the application of art therapy techniques by mental health professionals such as social workers and certified child and youth workers. This is different from 'art therapy', at least in North America, where art therapy is a mental health profession comprising master's-level professionals who hold a degree in art therapy or a related field. Some of the methods and activities described in this book are more experiential than arts-based. For example, we discuss the use of games, physical activities, meditations and guided imageries. While it could be argued that these methods have little to do with 'art', they are vital in teaching specific skills and in promoting group cohesion and functioning, to name just two examples. These experiential activities constitute an important part of the arts-based programme that we have developed, and they can often be easily connected with a more arts-based activity; for instance, drawing what one first imagines. Thus, while the methods described in this book can be used by a wide variety of helping and health professionals, students/trainees and educators, we note that readers of this book who wish to explore these methods within their own practices should have at least a basic level of professional training and experience in helping/health practices. This would include skills such as being able to communicate with children in a relevant and appropriate

manner according to their developmental stage, awareness of how experiences of loss and trauma can affect children's behaviour, and an ability to engage positively with children, to name just a few examples.

The holistic arts-based group that we have developed and studied is highly experiential and utilizes arts-based methods that are somewhat similar to play and art therapy, where art materials and games are used to assist children to understand and resolve issues that are interfering with healthy development. Overall, the holistic arts-based interventions aim to teach the children how to pay attention and focus; use their imaginations; understand and practise mindfulness-based techniques; explore their feelings, thoughts and behaviours; and develop their strengths. The holistic arts-based methods create novel experiences and an environment within which children are encouraged to explore their viewpoints, feelings and behaviours for the purposes of developing their self-awareness, self-esteem and resilience.

The reader will notice that all of the exercises are fairly simple and do not require any special equipment or materials. However, the process of creating during the exercise and the discussion about the creations and finished products can lead to profound insights, and can teach complex skills. The methods that are included in this book are based on our experiences with children and young people with high needs, and most have been developed by my research team. However, we also utilize other resources and adapt these for our own needs. Some of our favourites include *Expressive and Creative Arts Methods for Trauma Survivors* (Carey 2006); *The Expressive Arts Activity Book* (Darley and Heath 2008); *More Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth* (Lowenstein 2002); and *Art Therapy for Groups: A Handbook of Themes, Games and Exercises* (Liebmann 1986).

The use of creative activities has long been a part of group practice. Sometimes group facilitators use a specific creative exercise to achieve a certain goal, to address a particular issue or to help develop the group process. While our group programme builds on this foundation, our group and individual methods are unique in that they do not aim to treat a specific issue, and we are not

incorporating arts-based methods to elicit particular narratives about certain life experiences, such as abuse. Rather, we are interested in facilitating holistic arts-based methods with children in order to help them develop their self-awareness and consequently their self-esteem and aspects of their resilience. For example, we may use a mindfulness-based exercise to facilitate discussion about one's values and the values of others, or drawing oneself as a tree may lead to discussion about one's attributes and feelings.

In Chapter 1, our work is contextualized within the current state of knowledge development of arts-based and holistic interventions (the terms 'holistic' and 'spiritually sensitive' are used interchangeably in this book). The typical characteristics of children and young people in need are described, and the use of holistic arts-based methods with these children and young people is explored. Specific issues that often arise in work with children who have experienced significant difficulties (trust, isolation, family, loss, poor social skills) are discussed and examples from our work illustrate these points. The links between self-awareness and self-esteem are also explained, and some of our research findings related to the usefulness of holistic arts-based methods are presented.

Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of holistic helping/health practices and how spirituality and spiritually sensitive helping is most often conceptualized and incorporated within helping professions such as social work, psychology and nursing. The chapter discusses and illustrates how we have incorporated a holistic perspective into the arts-based group work and methods with children. Using holistic interventions with children is a fairly new area of inquiry within the broader field of spiritually sensitive social work practice. Basically, in our holistic arts-based methods, we make room for spiritual/transpersonal/existential ideas, concepts and discussions to emerge; as a result, the children will often spontaneously raise these issues themselves. This frequently occurs in discussions about their beliefs, the matter of 'good versus bad', by way of considering issues related to death and loss, and their values. The aim of these discussions is to use them to foster self-exploration and the development of self-awareness and understanding.

Also, sometimes we aim to facilitate discussions about spirituality in order to help the children consider this aspect of life experience and to show them that we are open to hearing their thoughts about it, even if some have never given it any thought at all.

I will note that no one on my research team is particularly religious – most of us are not affiliated with any particular religion or religious practice, and this lack of religious grounding is evidenced in our generic and inclusive approach to working holistically with children and young people. As a practising social worker my own interests in spirituality arose in the late 1990s, which led to my doctoral dissertation that explored how feminist social workers made sense of and incorporated spirituality into their work (Coholic 2001). I explain in the introduction to this thesis that one time I received a card from one of my clients with the following inscription: 'I thank you for the very professional guidance which has challenged me constantly. I can see a spiritual future which has been inspired by our sessions.' While I recalled that we had talked about her spiritual beliefs briefly in relation to her fear of death, I was somewhat surprised by her words and I reflected on our work together. I wondered how this spiritual inspiration had come about for her. I was not entirely sure I understood or could have articulated how our sessions had inspired a vision of a 'spiritual future'.

I also wondered about possible reactions from my colleagues had I shown them the card. Admittedly, I was concerned about negative responses and I feared that they might consider me unprofessional, imposing my own agenda and interests onto clients. I felt isolated with my ideas and thoughts as I identified very few colleagues with whom I could have discussed the emerging holistic nature of my social work practice. In this manner, my own experiences mirror many other practitioners' feelings and thoughts, and account for some of the marginalization of spirituality and holistic perspectives within helping and health professions; that is, because of these concerns and fears, many practitioners simply do not consider spirituality as part of their work or they practise it in 'secret', fearing recrimination from colleagues and supervisors.

However, around the same time that I received this card, I was noticing that more and more of my clients (I worked mainly in the

area of trauma and violence) were coming to counselling sessions armed with spiritually oriented books, initiating discussions about spiritually sensitive matters, and grappling with issues that I would identify as spiritual and existential, such as the meaning of life, death, abuse and other forms of suffering. At the time I thought that this was probably a reflection of my own life experience in which I felt a stronger need to explore spiritual influences in my practice, as well as a growing interest in spirituality within society in general. This latter interest is certainly evidenced nowadays in the proliferation of holistic books and helping/health practices that are available and increasingly used by people. Since I completed my doctoral thesis, almost nine years have passed. In that time the literature and research in spirituality and helping/health practices, as well as associated conferences and workshops, has really ballooned. This movement towards working more holistically with people and the associated development of knowledge in this area is reflected in the increasing popularity of mindfulness-based practice and philosophy, which is the topic of Chapter 3.

Mindfulness-based practice is an example of a holistic philosophy and intervention that is becoming widely used across most helping and health professions, although the facilitation of mindfulness with children is just emerging as a topic in the research literature. In Chapter 3 the use of mindfulness with children and young people is explored as a promising holistic method. We are interested in facilitating and teaching mindfulness-based practices that are in harmony with its holistic nature and history. We believe that when mindfulness is divorced from its holistic roots there is diminished opportunity to create therapeutic space that is flexible, open, creative and less focused on specific clinical treatment outcomes.

While research has found that mindfulness is helpful for a wide variety of people and problems, the practice must be modified for use with children, especially children and young people in need. In Chapter 3, various examples of exercises are provided with discussion about how the methods can help children develop their awareness and other skills and abilities. These range from teaching the concept of mindfulness to using mindfulness for the

enrichment of self-awareness. Exercises and methods include more traditional practices (that are modified), such as paying attention to one's breath, and informal everyday practices, such as mindful eating. We have found that mindfulness-based practices can teach children with problems to relax, to better cope with day-to-day problems, to become more self-aware and less judgemental of themselves, and to form more positive and healthy relationships with family and peers.

Chapter 4 includes additional examples of arts-based methods and exercises that are not organized and located within the other chapters. In particular, I discuss methods that focus on paying attention, using imagination, understanding feelings, thoughts and behaviours, and recognizing and developing strengths. Some of these activities, indeed several of the activities in this book, may seem familiar to the reader. Our own experiences as camp counsellors, students, trainees, practitioners and educators have all informed the development of the holistic arts-based methods. Some of the activities are based on childhood games passed down from generation to generation that we have adapted for our own use. I would expect the reader to further adapt what is presented in this book for his/her own contexts and situations. The discussion of these methods in Chapter 4 aims to illustrate how to use these exercises and how and why they are useful for children and young people in need.

Working with dreams, which is an important part of our holistic arts-based methods, is also described in Chapter 4. We work with the children's dreams because everyone dreams and dreams can provide rich material for helping children explore their beliefs, thoughts and feelings. Talking with children about their dreams is similar to having discussions about spiritually related topics in that both will often remain undisclosed if you do not inquire about them (the same could be said about working with adults). Many children and adults have vivid dreams on a regular basis or even recurrent ones; but if they are not asked about them, they may not arise in the course of the counselling and helping process. If children cannot remember their dreams, we have strategies for that situation as well, and these are described. Dreams are also often

connected with holistic/existential/transpersonal themes and so they fit well within our approach (Coholic and LeBreton 2007). Although there is a long history of working with dreams within helping professions, some professionals are not sure about how to approach dream work. The good news is that one does not have to be a psychoanalyst working long term and intensively with people in order to address their dreams. We offer accessible and useful creative methods for work with children and young people in need.

Finally, in Chapter 5 an exploration of issues and methods that are specific to working in holistic arts-based groups is explored. These include the structure of the group, the need for group rules and boundaries, and group membership. The benefits of working in a group are examined and considered in relation to working individually with children and young people in need. Although many of the methods described in this book are situated within group work they can certainly be modified for individual practice. Also included is a brief discussion of the challenges that we have had to address in developing our group programme and in working with children and young people with high needs. Examples of holistic arts-based methods specific to group work are provided, such as the need to build group cohesion and functioning, and a sense of belonging to the group; developing an awareness of each other's values, beliefs, goals and ideas; and the merit of closing exercises for shoring up strengths and positive characteristics. This chapter is written with the understanding that the reader has some background in, and understanding of, group practice and theory. Certainly, the extensive group work literature is the foundation upon which the holistic arts-based group programme is based. In particular the books *Working More Creatively with Groups* (Benson 2001) and *Nexus: Transpersonal Approach to Groups* (France 2002) were particularly useful for us given the creative and holistic nature of our group programme.

This book presents findings from our practice-based research, discusses what we have learned works best with children and young people in need, and provides examples of holistic arts-based exercises that we have developed and adapted. In order to illustrate the discussion, methods and processes, some examples of

conversations, directions and group dialogue, and some pictures of the activities, are included. These are based on transcriptions of the group work and individual sessions and interviews. We transcribe all of the group and individual sessions in order to conduct qualitative data analysis. All of the children and their guardians provide informed consent before they agree to participate in our research programme indicating that they understand that they will never be identified when we share our work with others. Consequently, the reader should note that all of the children's names have been changed as well as any identifying information and facts about them such as their gender, age, and so on. These changes serve to protect the children who have participated in the programme of research and do not detract from the power of the narratives. Also, for the purposes of clarity and consistency throughout the book, the names Tim and Barb are used to denote two facilitators' voices.

It is my hope that readers of this book will be encouraged to utilize the methods presented and to contemplate how holistic arts-based methods can become part of their own practices and contexts. I also hope that the reader will be encouraged to further explore dream work, mindfulness-based practices, and other spiritually sensitive methods. All of the methods included in this book can be used in a variety of contexts including classrooms, and within various helping and health professions. I have no doubt that the knowledge and evidence base in this area will continue to grow and evolve because holistic arts-based methods help to make our work more creative, enjoyable, meaningful and effective.

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CHAPTER 1

The Usefulness of Holistic Arts-Based Methods

OVERVIEW OF HOLISTIC ARTS-BASED PROGRAMMES

A brief overview of our group and individual programmes will serve to contextualize the material that follows in this chapter and the next three chapters. Chapter 5 will discuss working in holistic arts-based groups in detail.

In both the group and individual holistic arts-based programmes, the children are not asked to discuss specific experiences, such as abuse or being taken into care and removed from their home and family. Rather, they are constantly active and engaged throughout the group and individual sessions in holistic arts-based activities, games and meditations that teach them how to:

- listen and pay attention
- be mindful of their thoughts and feelings
- learn about their own and others' values

- play with different perspectives
- build strengths.

As was mentioned earlier, group and individual discussions with the children occur while the methods are taking place. The theme of each group or individual session is based on the needs and goals of the children, or the group. For example, in a group, an initial theme would be to build group cohesion and functioning, which includes developing listening skills. As the group progresses, themes and goals often include making positive choices, understanding and identifying feelings, and reframing negative perceptions about oneself, to name just three examples. In the holistic arts-based group and individual programmes, children attend and participate for 12 weeks. Each group session is held weekly for two hours – the individual sessions are one hour in length. Children attend gender-specific groups matched according to age.

The groups are gender specific for various reasons. One of the most important reasons is the fact that many of the children have expressed to us their wish to be part of a gender-specific group, feeling a greater level of comfort with similarly gendered peers. Children in need already have enough challenges in their lives so this is one way to ensure more effective group functioning and comfort from the outset. Also, boys and girls sometimes enjoy different types of activities. For example, girls like making feelings bracelets whereas the boys enjoy painting walking sticks. While we are not aiming to support gender stereotypes and behaviours between girls and boys (and we challenge these where appropriate and relevant), activities and methods also have to engage and interest the children otherwise the children quickly become disengaged and frustrated.

The structure that we follow for the sessions conforms to this basic outline:

- presentation of the plan for the group/individual session
- primer activity (described in Chapter 5)
- various arts-based exercises based on a theme consistent

with the group or individual's needs/desires/goals; for example, learning about feelings, building group cohesion, or practising mindfulness

- break at the halfway point where nutritional snacks are provided
- more holistic arts-based exercises
- a closing activity (described in Chapter 5).

Holistic arts-based methods facilitate psychological well-being because they help the children to express themselves, to discover and better understand their feelings, thoughts and behaviours, as well as teaching them social and coping skills. All of this occurs while the children are having fun and being creative. The facilitator's role is to engage the children in the methods and the group, to provide a safe context for the work, to help develop group cohesion and functioning, to teach skills, to manage the children's behaviours, to provide positive reinforcement and feedback, and to help the children discuss their creations, thereby helping them to develop their self-awareness, self-esteem and aspects of their resilience. What makes the methods holistic is that the philosophy and practice of mindfulness forms the foundation for all of the activities and arts-based methods. We also make room for the emergence of spiritually sensitive and existential discussions to occur.

Holistic arts-based methods offer an opportunity to engage children in need in a helping process that is supportive, strengths-based, enjoyable and non-threatening. For some of these children, this type of process especially suits and meets their needs. These methods can help them to improve their self-awareness and self-esteem, and aspects of resilience, such as social skills, coping abilities and emotional expression and management. Indeed, we have experienced overwhelming positive feedback from the children and young people that have attended both our group and individual arts-based programmes over the past four years. Children really enjoy participating in the group and with the holistic arts-based methods, and they want to continue taking part in the programme as long as they can (Coholic, Lougheed and LeBreton 2009). The

children like the group because they 'get to do a lot of things' and 'have fun'. As one child described, 'It was fun, and cool, and great.' Another child explained that 'I really want to come. Know why I want to do it on Tuesday or Monday? Because then [the group] comes quicker [in the week]!'

Consistently, three aspects of the holistic arts-based group programme and methods are identified as the most 'fun' and indicate what the children enjoy the most about the group and methods: the arts-based activities and games; eating snacks; and meeting other children and making friends. When we ask the children how they would describe the group to other children, responses are consistent with the following two children's summaries: 'A fun place' and 'I would say that you go and meet new people and you get to do fun activities, gain your self-esteem'. The children's parents and foster-parents are also enthusiastic. 'More kids should be referred to stuff like this' is a typical comment made by foster-parents and parents.

THE CURRENT CONTEXT OF ARTS-BASED AND HOLISTIC PRACTICE AND KNOWLEDGE

The use of art, play and other creative activities has long been incorporated into work with children to assist them to express and understand themselves, and to deal with problems in their lives. Arts-based methods have a growing literature and a need for more research that will investigate the effectiveness of these approaches (Darley and Heath 2008). Research in creative and expressive arts methods reports that these practices are useful in developing self-esteem, increasing socialization and improving psychosocial functioning (Torkelson Lynch and Chosa 1996); in fostering the development of self-awareness, self-expression and group cohesion (Camic 2008; Newsome, Henderson and Veach 2005); and for enhancing psychological well-being (Betts 2003; Puig *et al.* 2006). With regard to children, creative arts have been used to help with specific problems such as bereavement (Finn 2003); to facilitate expression in hospitalized and traumatized children (Klorer 2005;

Wikstrom 2005); and to deal with crises and trauma (Boyd Webb 2006; Irwin 2006). Indeed, the results of one study suggest that

> some youth may naturally turn to the arts for comfort and healing in times of crisis, and by supporting their creative intelligence for doing so, therapists not only further encourage this practice, but also affirm the value and worth of clients as self-directed individuals. (Tyson and Baffour 2004, p.223)

The growth of knowledge in this area demonstrates the increasing interest amongst helping and health practitioners, as well as educators, in using arts-based approaches for a myriad of people, problems and purposes. Readers with experience working with children and young people will know that creative methods are particularly useful – even essential – in work with children who have experienced significant life challenges, as these children usually work to avoid talking about their experiences (Boyd Webb 2006). Also, it is understood that children do not communicate the way that adults do, as many of their thoughts and feelings are expressed nonverbally through creative activity (Goodman 2005).

Our own approach to developing and facilitating arts-based methods with children and young people in need is holistic. There has long been a connection between art and creativity and the human spirit. We aim to work holistically, which means that we pay attention to all of life's dimensions including spiritually sensitive and existential issues and concerns. The consideration and incorporation of spirituality within helping and health professions is another area that has also experienced much growth and development in recent years. Indeed, much of the work examining spiritually sensitive practices is a phenomenon of the post-2000 period (Graham, Coholic and Coates 2006).

Generally speaking, within helping and health professions such as social work, nursing and psychology, spirituality and spiritually sensitive practices are conceptualized as distinct from religion and religiously based practices, such as prayer or attending church. Spirituality can be incorporated into practice:

- by way of assessment (asking about the importance of spirituality in a client's life)
- because of a client's culture and the links between the cultural worldview and spirituality
- because spirituality is an important part of the process of making meaning or sense of a situation, and developing understanding of some trauma or difficult life event
- because it is connected with coping resources and a person's resilience.

Social workers and other professionals, such as nurses and psychologists, have typically embraced definitions of spirituality that are inclusive of a variety of experiences, that encompass a diversity of beliefs and experiences, and that reflect the complexity of spirituality – these conceptualizations are considered further in the next chapter. For the purposes of setting the current context of knowledge development and practice in this area, I will note that, with regard to working with children and young people, there is especially a dearth of research that explores the use of spiritually sensitive methods with children (Josephson and Dell 2004). This includes mindfulness-based practices, which are just beginning to emerge as a topic in the literature that relates to working with children and young people. In Chapter 3, mindfulness-based practices are discussed as an important part of our holistic arts-based methods. In fact, this holistic philosophy underpins all of the group methods and processes.

So, the holistic arts-based group programme and individual methods that constitute the subject of this book reflect the increasing interest both in holistic health/helping frameworks and interventions, and in arts-based methods. A holistic and creative approach is also in harmony with, and is reflective of, the current emphases across helping and health professions, such as focusing on people's strengths and resilience; the possibility of positive growth in the face of adversity; empowerment perspectives; and client-centred approaches. Both holistic approaches and arts-based methods have a growing literature, and a need for research that

will investigate the effectiveness of these approaches. In particular, there is a lack of research that measures practice effectiveness and investigates the usefulness of specific holistic interventions across various disciplines, such as medicine, psychology and social work (Hodge 2006; Larimore, Parker and Crowther 2002). This is not unusual given the emergent nature of this knowledge, and it is not a criticism of the existing knowledge. As Kabat-Zinn (2003) states, in a field that is developing, it is not uncommon for the first generation of studies to be descriptive rather than definitive demonstrations of efficacy. Attempts at the latter evolve after the potential value of a new approach has at least been tentatively established.

The fact that there is much that remains to be explored in developing, facilitating and studying holistic arts-based methods is exciting, especially since these methods are proving to be successful and useful for children and young people in need. But what is it about children and young people that makes them particularly in need of, or particularly responsive to, these types of interventions?

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN NEED

Most of our work with children and young people in need has occurred with children between the ages of eight and thirteen. These children have typically suffered some type of loss or traumatic or difficult life experience, which is usually evidenced in their behaviours. These difficult life events include being removed from one's home and family because of experiences of physical and sexual abuse and neglect; not having enough food to eat and lacking other basic necessities of life; witnessing parents who are abusing drugs or who are violent; and emotional abuse and neglect. Many of these children have not received adequate love, attention, understanding and support, to give just a few examples. While children and young people in need are a diverse group, the effects of their difficult life experiences are evident. For example, some children have difficulty looking directly at the facilitators and maintaining eye contact, and may even communicate with

their bodies turned away, which cannot be attributed to specific cultural practices. Others cannot sit still unless their hands are busy creating or doing something, while others do not respond to any direct questions and simply shrug their shoulders in response. Some children act out with the other children, giggling inappropriately or even arguing and teasing each other, while others are hypervigilant and closely monitor everything that the facilitators and other children do.

One young person we worked with was very nervous about attending our group programme. Martha said very little to anyone and when she spoke it was in a very soft voice. She did not interact with the other group members and watched every activity closely before she would join in. In one exercise the group was decorating wooden clothespins and hers broke. We could see that she looked alarmed and anxious, and the facilitators quickly affirmed with her that it was an accident (which it was) and that it was no big deal that the wooden clothespin had broken – we had many more to replace it. At the time Martha happened to be attending our arts-based group programme, I had a social work student trainee. The student was able to pay a bit more attention to Martha during the group sessions in order to help draw her into the group activities and processes. This worked well for us as it allowed the other two facilitators to focus on the group methods and processes.

Other children and young people in need have difficulty focusing and listening to other participants and the facilitators – they frequently interrupt other group members, demand attention, and are easily frustrated. Our own experiences are consistent with Hansen (2006), who found that children with trauma histories have limited social skills, difficulty modulating their affect, poor sense of self, and trouble remaining grounded in the present moment. In general, trauma impacts basic notions of trust and secure attachment and can harm the child's developing sense of self (Osofsky 2004). It can also upset an individual's belief system and challenge their view of hope (Garbarino and Bedard 1996). In recent years, we have learned more about how trauma affects the brain. These effects of trauma or loss can begin to occur at an early age, when trauma's detrimental influence on the right side of the brain can

later manifest itself as an individual's inability to regulate emotion or verbally express feelings (Klorer 2005; Schore 2003). As Malchiodi (2008) explains, trauma reactions include physiological experiences – trauma affects the brain, resulting in the development of habitual responses such as unregulated emotions, noncompliant behaviour and cognitive problems. In summary, children and young people in need lack many of the characteristics of resilient children such as a positive self-concept/esteem, self-awareness, hopefulness/optimism, emotional expression, emotional management in stressful situations, and interpersonal problem-solving skills. Thus, they have a need to be helped to develop these characteristics and skills.

The effects of trauma and loss on children and young people could not have been clearer to us as when we recruited five children to act in an instructional film we produced based on our work and the facilitation of holistic arts-based methods. These children, living in stable, loving families and not having suffered many of the injustices, abuses and traumas common to children involved with child protection and mental health systems, listened attentively and paid attention to the facilitators and each other. They took part in the activities without giving us any problems, and displayed excellent social and communication skills. This experience affirmed for us that children with high needs require programmes and methods such as the ones described in this book to teach them the skills and awareness that their peers may already have.

Indeed, we are working with children and young people in need because there are serious concerns regarding the mental health of these children and, unfortunately, their future ability to fully participate in society (Racusin *et al.* 2005). They are particularly at risk of suicide, have higher rates of mental health problems (Charles and Matheson 1991) and carry a high burden of difficulties caused in part by the consequences of abuse, family breakdown and being taken into care. Certainly, the behaviours that the children bring into the group and individual sessions shape the development and facilitation of the holistic arts-based methods. This is a point that will be reiterated and discussed throughout this book as we discuss the facilitation of the arts-based methods with children and young

people in need. For instance, listening and attention skills have to be developed first before a child can be engaged in more complex arts-based exercises and methods. These children need to learn to pay attention not just to the facilitators and the other group members, but also to themselves and what they are feeling, thinking and doing.

Furthermore, some of the children need to be taught how to interact with their peers in appropriate and successful ways. One of the benefits of working with arts-based methods is that all of the children can be engaged in creative activities, even if they are not working together as a group on an exercise, and they can eventually learn to join with the other group members in group activity and processes. Another point to consider has to do with facilitating activities such as meditations or guided imagery exercises – it is unrealistic to expect children in need to close their eyes, especially if they are sitting together in a group. In fact, the meditations and breathing exercises, which must be short, work best if the children can find their own space in the room where they feel comfortable.

It is important to note that most of the discussions with the children take place while the holistic arts-based activities and methods are being conducted, and not afterwards, as might be the case with an adult who has a better developed ability and capacity to contemplate, analyse and talk about what they have created. Moreover, issues that the children identify and discuss are often raised spontaneously during the activity and processes. Also important to note is that these discussions are often brief. The children will typically express a thought or a feeling that emerges during an arts-based activity, for example 'I hate my mother', but then will quickly move on to something else. As a result, the facilitators often have to consciously shelve these issues and return to them at a later time to try and discuss further. Or the facilitators can identify a related theme that the group can address in an arts-based exercise. Themes could include, for example, feeling angry, how to cope with rejection, and making positive choices.

Further examples and discussions of these behaviours and the challenges that they present to practitioners and facilitators are found throughout this book.

Children and young people in need are often wary of engaging in any type of counselling experience; in fact, some researchers and practitioners would argue that they lack the skills for the usual talk therapies (Crenshaw and Hardy 2007; Darley and Heath 2008). As a result, holistic arts-based methods are particularly relevant and useful for this population of children. When we first meet with the children, they often express fears and thoughts that the programme they are being referred to is going to be boring and unpleasant. However, once we have a chance to show them the art rooms and tell them about the holistic arts-based methods, they are eager to begin. The usefulness of these methods for children in need is briefly demonstrated in the following two examples.

In the first example, Sally describes a collage that she made from pictures cut out from magazines. The collage represented a dream that she had (working with dreams is taken up in Chapter 4).

> *Sally*: It reminded me of my sisters and my family hanging out because we are like happy. And my dream was about family I guess. This is not really cookies, but it reminded me of, like I have three sets of families. And these two are like full, like I know my Smith side, and I know my Anderson side, and then the other side is really like only half and crumbled around.
>
> *Tim*: That is a really powerful image when you put it like that. So if those are families [referring to the pictures of cookies], what are the chocolate chips?
>
> *Sally*: I don't know, problems in my families.
>
> *Tim*: And what do you think of the crumbs?
>
> *Sally*: People, well, not really people, but the family in general, is like crumbled…like my sisters are wherever the heck they are, and my brothers are wherever they are. So it

is like people that are in my family but are like out there.

Barb: Do you think that it means anything that the cookies are overlapping?

Sally: Maybe, I don't know. I wasn't really thinking of that. I guess it could be me…maybe the middle means that all the families are joined by me.

Barb: They are all connected somehow.

Tim: They all have commonalities. Wow that is awesome.

Sally: Thank you.

This exercise of making the collage enabled Sally to talk about her families and express some of her feelings related to this situation. The collage provided her with a symbolic representation that she could describe and understand. Also, it offered an opportunity to explore how she might see her role in this situation in which her family members were scattered – an all too common situation for children and young people in need.

For a second example, Martha drew herself as a river (this exercise is described further in Chapter 4). The drawing and then painting of the picture enabled Martha to reflect on her life history and to express her feelings of hope for her future. In the following dialogue, Barb and Martha are discussing her picture, which contains three different rivers, some with bridges on them.

Barb: So what do those bridges represent?

Martha: This river represents my past. This one, the longest one, is my past. This one [pointing to a second river] is the present, and this one [pointing to a third river] is the future.

Barb: How come the past is the longest one?

Martha: Because this one represents sexual abuse, abuse by my father, my mother.

Barb: So, you feel like there are a lot of things in the past that have happened?

Martha: Yes.

Barb: I find it interesting how it is not connected to the future one.

Martha: I am glad that it is not connected.

Barb: So, you did that on purpose then?

Martha: Yes.

Barb: So, you see it as a separate part now, right?

Martha: Yes.

Barb: So are you on this piece of the bridge right now [pointing to a bridge on the river representing the present]? You feel like you are here working toward it?

Martha: Yeah.

Barb: So, what is on the present bridge?

Martha: My life now.

Barb: What are the really important things to you now?

Martha: That I have a home, that I am safe, that I have a nice school to go to.

Barb: Yes.

Martha: This [the present river] was also supposed to be long because there are some things [happening] at my school that have gone wrong.

Barb: Oh, so you wish that bridge could be a little bit longer but it is not as long as you like it. So how do you think that you could make that bridge longer?

Martha: Umm, just by being me.

Barb: So, if you think that you continue to be you, then the next time you are to draw this, then this bridge would be getting longer?

Martha: Yes.

Barb: What happens as the present bridge and the future bridge get longer?

Martha: They join up.

Barb: Oh, then those will be connected. Interesting. What about the past bridge, is that going to be connected?

Martha: Nope.

Barb: It is always going to be on its own. So, is it going to change in size?

Martha: Yep, it is going to go smaller and smaller [as time goes on].

Barb: As these two [present and future rivers] connect…

Martha: Then they become one long river. Then they will go down and down and down.

Barb: So what kinds of things do you see on the future bridge?

Martha: All my life is going to change.

Barb: So what is going to change? Give me an example. What would be on that bridge? Are those your goals and things that you are working towards?

Martha: That if I grow up, I get married, have kids.

The conversation continued and included Martha's feelings about the importance of having a family, and her feelings about her biological parents. Often, after a discussion of a picture, painting, and so on, other discussions can arise that do not have to be directly

related to the art-based creation but that stem from it – a relevant tangent of sorts.

As these examples briefly demonstrate, holistic arts-based methods can be really effective in assisting children in need to conceptualize and talk about their life histories, feelings, hopes and dreams.

AIMING TO IMPROVE SELF-AWARENESS AND SELF-ESTEEM

The goal of the holistic arts-based group and individual programmes is the improvement of self-awareness, self-esteem and resilience, which we think of as basic building blocks of good mental health and wellness. Self-esteem is vitally important for children's healthy development and without it they are more likely to have difficulties with peers, to develop psychological problems, and to do poorly in school (Kail and Zolner 2005). As is evident in many of the exercises and methods presented throughout this book, we talk often with the children about their values and what guides them in their daily lives when they are making choices about how they are going to feel, act, think, and so on. Being able to identify and understand why we are doing what we are doing goes hand in hand with a well-developed self-awareness. The need for the development of self-awareness is pointedly expressed by Beth who explains that 'I just do whatever comes to mind. I don't think if it's safe, if it's not, if it's stupid, so yeah.'

The goal of the holistic arts-based methods is based on the belief that self-awareness and self-esteem are important, and that there is a connection between developing self-awareness and improving self-esteem. The children attending our holistic arts-based programme understand the group and the individual work as a programme that will help them to understand themselves better and improve their self-esteem – they often describe it as a 'self-esteem group', which makes it less threatening for them compared with attending counselling or therapy.

Self-esteem and self-awareness are ubiquitous terms within helping and health professions, and are deemed important for

both practitioners and the people that they work with. For example, a practitioner who is unaware of their emotional responses to an angry or depressed client might react inappropriately with the client based on this unconscious transference reaction – they may infer that the client is angry with them or has no right to be angry when the anger is actually a valuable therapeutic moment. It is important that children and young people in need understand what they are feeling, thinking and doing, and why, so that they can do something about the feeling/thought/behaviour or situation, rather than being driven by unconscious feelings and thoughts that propel them to act out or put themselves into unsafe situations. Referring back to the example of Martha and the clothespin described earlier, understanding what she is feeling and how this anxiety is connected with past events can enable her better to discern when an anxious reaction is appropriate and when it is not, and can help her to understand that there are other perspectives, for instance that accidents happen to everyone and are a normal part of life. Developing self-awareness can improve her self-esteem by helping her to understand that she is not 'bad', nor has she done anything wrong.

If children understand themselves better and are more self-aware, there will be times when they can have more control and even choice over what they are feeling and thinking. Understanding that sometimes there are choices that can be made about feelings and thoughts can also help them to feel and think more positively and realistically about themselves – to develop their self-esteem. We agree with Schiraldi (2001) that self-esteem is essentially a realistic and appreciative opinion of oneself. It does not imply that one feels better than anyone else. As one girl expressed, self-esteem is 'not being shy…like when you're at school…being able to express your feelings, talk to people…not scared to do something'. Certainly, children in need who have suffered difficult life situations often feel poorly about themselves and describe themselves as inherently 'bad'. They do not recognize a difference between their behaviours and why they may act out, and their Selves. They expect bad things to happen to them, they are not assertive or confident, they feel marginalized at school and with peers, and they express

hopelessness about the future and their abilities, which they have trouble recognizing. Their potential to succeed in life has been significantly impacted.

The links between developing one's self-awareness and improving self-esteem are evident in the helping literature. As Sadao and Walker (2002) state, self-esteem is closely tied to knowing oneself and one's capabilities. Berger (2005) argues that, to develop self-esteem, we have to connect with all of what makes us who we are and that this connection arises when we learn about and express our feelings. Although Silvia and O'Brien (2004) acknowledge that self-awareness has a 'bad reputation' within social-clinical psychology because of its ties to negative affect, for example people can become locked in a cycle of self-criticism, they argue that without self-awareness one could not experience high self-esteem.

Although we think that developing self-awareness can engender a better sense of self-esteem, learning not to judge oneself too critically and learning appreciation or feeling gratefulness are also important components of this process. As Olendzki (2005) points out, people calibrate their self-esteem by constant comparison with others; consequently, they can feel impoverished in the face of abundance. Learning non judgement and appreciation or gratefulness is also part of learning the practice and philosophy of mindfulness, which is an important foundation for the holistic arts-based methods. I will note that the expressed improvement of self-esteem is not usually linked with mindfulness-based practices. Rather, in mindfulness-based approaches, the focus is usually on developing self-acceptance, self-compassion and positive well-being (Brown and Ryan 2003; Stewart 2004). This being said, we believe that these qualities are also an important part of self-esteem, and mindfulness can help one develop the self-awareness required for a positive sense of self. Self-awareness can develop from a connection with one's feelings and/or unconscious (and conscious) thoughts, and learning to pay attention to these feelings and thoughts. Importantly, holistic arts-based methods can be an outlet and expression for, and connection to, these thoughts, beliefs, feelings and behaviours. Rogers (1999) summarizes this process well, arguing that personal growth and a sense of wholeness are achieved

through self-awareness; self-awareness is attained by delving into our emotions; and the expressive arts allow us to express unknown facets of ourselves, thus bringing new awareness to light

In the following section, I consider the usefulness and relevance of holistic arts-based methods compared with traditional treatment methods for trauma; in other words, the role that arts activities can play or the place they can exist within this broader area of traditional practice and intervention.

TREATING TRAUMA

Conceptualizing 'trauma' can be complex given the broad range of experiences that have been described using the term. Trauma can be formed from 'the results of one sudden blow' or 'the results of longstanding or repeated ordeals' (Terr 1991, p.11). Some argue against any absolute understandings of trauma since suffering is produced and alleviated primarily by the 'meaning people attach to their experiences' (Crossley 2000, p.541). Our own understanding of trauma in children in need corresponds with Paton, Crouch and Camic (2009, p.45), who defined trauma 'as a way of describing a range of experiences that have some lasting impact for the individual'.

Traditional treatment of trauma usually entails the creation of a detailed story about the trauma or a trauma narrative (Lev-Wiesel and Liraz 2007). As Johnson (1987) explains, the person gains access to the memories in a safe and controlled manner so that he/she can re-examine these, which results in a modification of intensity and a transformation of the trauma into a memory that can be dealt with. Concerning children, Cohen, Mannarino and Deblinger (2006) argue that one of the goals of creating the narrative is to un-pair thoughts and discussions of the traumatic event from overwhelming difficult emotions, such as shame. Over the course of treatment, the child would be encouraged to describe greater details of what happened in addition to his/her thoughts and feelings during these times. After the trauma narrative is developed and discussed, unhelpful thoughts are explored

and corrected so that the child can better deal with the traumatic experience.

Similar to Sally's example described earlier (p.30) wherein she was able to express her conceptualization of her family, traumatic experiences can be expressed in a safer way via art, thus containing anxiety to a tolerable level (Kozlowska and Hanney 2001). Also, others have found that drawings aid the recall of important events in maltreated children (Veltman and Browne 2002). After the verbalization, the material can then be integrated in order to create meaning for the events in one's life (Hansen 2006). In general, the use of art facilitates exposure to traumatic cues in a less direct manner, allowing for desensitization of anxiety and a better understanding of affective states (Kozlowska and Hanney 2001).

However, this being said, it is important to keep in mind that while all children are affected by negative life experiences, not all of them will develop serious conditions such as posttraumatic stress disorder or associated symptoms, such as intrusive memories and anxiety. In fact, a variety of factors such as temperament, resilience, developmental level and external sources of support shape children's responses to difficult events (Cohen *et al*. 2006). Martha, who was described earlier in this chapter (p.27), is representative of a child that is suffering serious lasting effects of having been traumatized. However, the majority of children that we have worked with would not be classified as such. Thus, while there is no doubt that many children who experience the effects of traumatic experiences require intensive traditional treatment, one of the points that we would like to make is that for some children it will be a better idea to work with them on shoring up defences, stressing strengths, teaching social skills and problem-solving strategies. For instance, a child who has few hyperarousal and avoidance symptoms, little anxiety and no depression related to a traumatic or difficult experience might benefit from a programme that would include relaxation training, affective modulation and cognitive-processing components (Crenshaw and Hardy 2007).

Certainly, all of these practices listed above are important in holistic arts-based methods, as well as having 'fun'. So, the severity of a child's symptoms can help to determine whether they would be

better served by a more traditional treatment process or something akin to the holistic arts-based group programme and methods discussed in this book. That being said, children should also have adequate resources to undertake the demanding emotional work that is required in the traditional treatment of trauma, and the reality may be that many children do not have stable enough living conditions or adequate familial support. Therefore, holistic arts-based methods might be able to offer children some support and resources in the absence of a traditional treatment or counselling process (Coholic, Lougheed and Cadell 2009).

Another point to consider is that holistic arts-based methods might act as a bridge for some children who are in need of a more intensive counselling experience but are not ready to engage in this process. For example, John had experienced repeated sexual abuse but had never talked about this experience with anyone prior to attending our group. In fact, he very seldom expressed his feelings, but he did act out at school, often getting into trouble. He displayed poor social skills, was wary of adults, and described himself in negative terms. After a period of time working with the holistic arts-based group methods, he began to understand better what he was feeling and was able to identify trustworthy adults with whom he could talk about his feelings, which he began doing in the group, at home and at school. We did refer John for more intensive treatment when he completed our group programme so that he could address and deal with the abuse that he had suffered. But the holistic arts-based methods provided him with a foundation of basic skills such as listening, focusing and identifying feelings that he could build upon in a more intensive therapeutic process.

The reality that not all children exposed to trauma and difficulty will develop serious symptoms can of course be linked with the notion of resilience but also with a newer concept, that of posttraumatic growth. For instance, resilience is recognized as a factor that permits young people to survive in spite of difficulties. It is the effective nurturance of strengths and a matter of holistically supporting home, school and community resources that capitalize on young people's already existing strengths (Ryan and Hoover 2005). Posttraumatic growth is the idea and belief that a person

can experience positive change as a result of difficulty, adversity and/or trauma. The term 'posttraumatic growth' was coined by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996), and it refers to the idea that trauma can be a growth process that transforms (Kilmer 2006). It is this surpassing of the original state that differentiates growth from resilience (Kilmer 2006). Research and literature that investigates posttraumatic growth in children is beginning to emerge (Cryder *et al.* 2006; Ickovics *et al.* 2006; Salter and Stallard 2004). However, this research demonstrates that posttraumatic growth in children is characterized by alterations in five domains (the same as those found for adults). These are: new possibilities; relating to others; personal strength; appreciation of life; and spiritual change (Kilmer 2006).

While it has not been our intention to foster posttraumatic growth in the children with whom we have worked, we wonder if we are witnessing, in at least some of the children, aspects of posttraumatic growth according to the five domains listed above. As will be discussed later in this chapter, the children and their parents and foster-parents definitely identify changes in the first four domains – after completing the holistic arts-based group, the children feel that:

- they have choices and more control over their actions
- they get along better with family members and peers, and display improved social skills
- they can identify some of their strengths and positive qualities
- they can identify the things that they value, including their goals
- they develop some hope for the future.

Along these lines, this chapter's discussion ends with a description of specific examples of how children and young people in need

can develop their self-awareness and self-esteem through the use of holistic arts-based methods.

OUTCOMES AND FEEDBACK

Feedback from the children, and their parents and foster-parents, indicates specific examples of how the holistic arts-based methods are useful for the development of self-awareness, self-esteem and other aspects of resilience. We always conduct an individual interview with the parents or foster-parents and their children when the children and young people have completed a 12-week group or individual programme. Their feedback has assisted us in continuing to develop the holistic arts-based programme and methods, and has helped us to understand better how the methods can help children build strengths. We quickly learned to include foster-parents/parents in these interviews because often the children have difficulty articulating and explaining their experiences from the group or individual work. Also, they do not particularly like having to talk about what they enjoyed doing and what was challenging for them in the group or individual sessions. Indeed, many of them simply lack the skills for this and would much rather be engaged in the arts-based methods. Liz wrote on the whiteboard in the group room that the only thing that she did not like about the group was having to 'talk about what we like and don't like'.

Before presenting some of our findings, I will note that in order to further improve the gathering of information in these post-group interviews we have recently introduced the use of an inventory – the Post Traumatic Growth Inventory for Children – that is discussed by Cryder *et al.* (2006). The 21-item scale asks children to consider (about trauma) the very things that we are interested in knowing about our group programme and its potential outcomes; for example, 'I have learned what is most important to me', 'I feel closer to other people (friends and family) than I did before', and 'I learned that I can handle my problems'. The children respond on a scale from 'Not at all true for me' to 'Very true for me'. The inventory can also be used to assess the children's posttraumatic growth pre- and post-group experience. Additionally, we also encourage

the children to create something that represents what they enjoyed about the methods, or something that tells a story about them in group – something that would help us better understand their experience of the holistic arts-based methods.

One of the common areas of improvement is in the children's moods and feelings. Many explain how participating in the holistic arts-based programme helped them to feel 'happier' and more confident. As Andrea states, the group 'just made me happier…I just got to be myself, that's not usual…[usually] I try to be somebody else'. Importantly, Andrea was able to be authentic in the group, and she did not have to pretend to be anything other than herself because her authentic self was supported, acknowledged, affirmed and strengthened in the group. Another child thought that the arts-based methods helped her to

> relax and to…get to know myself a little bit better, and it's helped me make a couple of decisions…based on my behaviour and stuff…I'm sure if you look at the first group that I was here and then the last one, I've probably changed quite a bit. My foster-parents have said that they've seen like enormous positive changes.

Indeed, parents and foster-parents did notice many positive changes in many of the children and explained that 'you can see the difference in them, how they were feeling about themselves and stuff like that…big difference from the beginning to the end'. One mother stated: 'I've noticed that since he has done this [group]… that he smiles in the mirror a lot, like he's confident in himself… the way he even walks and everything, like he pulls himself up.' This increased confidence is also evident in other feedback that describes how some children were better able to assert themselves and stand up for themselves at school. In a post-group interview with a foster-mother and Maureen, the foster-mother reported that she thought Maureen was becoming better able to deal with difficult situations such as school. She states:

> Well I was telling her last week that she seems to be trying harder. You know? Applying herself more. I see something different. School has been a big challenge for Maureen and

> I see her starting to work through things a little bit more, and talking a little bit more. I think that has been a positive change that I have seen in a really short amount of time… The thing that I would like her to continue to work on is to not be so hard on herself. She is really hard on herself.

Being better able to interact and deal with familial and peer relationships is another commonly shared outcome expressed by the children and their parents/foster-parents. As Sue explained, she feels more comfortable in school and with peers: 'I'm always with someone, like when we walk down the street there's always two of us…three of us all the time…before I just walked by myself, I didn't care.' We witnessed a lot of growth in Sue who initially presented as a withdrawn, unconfident and negative teenager. By the end of her involvement with the group programme, she was much more talkative and was able to articulate her strengths and her dreams for the future. Her increased belief in her abilities and her newfound confidence assisted her in reaching out to friends and family and in forming positive relationships. Learning to care for and about herself, and coming to believe that she is an important person who matters in this world, helped Sue to be with others. Similarly, Doug believed that he 'learned to get along with new people', which was a solid accomplishment for him as he often became involved in altercations at school with other boys and girls.

Lee explained how she is becoming more patient and feeling more calm/grounded and better able to deal with her little sister, Judy. This is evident in a post-group discussion with Lee's child protection worker/practitioner, her foster-father and her biological mother, all of whom attended the post-group interview. One of the positive outcomes here is that Lee's improved way of being was evident across the different contexts of her life; that is, within her foster family, with her biological mother, and when she was with her helping practitioner.

Lee: I like the breathing exercises.

Barb: What about that was really helpful for you?

Lee: Um, that I stop getting really, really frustrating.

Barb: Can you give me an example of a time when you would have gotten frustrated but you used that [breathing] instead?

Lee: When Judy [her little sister] gets in the way.

Barb: Okay.

Lee: I just don't scream or anything.

Worker: I think you did a good one today when she ran into you.

Lee: Yeah [before] I would have hit her.

Worker: What did you do? Yeah, what did you say?

Lee: Ow!

Worker: And what else did you say? 'Judy, don't do that, that hurts', or something. You said it really calmly.

Lee: Yeah, that hurts.

Worker: But you were really calm about it though.

Foster-father: I myself, I notice that Lee's not screaming at her sister as much.

Barb: Well that's good.

Foster-father: That's a good thing because she would really, because Judy's a big instigator sometimes. So Judy would instigate…and then Lee would really lash out, you know…so you don't do that very much any more and I'm glad…And they seem to play together a lot better I find. She's not getting as frustrated with her when they're playing cards together.

Mother: Yes, I notice that too at home with her visits. I'm her mother and I've noticed that too at home that she's a little nicer with her little sister.

Another outcome of using holistic arts-based methods is the development of the children's imaginations. As Billy stated, 'The group helped with my imagination. I didn't really use my imagination all that much, so now I use it.' This is important because imagination can among other things help children achieve goals and develop empathy for others. One of the aims of many of the methods described in this book is to help children understand that multiple perspectives can exist, which can help them to understand and change their own viewpoints, not to mention that being able to understand and consider a variety of perspectives is also important for the development of good critical-thinking skills. Billy provides an example of how improved imagination skills helped him to be successful in playing basketball. He explained how he visualized the basket as an ice-cream cone and the ball as the ice-cream that needs to sit on top of the cone. He said, 'It's that easy [to sink a basketball]!'

We would expect that, as the children develop their self-awareness and a connection with what they are feeling, they would begin to express their feelings; and indeed, this outcome is often described by the children's foster-parents and parents, helping practitioners and even their teachers. As one foster-parent explained, both she and Mark's teacher had noticed that Mark was talking about his feelings and thoughts more, which could also be attributed to developing trust in others: 'I've noticed that he speaks more about his feelings…whatever bothers him which before, that was a big no-no.' Some of the children learn to make improved choices based on a better ability to understand what they are feeling – an improved self-awareness of their feelings, which influences their interactions with peers and accounts for some of the reported improvement in peer relationships and social skills. Sally explains that in the group she learned to talk about her feelings of anger with her mother instead of just reacting to them:

Sally: I don't just get mad.

Barb: What do you do differently instead?

Sally: I don't just get mad…Sometimes I talk about it with my mom.

It is our hope that the children are learning methods, techniques and exercises that they can continue to use on their own. As Billy explained, 'At home, I do a lot of stuff that I got teached here.' This is exactly the type of outcome we wish to foster, and many of the holistic arts-based exercises can be sustained by the children and their parents/foster-parents outside of any formal helping process. It is important to try to foster independence and the development of skills that children can utilize on their own so that they can continue their process of discovery and growth, and they can better deal with and address all of the problems and challenges that are yet to come.

These outcomes described here are not unsurprising and can be linked back to what we already know about the usefulness of play and creative activity. The use of play as a powerful combative force against suffering is substantiated by Brown (2007) who wrote: 'In the midst of childhood suffering, play and expressive activities serve as a powerful antidote' (p.32). Also, as James (1989) states, 'It is fun that keeps the child emotionally receptive so that the intense positive messages can slip through her defences' (p.13).

CONCLUSION

Both arts-based methods and holistic interventions are experiencing growth and increased utilization across helping and health professions. There is much research that discusses the incorporation of these methods and interventions, and that advocates for their usefulness with a wide variety of people and problems. Regarding children, this work is emerging but shows great promise for helping children and young people deal with issues, and develop skills and healthy ways of being. Our own approach in integrating arts-based methods and a holistic perspective is somewhat unique, particularly in work with children and young people in need. Holistic arts-based methods can assist children in need to develop their self-awareness and self-esteem, their ability to cope more productively with challenging life situations, to get along in

socially appropriate ways with peers and family members, and to feel more in control of their feelings, thoughts and behaviours.

There is a particular need for programmes and interventions for children and young people with high needs who are struggling with the effects of their difficult life situations. In general, they have poor prognoses for future functioning while, at the same time, relevant helping and health services are lacking in many jurisdictions. Many of these children and young people require programmes that can engage them in a less threatening process that aims to shore up their defences and coping skills, that stresses their strengths, and that teaches them problem-solving strategies and how to relax and be mindful. Self-awareness and self-esteem are crucial building blocks for a healthy life. Holistic arts-based methods are a fun and creative way to help children and young people develop this important foundation, and they can be offered in a wide variety of contexts by various helping and health practitioners.

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CHAPTER 2

Spirituality and Spiritually Sensitive Helping

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF SPIRITUALITY WITHIN HELPING AND HEALTH PROFESSIONS

The concept and incorporation of spirituality within helping and health professions has received much attention especially since the year 2000. In the past several years, we have witnessed a rapid proliferation of the research literature in this area along with many associated conferences held around the Western world. This demonstrates that the drive to work from more holistic models of helping and health practice is growing across professions and shows no signs of abating. Some holistic interventions, such as mindfulness, have even gained a lot of popular awareness within Western mainstream society. Thus, in some ways, those of us working in professions such as social work, nursing, psychology and education are reconnecting and exploring again the importance of spirituality that has been noted throughout the 20th century by well-known

humanistic psychologists Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, and by existential theorists Viktor Frankl and Erich Fromm.

It is not necessarily a straightforward process to encapsulate into words the meaning of concepts such as spirituality. The language that is used to discuss spirituality and related issues can be confusing or unable to fully encompass the experience of spirituality. Words such as spirituality, spiritual dimension, spirit, soul, higher power, inner self, Universe, God and goddesses can evoke a myriad of personal meanings. Often spiritually sensitive experiences are highly personal and felt on an emotional level rather than expressed in words. However, generally speaking, within helping/health professions, spirituality and religion are understood differently, although it is also understood that they can overlap and shape one another. Spirituality often refers to a universal aspect of human life that encompasses experiences that transcend the self: it is necessarily self-defined. Also, the concept of interconnectedness, a belief in the inherent worth of people and nature, and a belief in an ultimate purpose are common to most definitions (Coates *et al*. 2007).

Within our own research and practice, we understand spirituality in this inclusive and diverse manner. A nonsectarian definition of spirituality is far more palatable to most social workers and other helping and health professionals because it fits more with these professions' values, goals and histories of development. While the information presented in this chapter reflects the dominant perspective concerning how spirituality and spiritually sensitive practices are usually conceptualized within helping/health professions, we understand, and I have argued elsewhere with one of my colleagues, that this dream of an all-inclusive spirituality can be problematic in that it relies on the possibility of an innocent spirituality, somehow disconnected from histories of oppression (Todd and Coholic 2007). Also, it could be argued that a generic understanding of spirituality based on humanistic values does not fit for clients from some religious backgrounds. It is quite likely that helping and health professionals will never come to full agreement concerning how spirituality should be defined. Suffice it to say that debates regarding the complexities of conceptualizing spirituality

and religion within the helping and health professions will and should continue, but that this discussion is beyond the scope and intent of this chapter.

Spirituality is often incorporated into helping and health practices because clients raise the issues for consideration; their culture dictates the necessity of considering it; and it is important for the way that many people cope with problems. Holistic and spiritually sensitive practices usually refer to methods that are different from religious practices, such as praying. Holistic interventions often include:

- helping people to make meaning of a situation; for example, understanding why a particular event has happened to them
- using meditation and mindfulness-based practices to teach a holistic philosophy of life or specific practices such as increased compassion
- the recognition of people's inherent resilience and coping resources; for instance, some people rely on their spiritual beliefs for support
- social activism towards the betterment of communities and the environment.

(Canda and Furman 1999; Graham, Coholic and Coates 2006)

The idea that spiritually sensitive practice is effective is also a strong theme found within the research and academic literature. In fact, it seems to underpin many of the arguments for the inclusion of spirituality in helping and health practice, and within other fields, such as adult education. For instance, it has been contended that when spirituality is ignored, the fulfilment of people's potential for wholeness, their right fully to express their experience, and creative transformation are all restricted (Russel 1998; Walker 1998). Research that investigates the actual effectiveness of holistic

methods is emerging and our own work in this area is a step in this direction.

Although holistic helping methods and interventions are increasingly being discussed and studied across helping and health professions, the marginalization of these approaches continues for various reasons. For example, some of the wariness about considering and incorporating spirituality into practice stems from the historical processes of secularization and professionalization that helping professions such as social work underwent in order to gain recognition and credibility (Clark 1994). Also, some helping professionals may be concerned with blurring professional and personal boundaries with clients. A lack of clarity surrounding definitions of spirituality and religion creates confusion and can lead to fears of proselytizing. As I explained in the introduction, others are concerned with colleagues' opinions and worry that they will be viewed as unprofessional (or worse) if they incorporate spirituality into their practices (Holmes 1994; Russel 1998). Moreover, the lack of empirical knowledge in this emergent field may discourage some professionals from incorporating a spiritual dimension in their work. However, many professionals are simply not aware of the burgeoning literature and developments in this area (Coholic, Cadell and Nichols 2008).

It is important for various reasons for us to consider how we can work holistically with people, including the fact that the people with whom we work will often raise these issues themselves, and spiritual issues are integral to the problems they present or are intimately connected with their cultural beliefs and practices. So, it is not something that we as practitioners can always avoid addressing, nor should we strive to do so because, in doing so, we may be affecting the relevance and effectiveness of our practices and methods. For instance, if a young person decides to leave his faith and his family shuns him as a result, we cannot avoid discussing his spiritual and religious beliefs, and those of his family and community. The same is true in the case of a homosexual young person who feels unaccepted within and by their faith and family, or a child who is dying and coming to terms with that process, or a traumatized child who is trying to make sense of the

broad existential issues that inevitably arise when a trauma occurs in one's life experience.

Interestingly, much of the impetus for the study of spirituality in helping and health professions is based in client and student demands for it. In my own research, I have found that undergraduate and graduate social work students desired places in their programmes of study where they could explore spiritually sensitive issues. However, most of these students believed and experienced that their professors and fellow students were not open to doing so for a variety of reasons, some of which were listed earlier (Coholic 2003, 2006). As an educator, my own belief is that we do a disservice to our students when we do not help to fully prepare them for some of the issues that they will face in their work. In fact, some students end up practising within contexts such as old-age homes and palliative care hospices where their clients' spiritual beliefs will be highly relevant to consider. Additionally, one's spiritual viewpoints, or lack thereof, are important to consider in the process of developing personal and professional self-awareness. In my experience, many social work students have had negative experiences with religion and bristle when the topic is initially raised. But like many other topics, such as racism, heterosexism, classicism, ageism, and so on, it is relevant to understand our feelings and thoughts about these matters so that we can be most effective in our work with others.

SPIRITUALITY AND CHILDREN

Consistent with the trajectory of knowledge development for many other helping methods and approaches, investigations and applications of theory often occur first with adult groups and populations. As Koepfer (2000) reports, although addressing spiritual issues in therapeutic settings has become increasingly common in many areas of health care, one area that has lagged in this regard is paediatric medicine. That said, spirituality has been examined in paediatric nursing care as part of the overall quality of health care provided (Elkins and Cavendish 2004) and as an integral aspect of a child's culture (Gottlieb 2004; McEvoy

2003). The potential impact of spirituality has also been identified as an important factor to consider for the serious medically or psychiatrically ill child (Sexson 2004; Zengerle-Levy 2004), especially in the areas of death/dying and HIV/AIDS (Himelstein *et al.* 2004; Hurwitz, Duncan and Wolfe 2004; Jones and Weisenfluh 2003; Lyon, Townsend-Akpan and Thompson 2001; Stuber and Houskamp 2004). Other research reports that spirituality was a resiliency factor in helping children cope with childhood abuse and homelessness (Kidd 2003; Lindsey *et al.* 2000; Valentine and Feinauer 1993), and that spiritual growth is significantly related to an adolescent's initiative and responsibility for self-care (Callaghan 2005).

Duff (2003) describes the development of spirituality in children as including three features: awareness, self-knowledge and transcendence. By assisting children to develop these aspects of spirituality, they are helped to understand themselves and the world, and not just conform to it. It is also described as a lens through which we view mind and body relationships, reflecting life's deepest longings: purpose, direction and meaning. Consequently, spirituality may be especially important to a young person's search for self-identity, life purpose, direction and meaning (Doswell, Kouyate and Taylor 2003). Similarly, spiritually sensitive methods may assist children to build their resilience by helping them to explore their sense of purpose, autonomy and social competence – broad patterns of strengths from which resilience derives (Benard 2004). Spirituality's connection with resilience is discussed by Ungar, Dumond and McDonald (2005), who explain that resilient children have an awareness of a greater good that is synonymous with what we often perceive as spirituality.

While there is a prevalent myth that children are not capable of cognitively grasping spiritual ideas and concepts, the reality is different (Fisher 1999; Hart 2004; Scott 2004). For some examples, the existential suffering that terminally ill children suffer can be similar to what adults experience (Attig 1996); pre-adolescents can be interested in moral, religious and spiritual questions (Tirri, Tallent-Runnels and Nokelainen 2005); and spirituality can be a critical component of a child's well-being (Walker 2005). In

harmony with our work is the perspective that a child's personal identity should be understood to be embedded in their understanding of their life purposes through how they relate, and is therefore spiritual and existential in character (Webster 2005).

Children's spiritual beliefs can be used to further the development of self-awareness and understanding. We share the viewpoint that helping children construct meaning may involve respecting their spiritual beliefs (Crenshaw 2006). I will note that this is particularly relevant for children from Indigenous cultures where spirituality is often an essential aspect of life. Indeed, there is a strong connection between the importance of art, symbols, rituals and other spiritually sensitive and creative methods for Indigenous peoples. For example, story telling is often used to share cultural/spiritual teachings (Struthers 2003). Story telling and art can also be used in educational and classroom curriculum to help children better understand their culture (Hoffman *et al.* 1991; Yazzie-Mintz 2007). In fact, the use of arts-based methods has been linked with Indigenous spirituality and humanistic value systems and perspectives (Herring 1997).

In general, it is not uncommon for connections to be made between arts-based methods and spirituality and spiritual perspectives. For example, Rogers (1999) argues that expressive arts are a creative connection to the soul. The point to keep in mind is that, in a holistic arts-based group and methods, children are encouraged to make sense of their experiences in a holistic manner if they deem this to be important. If we ignore the spiritual dimension of children's lives, we may be missing an opportunity to help them construct narratives that accurately and effectively fit their experiences. It is important to stress with the children that spirituality has diverse meanings and usually means something different to everyone. When children know that you are open to working with all of life's dimensions – the physical, emotional, cognitive and spiritual – unexpected conversations and therapeutic moments often occur.

For one example, a group of boys were playing a game in which they were trying to guess the identity of a person that one of the children had drawn. In a tangent to the discussion of the game,

one of the boys wondered out loud, 'When God created man he was joking?' Then, returning to the game, he enquires about the other boy's drawing, 'Is it God when he first created man?' The following conversation ensued:

Roger: [repeating] Is it God when he first created man?

Jeremy: No.

Tim: Is it Akon?

Peter: Akon is weird.

Roger: Does anybody here believe in God?

Jeremy: No.

Roger: Do you? [asking Jeremy]

Jeremy: No.

Roger: Who believes in God?

Barb: I believe in God.

Tim: [asking Roger] Do you believe in God?

Roger: Yeah. Do you? [asking Tim]

Tim: I think so, yes.

Peter: [back to the game] The lady that made that song.

Jeremy: No.

Barb: Is it a woman?

Jeremy: It's a boy.

Peter: Well, it sure does have a big dress! [group laughs]

Barb: What is the boy wearing?

Tim: [back to Roger's question] Roger, what made you ask that question?

Roger: What do you mean?

Tim: Well, that's a fantastic question to ask…What were you thinking about that made you ask that?

Roger: Huh?

Tim: What were you thinking about that made you think of that?

Roger: I don't know.

Barb: Is there something you want to talk about Roger?

[The game continues along until they solve the puzzle.]

Tim: Okay, well we'll take a second here to regroup and do some clay work now. I'm really interested to follow up with Roger, if Roger had something to talk about. He asked a question about God.

Roger: Who believes in God?

Tim: I think you got an answer out of everybody.

Roger: [goes back to the boy who said he didn't believe in God] Jeremy, do you?

Jeremy: No.

Roger: You don't believe in God?

Jeremy: No.

Roger: Then who do you think created you, Mary?

Jeremy: Yeah.

Roger: Mary is God's wife.

Barb: Is God something that's important to you Roger?

Roger: I don't know. Yeah. When Mary created um, woman, she was joking.

Tim: I don't get it.

Roger: Neither do I! And when God created men he was joking, and I don't get that.

Barb: Did you hear that somewhere?

Roger: Yeah, Trish, my friend.

Tim: What do you think she meant by it?

Roger: It's just an old saying.

Tim: It sounds like it might be a put-down.

[The group then moves on to another activity.]

In a second example with a group of girls, the following conversation took place beginning with Sally describing her picture:

Sally: Well the sun is pretty much in the sky so I think… the moon is on one side and the sun is on the other because they are always in the sky. Heaven is in the sky.

Tim: So you think heaven is up there above us?

Sally: Yeah, and the bottom is you know who.

Lee: The devil, hell.

Sally: You aren't supposed to say it! I never say it.

Tim: Why do you think that you aren't supposed to say it?

Sally: It isn't lucky.

Tim: I ask you these questions because I am really interested to know what you think.

Barb: We want to hear what you have to say.

Lee: I have to say that she meant that the devil is at the bottom and he lives in hell.

Sally: Yeah, and he is a bad person.

Andrea: Hell isn't a bad word unless you use it in negative words…I watched this show. Have you ever seen [name of the show]? At the beginning there is this guy that is really bad and he robs banks for a long time. Do you know what he said? He said that he would 'See you in hell'.

Tim: Right, so that would be an example of using that word in a negative way.

Although the next example of how spiritually oriented conversations can arise is unusual in that we have not worked with many children who have discussed religious beliefs and struggles, it demonstrates how one might go about helping a child explore this and their related thoughts and feelings without imposing one's own beliefs, judgements, and so on. In this example, Barb and Dawn have just come back to the group room after conducting a mindfulness exercise outside where they took a walk and wrote down everything that they noticed. Barb makes a decision to explore Dawn's expressions related to religion before discussing the mindfulness activity that they had just engaged in because Dawn has repeatedly raised this issue and it seems important to her.

Barb: Wasn't that nice? We did our walk outside. Do you need something else now? Okay, so the first thing I want to do is…I want to compare the lists that we made, when we made our observations outside.

Dawn: There is one movie that I saw that you shouldn't let your kids watch until they are 13 or 14 years old. It is called [name of the movie].

Barb: I have never heard of it.

Dawn: That is because it is a Christian movie.

Barb: What is it about?

Dawn: It is about a man who is a monk, his name is Luther. Martin Luther. What he does in the beginning of the movie, he is doing the mass because he is Catholic. He was

doing his first mass, he did the bread and that was fine. He went like this with the cup and his hands were shaking and he spilt the wine, and his father got mad at him.

Barb: So do you watch a lot of Christian movies?

Dawn: We saw it at my school.

Barb: Oh you saw the movie at your school? Yeah? So what role does religion play in your life?

Dawn: Um, I am finding myself Catholic.

Barb: Yeah?

Dawn: Because every time when nobody is looking I do this [making the sign of the cross]. I am feeling that I am becoming Catholic.

Barb: What religion have you been raised?

Dawn: Ever since I lived with my dad, I had no religion. After a few years I became a Christian and now I am turning Catholic. So it is like no religion to Christian to Catholic.

Barb: So you don't identify with any particular religion right now?

Dawn: Yeah. Although I can't go to a Catholic church because my parents won't let me go.

Barb: So do you go to a church now?

Dawn: To a Catholic church?

Barb: To church?

Dawn: Yeah.

Barb: You are making me wonder if we shouldn't do an activity about this because you are talking so much about religion and stuff. Is there something that you want to

draw or make that could represent what you are feeling right now?

Dawn: I don't know.

Barb: You brought up a lot about being Christian and now you are saying that you feel more Catholic.

Dawn: I don't like being a Christian. I would just rather eat. Not read the Bible. Do my thing…But instead my parents are putting God first in my life. I am saying that this is driving me nuts. We eat supper, well actually we pray and then eat supper. Then we read the Bible and then we do a whole bunch of other things. Then I have to do all my stuff.

Barb: So you feel it's…there is not enough time in the day?

Dawn: Not important…I don't feel that what the Christians do is important.

Barb: It is not important?

Dawn: Yeah.

Barb: But you have religious values, right? You said that you feel that you are Catholic and you find yourself doing the sign of the cross, and you mentioned about God.

Dawn: It is because the Catholics don't believe in God.

Barb: Who told you that?

Dawn: A lot of them worship Mary and others.

Barb: Yeah, but they still believe that there is God.

Dawn: Oh yeah?

Barb: Yes…So what is this struggle that you are having then? What is it?

Dawn: I don't know.

Barb: You don't know? It is hard maybe just finding a place for religion in your life? You feel unsure about where it fits in?

Dawn: Yeah.

Barb: It is probably the same with other things in your life right now. You are trying to figure out how everything fits into your life? We will definitely come back to that when we move onto this other activity…Did you want to go over the lists of the mindfulness walking? Or do you want to make something? What do you want to make? Do you want to sculpt something?

Dawn: Yeah.

Barb: Okay, open it up [the package of clay]. So are you going to make something to represent the spiritual side of you? How does that sound? Since that is the thing that we seem to be touching on throughout the last couple of weeks.

Dawn: I will try to make something. [begins working with the clay]

Barb: What are you making?

Dawn: The cross of Jesus Christ.

Barb: Why is it on a circle?

Dawn: This is supposed to look like this…The sky is supposed to be in red because God is sending his grace to his Son. His Son Jesus took all the sin in the world.

Barb: You put a lot of thought into what you are making.

Dawn: Would you like to know what I would never step my foot on?

Barb: What would you never step your foot on?

Dawn: I would never set my foot on evolution.

Barb: What do you mean by that?

Dawn: I would not listen to evolution.

Barb: Oh no?

Dawn: I don't know. So anyways, do you like it?

Barb: I really like it. Tell me about what you sculpted? Oh my goodness, look at all the detail.

Dawn: Done!

Barb: Very nice, that looks great.

Dawn: Guess what I forgot to put on? A body. See there is the head, the arms and the feet. No body.

Barb: Any reason?

Dawn: I forgot to put the body.

Barb: So are you going to tell me a little more about it while you put the body on? So what kind of feeling do you have when you look at what you sculpt? What does it make you feel? Does it give you any particular feeling?

Dawn: Not really.

Barb: No? Any memory that goes along with that?

Dawn: Yeah.

Barb: What is the memory?

Dawn: That Christ died for us, like nearly 2000 years ago. Two million years ago.

Barb: So it makes you think about Christ then?

Dawn: Yeah. This is actually the first thing that I have ever sculpted.

Barb: Oh yeah? Now that looks like something pretty special. Now there are a lot of other really special things that you made around this room too.

While the above conversations occurred spontaneously during other activities, the topics, issues and questions were obviously important enough for the children to raise them. A friend and colleague of mine once told me that the core issue that brought her into her own counselling and therapy was a spiritual one but that she never identified or conceptualized this with her therapist because she did not believe that he would be open to having that discussion. On the contrary, within the holistic arts-based group work and methods, we want to demonstrate to the children that we are open to these types of conversations. Consequently, we sometimes utilize exercises that facilitate thinking and talking about ideas related to spirituality. Some of these are described next.

FACILITATING SPIRITUALLY SENSITIVE DISCUSSIONS

We find that most children have ideas about spirituality but that their thoughts are often tentative and in flux, which makes sense given their developmental stages and life situations. Also, there are a variety of opinions expressed ranging from having not thought about it at all, to detailed ideas about what spirituality means to them. When discussions related to spirituality arise, the children know that they are free to explore these ideas and may even be encouraged to do so. This process has led to some interesting discussions that may be unique, for these children, to the group interaction and methods.

Examples of how children make sense of spirituality include the following. In one girls' group, one of the girls stated that something 'touched her soul'. The facilitator then asked the group what the 'soul' meant to them. Responses included:

- 'Your soul is the inner you or something.'
- 'It's basically what makes us who we are…boring in this world if we were like everyone else.'
- 'I don't know…If we had no soul, then we wouldn't be who we are. It's hard to explain, but if you sell your soul then… it's like you're not living.'

For other children, spirituality is about the choices that they make in life, or it is akin to using your imagination: 'It means that you believe in stuff. You believe things that could happen to you.' Another young person explained what spirituality meant to her: 'Well what I thought it meant was yourself and how you look at yourself, and the way God looked at you I guess. The way you lead yourself through this world. So yeah, I still think it is that.'

We have facilitated explorations and discussions about spirituality by encouraging the children to draw whatever comes to their minds when they think about spirituality. Common pictures include ghosts, rainbows and angels. One child reported that the word 'spirituality' made her think of Shakespeare, 'the dude that invented poetry'. Importantly, the facilitators display an openness to the children's thoughts and emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers. Games can also be used to help the children discuss their thoughts and feelings related to many things, including spiritual themes. For example, we have modified a game played with small rectangular-shaped wooden blocks – Jenga (see www.hasbro.com/games/family-games/jenga). The goal of the game is to build a tower from the blocks by stacking them on top of one another. Blocks are removed from the tower and placed on top until the tower cannot support itself any longer and falls down. We attached words printed on pieces of paper to the blocks and when each block is chosen a word association occurs. Words such as Spirit, Dream, Angels, Wind, World, Hope, Sun, and so on are used. In one game, the word 'Angels' led to associations with heaven, spirits, singing, rainbows and best friends. Often the words lead to discussions about the meaning behind the words and varied associations with them. For instance, for one boy 'Fire' made him think about the Fantastic Four and one of the characters that uses fire as their power. This type of association can then lead to a further discussion about, for example, heroes, super powers, good and evil, and teamwork. The possibilities for dialogue are endless but are always aimed at discovering and exploring as much as possible the children's values, thoughts and beliefs.

Spirituality can also be discussed in terms of values – What guides the children in their lives? What helps them make decisions

and choices? What sorts of things do they feel connected to that guide their thoughts, actions, feelings, etc.? What do they value? What is important for them? Children discuss how their brains, minds, friends, bodily senses and feelings guide them as well as activities that make them feel good or happy. For some children, people inspire them. One child explained how fishing guided him because it provided him with good food to eat. In one exercise, the children were encouraged to construct radios (from boxes and art materials) with different channels that corresponded to what guides them and what they listen to. This led to a discussion about how our egos or minds might want one thing and our hearts and spirits might want another thing. One child provided the example of how her heart/spirit might tell her to 'hang out' with the nice girl in her class, while her mind or ego might encourage her to associate with the 'cool group'. These discussions and exercises are then connected with the need to develop the ability to listen and pay attention to our thoughts and feelings so that we can better understand the different messages that guide us in our lives.

Sometimes the children will share something that they are struggling with that happens to be related to a spiritual theme. In the following dialogue Mary was talking about the religious beliefs of her family and the Christian youth group that she was currently attending. Barb, the facilitator, listened to her and affirmed the struggle to understand oneself. Barb expressed her hope that the arts-based methods could help Mary in this direction of developing her self-awareness. Importantly, our aim is to provide a context where the children and young people will feel free to raise issues related to spirituality and religion because sometimes these beliefs are an important part of who they are, who their families are and who they are becoming.

Mary: I don't know what's wrong with me. My heart is saying that I am Christian but my whole body is saying, no, you're not a Christian.

Barb: So you are really struggling then, finding out who you are?

Mary: Yeah.

Barb: How do you find what guides you or lets you feel like your true self?

Mary: I don't know what guides me. I don't know.

Barb: How do you think you are going to figure that out?

Mary: Maybe I will understand when I am older.

Barb: Yes, and maybe through some of the activities where we talk about ourselves. Maybe that will help you learn more about yourself too.

Spirituality has also been integrated into our groups by way of attention to the children's cultures. For people from some cultures, spirituality or religious beliefs are inseparable from cultural beliefs and practices. In our own experience given our physical location in northeastern Ontario, Canada, this incorporation has occurred most frequently with regard to Indigenous children – many Indigenous people live in the northern part of Ontario. We often have Indigenous children in our groups as many Indigenous children come into contact with the child protection and mental health systems due to ongoing experiences of colonization, racism and discrimination suffered by their families and communities. As well as having had experiences where the children themselves introduced culturally/spiritually relevant exercises such as drumming and singing, one of our group facilitators has also integrated culturally sensitive exercises using teachings from her own Indigenous tradition. It is important to encourage the children to express and share their culture/spirituality with the group, particularly when this culture has been oppressed and the children continue to be marginalized within mainstream society.

As well as introducing discussions and considerations about spirituality, and having the children spontaneously raise related issues and questions, spiritual themes are connected to specific topics that arise during the arts-based methods. These topics include the issue of death; what happens after death; the nature of life; keeping oneself safe; and the struggle between good and

bad. The last issue, the struggle between good and bad (or good and evil), is most evident in the discussion regarding working with dreams that is found later in Chapter 4.

DEATH, LIFE AND SAFETY ISSUES

The children we see frequently raise issues connected to the theme of death, which is not unsurprising given the many losses that these children have experienced in their short lives. Their ability to discuss these issues as well as other existential matters demonstrates that children are interested in contemplating the nature of life. For instance, they may report that they can see people and animals that have died; for example, 'I always think my grandma is watching me and sometimes I get ticklish by myself, so I like to think it's her…She's always around my dad. I know that.' In response to a facilitator's question, this child stated that it feels good knowing that somebody is with him. So, he could be trying to create a relationship that he never had or attempting to help himself feel safer and more secure. Other children appear to try and hold on to something important to them that has passed on. One girl talked about seeing her dog as a ghost – a dog that she had had for a long time and that she felt was protective of her.

In the following example, the children engaged in an exercise in which they were guided through a meditation that included imagining themselves inside a crystal. After the guided imagery, they drew a picture of what they had imagined. Beth's picture consists of a wolf howling at the moon – the wolf and moon are inside the bubble/crystal, as can be seen in Figure 2.1.

In a discussion about this drawing Beth explained:

> Well I've liked wolves and I believe that you always stay here on earth to continue until you get really good…you undo all the mistakes you did in your life. And I believe that before I was a wolf. Wolves were strong…you know how wolves are in a pack…well I'm really strong. I went through a lot but I've always come out stronger.

Figure 2.1 Wolf howling at the moon

I like this example because it is such a good one in terms of demonstrating the richness of the children's narratives, even if they are short (see also Coholic, Lougheed and LeBreton 2009). In this example, Beth is expressing beliefs about her strengths and resilience, and reincarnation. It matters less that you share these beliefs and more that they are used to enrich Beth's self-awareness and facilitate her self-exploration. There are a myriad of exploratory questions one could ask regarding the picture in the above example; for instance, what mistakes does she think she is responsible for? What further meaning does she ascribe to being a wolf? Does she feel like she is part of a pack or is she a loner? Does she feel persecuted, such as many wolves are, or does she feel strong? Who is part of her pack? What is appealing about being a wolf? What

has adversity taught her about herself, about others and about life in general? What are her strengths? What does she feel she needs to accomplish in her lifetime?

In the following dialogue, the children are exploring their beliefs about death and reincarnation. In particular, Fred tries to figure out a way that he can be safe from all danger, which he eventually accomplishes by stating that he will become a 'shape shifter'. A shape shifter is a being that can assume the form of anything that it chooses to be. The facilitator uses the moment to help them explore. The dialogue also demonstrates how the children sometimes challenge one another, having fun in the process of doing so.

Doug: And everything has to end up dying.

Fred: Not really. We never die. We go to heaven.

Sam: Or you might just go some place else but I don't want to say.

Tim: So you believe that there is a heaven and not a heaven.

Doug: I believe in everything…Is it true when you die you come back as another person?

Peter: Or you come back as another thing.

Tim: Some people believe that…If you were going to come back and you had some choice what would you come back as? Would you come back as another person or something different?

Doug: Something different.

Fred: Fish.

Barb: You would come back as a fish?

Fred: 'Cause I'm a lot smarter and know why fish get caught.

Doug: But you might get eaten.

Barb: Well he's not going to get caught.

Doug: By the bigger fish.

Fred: Not if I am quick enough, and not if I'm a shark.

Doug: Oh. But what if I'm a whale? What happens if I'm a killer whale? Oh, killer whales eat a lot!

Fred: What happens if I'm a huge piranha?

Doug: A killer whale would kill a piranha in three seconds.

Fred: Oh, now I know what I want to be.

Tim: Yes?

Fred: I want to be a shape shifter!

The next conversation demonstrates how some children try and make sense of death and what happens when someone dies. This conversation, like many others, arose while the children were engaged in an arts-based activity. However, it is evident that the facilitators make use of the opportunity to explore the children's thoughts about the situation.

Sally: My bus driver died.

Barb: Your bus driver died today?

Sally: Yeah because he was really, really, really ill.

Barb: So what do you think happens when somebody dies?

Susan: Their spirit goes to heaven.

Andrea: You have a funeral for them.

Tim: Their spirit goes to heaven. What is their spirit?

Susan: Inside of them, there's the same person inside them

just…in a different way.

Tim: Do you know how they might be different?

Susan: Not really, maybe it's different because maybe the spirit is not breathing…the person inside them isn't breathing.

Tim: So your spirit doesn't have the same need as your body but they're connected because one is inside of the other? Is that what you mean?

Susan: Yeah.

Barb: She said that there's a funeral.

Tim: So after the funeral what do you think the funeral is for – do you think the funeral is for the people who have died or for the people who are still alive?

Andrea: Both…I don't know, they just thank the person you know.

Barb: So if she is right and your spirit is different from your body what do you think happens to your spirit after you die?

Sally: Goes into the white light.

Susan: Goes into heaven.

Andrea: But like sometimes you don't.

Sally: Oh yeah, you go to the awful place people don't like. Good people go to heaven.

Barb: What do you think the white light is?

Sally: The door to heaven.

Andrea: I thought it was always the gate.

Sally: Same thing.

Lee: Or like the bright light raises you and then you open

> the golden gate. When I was little somebody read me a story like that and they open the gold pearly gate or whatever.

In the next example, the group is trying to make sense of the concept of déjà vu, which then leads to some thoughts on death and if there is something after death – an existential thinking through of what life is all about. In response to a query from Fred, Tim is attempting to explain to the children what some people think déjà vu is. A sense of humour and how the children sometimes challenge one another is also obvious.

> *Tim*: Some people think that your soul – after you're alive and then you die – then your soul gets reborn into another person.
>
> *Fred*: Yes but when you get déjà vu you can't be you again can you?
>
> *Tim*: Right I'd be somebody else, but I might have past recollections of who I was before, right?
>
> *Sam*: What, you remember?
>
> *Tim*: I won't remember who I was before but I might think, I've been here before or I know my way around the building and yet in this life I've never been there.
>
> *Harry*: What? You're not you! [group laughter]
>
> *Tim*: What do you think of that?
>
> *Sam*: I don't want to die.
>
> *Fred*: You will.
>
> *David*: I will.
>
> *Sam*: [asking Tim] You don't want to die do you?
>
> *Tim*: No.
>
> *Fred*: No one wants to die but if you stayed alive forever you'd have to watch all your friends die.

Harry: I don't really think it matters if I die or not because they say that if you die you go to a better place so…

Fred: Yeah but what if you don't?

David: If you kill yourself…

Sam: What if you just stay there and just see black for the rest of your life?

Harry: That's exactly what I've been thinking.

Sam: But I won't be able to see black.

Fred: Can I, I'm going to ask you guys a question that you will never ever find out. Does the galaxy ever end?

Harry: Maybe, how do you know it's not like War of the Worlds and we have aliens in the ground and they go,

Fred: Who said that it would ever end?

Sam: This world?

Fred: Not yet…yeah.

Sam: This Earth?

Harry: Maybe it does but then God starts it over again. Maybe it's like a game of Risk.

Sam: Outer space?

David: Yeah?

Sam: Whatever, that doesn't end.

Fred: Are you sure?

Harry: It's probably like uh, God's playing Risk.

Fred: Yeah, God's playing Risk!

These conversations often begin spontaneously and end abruptly as the children move on to something else. However, the fact that

the children raise the questions in the first place indicates awareness that it is appropriate and safe to do so within the group and individual methods. Our experience has been that when children know that the context is open to discussing holistic topics, they take the opportunity to do so when they want to. And for many of their queries, there really is no answer to a question. The important point is to use their questions to try and foster open communication about the issues that they are raising. In the examples above, the issues that could be further explored with the children include:

- safety and the importance of feeling safe
- positive and negative behaviours, and consequences of these behaviours
- thoughts about the nature of human beings and life in general
- endings and losses.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the facilitators often have to take note of these themes and issues, and raise them again later in the group or even in another session and method in order to foster some discussion related to the theme. If a child does not want to discuss an issue further, there is little point in pursuing it when using arts-based methods, and it might even be detrimental to the process. Certainly, there are common issues and themes that arise in work with children in need. Consequently, one does not need to worry that an opportunity to discuss a particular topic is lost because it is likely to arise again in another activity. For one example, children in need usually hold negative viewpoints about themselves, which can arise in a myriad of ways. For one example related to the topic of this chapter, Dawn stated, 'I think I am going to go to hell.' In response to this, another girl offered, 'I don't think there is hell…No one goes to hell. God forgives everyone.' Facilitators (and even the other children as seen in this very brief exchange) will have a chance to challenge and improve the

children's beliefs about themselves throughout the group process and in various activities.

Finally, I will emphasize that it is always important to challenge a child's negative statements and thoughts about themselves and to reframe these so that the problems are externalized and not inherent to the child. For a common example, many children in need will interpret problems at school as caused by their inherent 'badness' when, in fact, school structures, rules and processes, not to mention difficult relationships and interactions with peers, can contribute to negative experiences and acting-out behaviours. One Indigenous child explained to the facilitators how he was regularly teased and bullied on his school bus by some older children who were students at another school. They made fun of the fact that he was living in foster care and used racist slurs against him. He retaliated in a physical manner, which often led to him getting into trouble. Arriving at school after having to deal with this type of harassment almost daily would be emotionally and psychologically difficult for the best of us and did nothing to foster this child's ability to positively function in the school environment.

CONCLUSION

This chapter briefly reviewed how spirituality is conceptualized within most helping professions as a universal aspect of human life that encompasses experiences that transcend the self. Although the definition of spirituality remains contested, there is broad consensus that holistic helping methods often include processes such as:

- helping people to make meaning of a situation
- incorporating meditation and mindfulness-based practices into work with people
- recognizing people's inherent resilience and coping resources, which often include spiritual beliefs and religious groups
- social activism towards the betterment of communities.

Despite some helping and health professionals' concerns about introducing spirituality into their practices, there are many rationales for incorporating spirituality into these practices. These include a person's culture and religious beliefs and experiences; the nature of their problem, which could be intimately connected with spiritual themes; a person's desire to discuss spiritually sensitive topics; and the fact that when we ignore this dimension of life we may be hampering a person's ability to develop a narrative that accurately encompasses their life experience.

We work from a holistic approach and incorporate a spiritual dimension into the arts-based methods in order to help children better understand themselves and to explore their viewpoints. We understand that, for some children, a holistic perspective better meets their needs and worldviews. Moreover, holistic methods such as mindfulness-based practices are effective methods to teach children self-awareness and other essential skills that are described in the next chapter. Often, practitioners need to ask the people that they are working with about their spiritual perspectives and ideas in order to access this material, which can be rich in substance and, therefore, important and relevant to one's self-exploration and understanding. If we do not introduce spirituality as a possibility and inquire into it, it would in all probability not be raised by the children – the same is true when working with adults. In our experiences, children in need most often raise spiritually sensitive themes through talking about their values, their culture and beliefs, through the topics of death and loss, and the nature of human beings and life in general.

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CHAPTER 3

Mindfulness-Based Practice

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness is a holistic philosophy with ancient historical origins attributed to northern India circa 500BCE. The development of the practice of mindfulness is usually attributed to Gautama Siddhartha, the Buddha, about 2600 years ago. Mindfulness meditation was developed as a holistic teaching whose purpose was to relieve human suffering, to increase compassion and loving-kindness among its practitioners, and to help individuals attain the peace of enlightenment (Armstrong 2001). This being said, nowadays most facilitators and researchers of mindfulness point out that one does not have to be a Buddhist to learn, practise and benefit from mindfulness. In fact, for many practitioners and researchers, mindfulness is not connected with any type of spirituality or holistic perspective.

According to Weiss (2004) mindfulness was meant to help people see clearly and understand themselves and others better so that we could live a more fulfilling and joyful life. He describes mindfulness as a practice that can help people 'free themselves from mental constructs…see the world as we really are…allowing

us to experience the delight of touching life deeply and authentically…giving us a way through suffering to joy…and encouraging us to do all of this every moment in our daily lives' (pp.*xvi–xvii*). Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990, 1994), one of the pioneers in developing mindfulness-based programmes in North America, explains that mindfulness meditation practice is activity that encourages awareness to emerge through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgementally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment. He argues that mindfulness has everything to do with examining who we are, with questioning our view of the world and our place in it, and with cultivating appreciation for the fullness of each of life's moments.

Thich Nhat Hanh's (1991) approach to teaching mindfulness centres on conscious breathing (the awareness of each breath) and, through this breathing, mindfulness of daily life acts. As he states, 'We can practice conscious breathing not only while sitting in a meditation room, but also while working at the office or at home, while driving a car, or sitting on a bus, wherever we are, at any time throughout the day' (p.9). In general, mindfulness-based meditation and practice is formally and/or traditionally facilitated by helping a person focus on their breathing, usually when sitting still, and informally by incorporating mindfulness into everyday acts, such as walking, eating and washing dishes.

Despite its long and complex history, and the holistic nature of the practice and philosophy of mindfulness, especially over the past few years, it has been operationalized by researchers as a cognitive behavioural intervention. These researchers, who for the most part work within the fields of psychology and medicine, are concerned with defining mindfulness for the purposes of investigating its effectiveness and evaluating consistent outcomes. Within a cognitive behavioural approach to mindfulness, people are typically taught ways of developing a different relationship to the content of experiences such as unpleasant body sensations, thoughts and emotions. The most commonly taught form of this mindfulness meditation uses breathing as a focus for attention. For example, mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) (Kabat-Zinn 1990) has been delivered as an eight-week programme which

combines sitting and walking meditation, guided body awareness and light yoga, with an emphasis on nonjudgemental acceptance of the body.

MBSR and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) can also include other complementary interventions, such as psychoeducation and cognitive techniques (Dimidjian and Linehan 2003). For instance, Segal, Williams and Teasdale (2002), in a discussion about the use of MBCT for the treatment of depression, suggest that the use of mindfulness meditation helps in interrupting the downward spiral of rumination that is associated with depression relapse, and de-automating these unhealthy thought patterns. Within cognitive behavioural approaches, mindfulness practice has been studied for its effectiveness with a myriad of adult client populations and problems, and it has been found effective in helping a broad range of people cope with issues and problems such as anxiety, chronic pain and grief, mood disturbance and stress (Bishop *et al.* 2004; Brown and Ryan 2003; Grossman *et al.* 2004; Sagula and Rice 2004).

It is evident that separating mindfulness from its holistic background has assisted in researching its effectiveness with positive results for a variety of people and problems. This in turn has influenced the proliferation of mindfulness-based practices and research that are now found across helping/health professions and within popular culture. It is not surprising that mindfulness has been divorced from its holistic roots by many researchers and practitioners given the tensions that exist between secular helping/health professions and spirituality, as was discussed in the previous chapter. Next, I briefly explore mindfulness as a holistic practice before moving on to discuss how it can be facilitated with, and taught to, children and young people with high needs.

MINDFULNESS AS A HOLISTIC PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE

Kabat-Zinn (2003) encourages us to contemplate the complexities involved in divorcing mindfulness from its holistic roots and argues that it is important to recognize the unique qualities of

mindfulness practice so that it is not 'simply seized upon as the next promising cognitive behavioural technique…decontextualized, and plugged into a behaviourist paradigm with the aim of driving desirable change' (p.145). Others such as Grossman (2008) also argue that mindfulness is a difficult concept to define, let alone operationalize. However, these types of arguments are not often raised or debated within the academic and research literature on mindfulness. In a recent edited book, Hick (2009) raises this point and is also sceptical of our ability to operationally define mindfulness, which is experiential and embodied (akin to trying to define spirituality). He further explains that the profession of social work has engaged with mindfulness differently from psychology and medicine, and that social workers are interested in how mindfulness can help to develop the professional self as well as contribute to community work. Indeed, as a social worker, I am invested in facilitating and teaching mindfulness-based practices that are in harmony with its holistic nature and history.

Consequently, we agree that, when mindfulness is divorced from its holistic roots, there is diminished opportunity to create therapeutic space that is flexible, open, creative and less focused on specific clinical treatment outcomes (Rosch 2007). In turn, divorcing mindfulness from a holistic perspective limits the opportunity for spiritually sensitive and existential discussions to emerge, and limits the creative possibilities for facilitating the practice. Creating space for this discourse is important because, for some people, a mindfulness practice will be inextricably linked with their spiritual perspectives and experiences (Coholic 2006). Furthermore, mindfulness as a holistic philosophy offers a foundation for a life-long practice with an understanding that the fruits of this practice will take time to unfold. This contrasts with many mindfulness-based cognitive-behavioural interventions that are typically time-limited brief processes with expectations of specific outcomes.

The important point here, which I will reiterate, is the idea of creating space for children to make sense of their experiences in a holistic manner if they deem this to be relevant for them. For some children, such as children from Indigenous cultures, this will be especially relevant as their spiritual viewpoints are often inextricably

linked with their culture. If we ignore a spiritual dimension in our practice and research, we may be missing an opportunity to help people construct holistic narratives that accurately fit their experiences. For example, we have worked with Indigenous children in our groups and have encouraged them to share their worldviews with the other group members. For many Canadian Indigenous children, drums are important culturally and spiritually. In some of our groups, children have brought their drums to the group for the purposes of drumming and singing traditional songs, which is a great opportunity for their self-expression and for the sharing of these experiences with others. Importantly, it seems logical to emphasize the point that it is relevant to create space for spirituality to emerge when we are facilitating or studying a holistic practice such as mindfulness.

MINDFULNESS AND CHILDREN

Mindfulness has until quite recently been a virtually unexplored area of research with children and young people. However, on the other hand, there is substantial information regarding the facilitation of meditation with children and we certainly utilized this material as a base from which to develop the holistic arts-based methods (Fontana and Slack 2002; Jenkins 1996; MacLean 2004; Viegas 2004). Thompson and Gauntlett-Gilbert (2008) contend that mindfulness shows great clinical promise for young people. Other researchers and practitioners have found that mindfulness can be taught to anxious children and holds promise as an intervention for anxiety (Semple, Reid and Miller 2005), and that mindfulness-based cognitive therapy helped children in reducing internalizing and externalizing symptoms (Lee *et al.* 2008). Bogels *et al*. (2008) found that mindfulness training helped adolescents with attention and impulsivity problems to achieve goals, develop better attention, feel happier, and develop mindful awareness.

There is also some evidence of mindfulness training in school-based programmes in order to reduce stress (Napoli 2005; Wall 2005), and in nursing practice to help children deal with pain (Ott 2002). Additionally, mindfulness meditation was helpful for

adolescents in their search for self-awareness, meaning and life purpose (Birnbaum 2005). In our own research, which mirrors some of the results reported above, we found that mindfulness-based practices can teach children with significant problems to relax, to cope better with day-to-day problems, to become more self-aware and less judgemental of themselves, and to form more positive and healthy relationships with family and peers (Coholic and LeBreton 2009).

FACILITATING MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness-based practices are important for children because they can help children and young people to learn to focus on their feelings and thoughts without judging these experiences, thereby promoting the development of self-awareness and self-esteem. In turn, a foundation of self-awareness and self-esteem can assist children to build resiliency including improved coping and social skills, as well as problem-solving skills, and a better ability to understand the perspectives and values of others.

The basic elements of a mindfulness practice often include mindfulness of breathing, sitting meditation, and daily-life mindfulness. However, when beginning to teach mindfulness to children and young people with high needs, these traditional practices are not effective and do not foster success. For instance, children with histories of trauma and loss have trouble closing their eyes for activities such as meditation, they frequently interrupt other children and the facilitators, and they have trouble remaining physically still, to name just a few of the effects of their difficult life histories. As one child stated, 'The first time [in the group] I think I was distracted…so we fooled around a lot…I was able to focus more on it the second time.'

Initially, mindfulness-based exercises must help to build a foundation of skills that include listening, paying attention, focusing and being grounded in the moment before more complex and abstract tasks and methods can be facilitated. Overall, mindfulness exercises should be basic and shorter than is usually the case in traditional practices. They should also be more active and sensory-

focused, and abstract concepts have to be concretized (Semple *et al.* 2005). Certainly, teaching children a foundation of attention is essential for the observation of thoughts, emotions and body sensations. To this end we have developed many exercises that aim to improve the children's abilities to listen and pay attention as well as to identify and understand their feelings and the values of other people in the group, and to relax, focus and use their minds and imaginations. Creative arts-based and experiential methods are an excellent, effective and useful way to engage children with significant problems in considering and practising mindfulness.

Teaching the concept of mindfulness

One of the important ideas to convey to children relates to their self-awareness of their thoughts and feeling; that is, if one's mind is very busy and not focused, it is hard to know what we are thinking and feeling about an event or another person. As a result, it is more difficult to make appropriate and healthy choices, as our feelings can propel us to act out. In fact, children with high needs may be experiencing many feelings but may not consciously know what they are feeling or why, or what they can do about all of these feelings swirling around in their minds and bodies. Children can make informed and improved choices when they know and understand what they think and feel about something or someone – when they are being mindful. Keeping this in mind, a connection between mindfulness, awareness, choices and consequences can be introduced and discussed.

The 'Jar of Thoughts' exercise illustrates and symbolizes how one's mind looks and feels when it is full, busy, not focused or relaxed versus what it can be when one is mindful, focused and self-aware. Using an empty glass jar that is half filled with water, participants take various shaped and coloured beads and bobbles, and drop them into the jar. Each object can represent a thought or a feeling. When the jar is full, participants are invited to take turns passing the jar around the table swirling and shaking it (make sure that the jar has a tight-fitting lid!). Discussion then occurs about how well our minds can work when thoughts and feelings are all

swirling around and moving quickly compared to when they are calm and focused – when the objects are resting at the bottom of the jar. The relevance of mindfulness can be explained as a way of helping us to keep our thoughts and feelings clear, calm, focused and understandable, because with mindfulness we are more aware of what we are feeling, thinking and doing in the present moments of our lives. The discussion can then move to strategizing about how we can achieve a calm and focused mind with some explanation of how the holistic arts-based methods can help us accomplish this.

Facilitating a discussion about choices and what helps us make good choices can also be productive in terms of having the children consider how their feelings, thoughts and state of mindfulness (or not) can influence the decisions they make. The following discussion is an excerpt from a group with girls. The discussion begins with conversation about choices and identifying what sorts of choices the girls can make. Then the group moves into an activity where they are encouraged to construct something on paper that represents them. The facilitators purposefully do not provide the girls with a lot of instructions but talk with them about the choices that they are making in the construction of the symbol of themselves.

Tim: Alright Barb, what are we talking about today? Choices.

Barb: Absolutely, we are talking about choices.

Megan: Music and partying!

Barb: Well how does that come up when I say choices?

Megan: I don't know. Because I'm going to a party next week. I got that stuck in my head.

Sally: Tomorrow I get to wear pyjamas at school.

Lisa: Pyjama day!

Tim: Do you know what pyjamas you're wearing?

Sally: No.

Tim: So you have to make a choice don't you?

Barb: I always have choices to make. I have to choose what to make for supper.

Tim: We do make choices all the time don't we?

Megan: We make choices about what we can put on… [pointing to the list of group rules]

Barb: On the group rules?

Megan: Yeah.

Barb: I started to think about it today. How many choices I was making in an hour…there was a lot.

Sally: How many?

Barb: It depended on what time of day it was.

Tim: For example, you could choose to pay attention to us.

Lisa: Yeah, like we can choose to talk.

Liz: To listen.

Tim: Are there some things that we don't choose?

Sally: Where we want to live.

Barb: Where we want to live, yes, sometimes we don't have that choice.

Lisa: Or not to do an activity or something?

Barb: Right, so when we can't make a choice is there something in that that we can still choose? Say you don't get to choose where you live – is there something about that that you still get to choose?

Sally: Who you live with?

Lisa: Yeah, maybe.

Tim: Or how you react to it. You get to make that choice.

Sally: Yeah, like you can choose to be happy or sad.

Barb: Brilliant. She's brilliant!

Tim: Sometimes you don't get to choose. Like our breathing just happens and we don't really give it much thought do we? We don't say 'I'm going to choose to breathe today', but our body kind of knows how to do it, right?

Lisa: Yeah. And you can't say like I'm going to choose to go somewhere today, in case you don't go there.

Barb: Okay, but then if you said 'I'd like to go there' and you didn't go there, what choice would you have about that?

Lisa: Ah, I don't know.

Barb: Well I suppose you could choose…to still try and have a good time or not.

Lisa: Yeah. Like if you were having a bad day and you wanted to stay alone because you thought something would happen…then you're choosing to do that. But then if each time somebody comes over and tells you something good that happens that day – so then you might choose to do it.

Tim: That's true. Sometimes choices are really hard. Anybody have any really hard choices?

Liz: Choosing on what assignments you're going to do for like a really important mark? I'm doing a historical fair…I gotta find out the background of something.

Barb: So what guides that choice? What's going to help you make that choice?

Liz: Knowing what I know most about.

Barb: And because you know something about it, because you're living that experience, that's what guides you.

Sally: And you could do like when we were making clay things, we had to choose which ones to make.

Tim: I know, there's so many choices. So let's do our activity. [the activity begins – creating something on paper that symbolizes or represents who they are]

Liz: So what we're doing, does it have to be like sort of a poster?

Barb: One time when I did this activity…do you know what a quilt looks like? Each person got a square to the quilt and then we all kind of drew onto it or knitted onto it, or added things like buttons, and at the end we put them all together. Although it was a quilt, each person had their own square; so each person was represented.

Lisa: So we're kind of showing stuff about ourselves?

Tim: Yes! Ourselves as part of a group.

Sally: And you can draw a smiley face, how you're feeling.

Barb: You got it.

Tim: The only thing we would ask is that while you're making these choices about what [art materials] to use, try to think about the choices you are making…we are interested to hear what's guiding your decision making.

Megan: I know what's guiding my decision on the flowers. Because it's my birthstone colour.

Barb: That's a great reason to know why you're making that choice. That's a perfect example, thank you. [the activity continues]

Tim: When we make really, really good decisions, how are we feeling before we make those decisions?

Sally: Happy.

The group continues working on the activity discussing the art materials and other things such as what is transpiring at their respective schools. This is then followed by a break, after which point they begin to share their creations.

Barb: Okay, so Lisa, you want to go first? Start by saying 'I chose'.

Lisa: I chose this board because I liked it. I chose the flowers because I like flowers…well they were nice. And I chose lime green because my favourite colours are lime green and hot pink. And I put this sparkling stuff on it. And I wrote all these names [of the group members]…I put down these bees because they reminded me of the bees off of Winnie the Pooh because I love Winnie the Pooh. I put a heart with me and Andrea that equals BFF because me and Andrea are best friends. And I put Winnie the Pooh drawing because I like Winnie the Pooh.

Sally: Who is Andrea?

Lisa: She's my best friend.

Tim: Thanks for sharing that. We're going to talk about it after everybody gets a chance to present theirs…Liz, you ready? Tell us about your masterpiece. Turn it around so that we can see it.

Liz: This is my masterpiece. These cubes represent what she [Lisa] said.

Barb: Oh good job, so she put all the people in the group.

Liz: And there's some leaves there for when I said spring, and there's some candy right there.

Tim: And what's the big thing in the middle of yours?

> *Liz*: It's a dog that I used to have…I put it there because I miss it, because I like dogs and I really miss my dog.
>
> *Megan*: Well I chose the flowers because the colours were birthstone. I did this squiggly line and the skates because I love skating. And I put the silver and gold sparkles and stars on it because I've gotten silver and gold medals for skating. And I put a heart for caring and I put my dog.

This sharing is followed by some discussion about choices and what can help us make good choices, such as being mindful and having the ability to know what we are feeling and thinking – having a focused, calm and self-aware mind. Tim returns to the earlier comment by Sally that feeling happy can help us make good decisions and choices. While he agrees with this he adds that being mindful, that is, knowing how he is feeling and what he is thinking about, is the most help in making a positive good choice. The importance of self-awareness and knowing oneself is stressed. Barb also points out how, while the group began with the same materials, they all created something different. The point is made that we can all make different choices and all of these choices can be correct. Importantly, we need to learn to make the right choices for ourselves based on our unique circumstances.

Teaching mindfulness using the physical senses

An excellent way to teach mindfulness to children is through the use of their five physical senses. Certainly, developing listening skills and the ability to pay attention is usually one of the first priorities and goals with children with high needs. One exercise helps the children to develop mindful listening skills by encouraging them to write down everything they are conscious of hearing over a period of approximately three minutes. Children might note that they can hear breathing (their own and others), doors opening and closing, people walking and talking in the hallway, the beep or click of a watch, the fan in the room, the hum of lights, the sound of the weather outside, sounds that people are making inside the group room, and the sound of their own writing, among other things. In our experience, the lists are never identical and in

comparing the lists the facilitators can highlight choices that we make in what we choose to focus on and how we might perceive the same stimuli differently and why.

Another listening exercise can be called 'Household Appliances'. This listening exercise is also an example of how children can be encouraged to reflect on their choices, be mindful of their environment, use their imagination, and create poetry. In this activity we ask the children to imagine walking through their homes and to write down a list of appliances or devices that make noise. They then write down the sound it makes, creating a new word if necessary. After sharing their lists/sounds with the group, poems can be created from the sound words. For instance, children can be asked to highlight the words that stand out for them and then, using these words, construct a poem. Often, one can simply write the highlighted words into sentences without any editing. The following example is focused on sound words:

> La, la, la, blah, blah, blah, bubble, bubble, bubble, blah, blah, blah, tick, tick, tick, tock, hop hop, blah, blah, ah pop, clock, zzz,zzz, opo, and la, la, la, blah, blah, blah, ding!

Another poem is more descriptive and tells a story:

> My TV goes 'ah' and my dryer goes 'whir'. Does your washer go 'bang'? Does your light go 'click'? My alarm goes 'zzz'. Does your MP3 go 'baboom'? Does your vacuum go 'vroom'?

Group discussion of this activity can include questions about how the participants decided to include the devices on their lists, how they came up with the sound words, what it feels like to share their list of sounds and the poem with the group, and how the experience of writing a poem made them feel. For some children, writing a poem is an accomplishment that they are proud of and this achievement should be positively acknowledged and encouraged (Coholic, Lougheed and LeBreton 2009).

Assorted materials that can be ripped, such as paper, tinfoil, plastic bags, newspaper, cardboard and sandpaper, can be brought

to the group for another listening activity called 'Rip It Up' (Coholic and LeBreton 2009). The children can be encouraged to examine the materials closely for a few minutes and then to close their eyes. While their eyes are closed, one of the facilitators can tear one of the materials and the children have to guess which one is being torn. In our experience, the children like taking turns ripping the materials and will even try to make it harder for the group by tearing more than one material at the same time. This exercise encourages the children to focus on and be mindful of what they are hearing.

'Five Changes' is an exercise that encourages children to pay attention in the moment by challenging them to notice changes in a partner's physical appearance and attire. The exercise is often successful when staged as a challenge, turning the exercise into a game, which we have found is especially appealing to most of the boys who typically like to challenge one another in game playing. Seated in chairs, participants pair up and face one another. They spend 45 seconds to a minute engaged in silence, conducting an inventory of their partner's physical appearance. In the next step of the activity, both partners turn away from one another and make five subtle changes such as rolling up their sleeves, putting their watch on another wrist, turning their hat backwards, putting their shoes on the wrong feet, and so on. Facing one another once again, they take turns guessing the five changes.

'Find Your Shoe' involves everyone removing a single shoe and placing it under a table. One at a time, the children are encouraged to feel under the table with their hands without looking and locate their shoe. They then articulate out loud the process of finding their shoe to the group members. How will they find their shoe? What specifically are they searching for? What do the shoes feel like? Does their shoe feel unique or different from the others? What are they noticing about touching the shoes?

In a variation of a mindful walking exercise children can also be encouraged to walk around the group room for a minute in silence taking note of what they see. They often notice things that they had not taken notice of before the exercise. One child reported that this experience left him feeling 'Like you don't want to talk

on the first day of school…Because you don't know what to say, and kids ask you stuff and come up to you and talk to you…Yeah, feels like the first day of school.' Perhaps in this comment this child is expressing some mild form of anxiety, which could be due to the heightened awareness created by the exercise. Importantly, he is becoming more aware of what he feels in the moment and has expressed this using a comparison with another previous life experience.

A variation on the theme of a mindful walking meditation can be used whenever possible, for example during break times, and can help to reinforce the idea that being mindful means paying attention to where we are going and what is around us. For example, we have challenged children to walk on only the dark squares of a multi-coloured and multi-textured floor. As the tiles were smaller than their feet, the children had to observe mindfully exactly where they were going and where they were placing their feet. The children began to talk about the subtle shade differences on the floor tiles and they noticed the bumps and grooves in the tile. Until they were encouraged to notice what they were walking on, they had not made these observations. This simple exercise then led into other group discussions concerning other things that we miss when we are not paying attention in the moment (Coholic and LeBreton 2009).

One activity that occurs outside is the game 'Camouflage' (a version of hide and seek). Often this game is played during a break in order to enable the children to go outside and run around. Even when playing this simple game, children can be encouraged to practise being mindful and paying attention. We challenge the children to be mindful in their hiding places; that is, they are encouraged to notice any bugs running on the ground, the colours of the leaves or the sound of the wind. During one game, a facilitator and a child were hiding close to each other and the child became quite excited as she showed the facilitator a dried flower that she deemed to be 'the most beautiful flower in the world'. When the children return inside, conversation can take place about what they noticed while they were outside playing the game. Tim explained how mindfulness can be practised in this game to one group:

> One reason I really like to hide now is I use it to slow down my thoughts. When I'm really close to the ground usually hiding, I can see things that I normally would just walk over, right? I can see the little ants, little small pieces of gravel. I can see the edge of a leaf. I can see how jagged the leaf is or if the rocks are loose, or if the ants are moving. Those are some things that you can pay special attention to when you're trying to slow down your thoughts and be mindful.

The following conversation occurred after a group of boys had played Camouflage. Tim is helping the boys to think about how they take in information when one of their senses is blocked; for example, having their eyes closed when the others run off to hide.

> *Tim*: Do you guys think you can take a crack at that question that I just asked? Which senses do you use most when your eyes are closed in that game?
>
> *Harry*: Your hearing and um…
>
> *Paul*: Gut feeling!
>
> *Harry*: I use my hearing and my mind.
>
> *Joe*: Yeah, and I use my gut seeing, my mind.
>
> *Tim*: Which one do you use the most when your eyes are closed?
>
> *Paul*: Hearing.
>
> *Tim*: So what kinds of things were you listening for?
>
> *Harry*: I go like this [makes the sound of the wind]. When you guys run past me, you go like this and the wind comes at you.
>
> *Tim*: I was trying to be like an animal who would just move through the bush without making any noise. Didn't I do that?

Paul: I never saw you.

Tim: You could hear me?

Harry: Especially when you jumped over the bush!

Tim: When I jumped over the bush, I must have made a lot of noise…What things did you notice the most when you were hiding?

Joe: I seen the grass like close.

Paul: I saw dead leaves, a lot of ants in an ant hole, and then I seen a big…

Joe: That must have burned if one bit you!

Tim: I saw a chickadee in the tree.

Harry: I seen it too!

A more traditional daily-life mindful practice is mindful eating. Eating mindfully is commonly discussed in mindfulness books and articles, and there are many available scripts that can be read to facilitate mindful eating exercises. One example can be found in Kabat-Zinn's book *Full Catastrophe Living*:

> First we bring our attention to seeing the raisin, observing it carefully as if we had never seen one before. We feel its texture between our fingers and notice its colours and surfaces. We are also aware of any thoughts we might be having about raisins or food in general. We note any thoughts and feelings of liking or disliking raisins if they come up while we are looking at it. We then smell it for a while and finally, with awareness, we bring it to our lips, being aware of the arm moving the hand to position it correctly and of salivating as the mind and body anticipate eating….take it into our mouth and chew it slowly, experiencing the actual taste of one raisin. And when we feel ready to swallow, we watch the impulse to swallow as it comes up, so that even that is experienced consciously. We

> even imagine, or 'sense', that now our bodies are one raisin heavier. (Kabat-Zinn 1990, p.27)

Hick (2009) provides another example of a mindful eating process but he lists seven points guiding the direction of the exercise that could also be read out loud to facilitate the process of mindfully eating something such as a raisin. Similarly, his points include looking closely at the food, noticing the colour and smells, slowing eating and paying attention to the texture and taste of the food, and noticing when one has the impulse to swallow.

We all eat and too often we eat mindlessly not paying attention to the food we are eating, where it came from or how it tastes. In our experience, reading a script does not work as well with children with high needs compared to having a free-flowing conversation about something they are eating and helping them to pay attention to the different aspects of eating the item of food. For example, in an individual session between Harry and Tim, the following discussion took place about mindfully eating a granola bar. Harry engages in the process and even forces Tim to count out the number of times he is chewing, really slowing down the process of eating the granola bar.

> *Tim*: Do you want to try it with a granola bar? Okay, we're going to take our time and we're going to think about all the things that we normally miss because we eat food too fast, right? So first of all, we have to decide what granola bar we are going to have. There's lots of different kinds. So already you're being mindful because you're thinking about what we want right now, what's going to taste the best. What else are you thinking about?
>
> *Harry*: Which one I'm going to choose.
>
> *Tim*: Yeah, but what factors do you think are going to go into that choice, what's going to help you make that decision?
>
> *Harry*: What they taste like? I don't know.

Tim: To me, it's going to be what they look like. I think maybe this one might taste better.

Harry: Raspberry.

Tim: You want to try raspberry?

Harry: This is big.

Tim: So what else would we do, if we were being totally mindful, and what else would we do before we even opened it, if we really wanted to enjoy it?

Harry: Sit down.

Tim: Sit down, yes. I might turn it over in my hands. I might feel what's inside the wrapper and imagine what it's going to look like. It's going to look like the picture. Maybe that big fat raspberry on the picture…you're thinking, it's just going to be like chewing into a nice big juicy raspberry. What else? What else would you think about if you were thinking really mindfully?

Harry: The stuff on the bottom.

Tim: Yeah, the stuff on the bottom. What's that? You're smelling it. Yeah, you're seeing if you can smell raspberries inside, right? Can you?

Harry: There's yogurt at the bottom.

Tim: Let's see if there is. [opening the wrapper]

Harry: Smell it.

Tim: Oh, so you noticed the smell already. Okay, so normally if I was eating a granola bar, it would be gone by now, but if we're eating mindfully and we really want to enjoy it, what are you going to think about now? Okay, so now you noticed the chocolate chip on mine [Harry pointing at Tim's bar]. What did you notice about yours? I just saw you go like this [making a hand movement], does it feel sticky or something?

Harry: It is sticky!

Tim: Yeah, did it feel sticky when you picked it up?

Harry: Feels chewy.

Tim: Okay, there is something happening in my mouth while I'm looking at this.

Harry: Tasting it…drool.

Tim: Yeah, I'm starting to drool a bit because I'm thinking about what it's going to taste like. It's going to taste good. Okay, now how should we eat it?

Harry: Slowly!

Tim: Slowly, okay. So normally I would take one bite and then two bites. How could we try to eat it differently?

Harry: One bite.

Tim: One bite at a time, okay. And I'm even going to do better than that, I'm going to break it up into small pieces… it's a beautiful chocolate chip. Ready?

Harry: I'm checking the taste.

Tim: How many times do you think we should chew?

Harry: Ten. Count to ten.

Tim: Count to ten. You tell me when ten is up…Okay, so let's swallow. What did you think about that first bite?

Harry: It's good. There's almonds. Good thing I'm not allergic.

Tim: Is there anything else you noticed about it from that first bite? Was it everything you thought it was going to be?

Harry: It was chewy. Okay, let's take twenty chews this time!…Take your time to swallow.

> *Tim*: What is one thing that you've noticed that you would normally not have noticed because you just would have gone faster?
>
> *Harry*: Not tasting it.
>
> *Tim*: Yeah, I also noticed the sound of the wrapper. I never noticed that before. It's pretty loud…Here's something else. I noticed that the chocolate is in perfect squares. I never noticed that before. And I noticed that yours, those things are in circles.

Children can be highly creative and often they add ideas to the arts-based methods and activities. We encourage and reinforce their appropriate additions and ideas whenever they arise. This script, and all scripts, relaxations, guided imageries, meditations and stories, should be read slowly and calmly, sometimes pausing where appropriate. We have also used recorded guided imageries that are widely available for use with children. While the audio recording is playing, the children can be encouraged to sculpt out of clay, paint or draw what they are imagining as they are listening to the story. This process encourages them to develop and express their imaginations, and enables them to be active while they are also practising listening and learning to pay attention. Different people will enjoy different meditations and guided imageries, so it is a good idea to try various means of teaching children how to focus on their minds and feelings, and use their imaginations. Many of the children that we work with enjoy stories about animals, such as 'The Brown Bears' in Maureen Garth's book *Moonbeam: A Book of Meditations for Children*. This meditation begins with the following few sentences:

> The sun is warming your body as you wander through your garden, feeling the warmth and peace there. Feel the freshness of the air against your skin and breathe it in, feel it clearing your lungs. You can now smell something quite different. I wonder what it can be? Why, I think it is honey. There are many bees around and they are flying in a straight line towards a large green tree in the distance. Why don't

> you follow these bees and find out what they are doing? (Garth 1992, p.83)

Another good example of a meditation that is more appropriate to use with children who have developed some ability to listen, pay attention and focus is a meditation on a bubble (LeShan 1974). Hooker and Fodor (2008) explain that this meditation is a useful mindfulness meditation as it can help a child to slow down, observe their thoughts, and let their thoughts go without judging them:

> Begin by sitting in a comfortable position, with your back straight and shoulders relaxed. Softly close your eyes. Imagine bubbles slowing rising up in front of you. Each bubble contains a thought, feeling, or perception. See the first bubble rise up. What is inside? See the thought, observe it, and watch it slowly float away. Try not to judge, evaluate, or think about it more deeply. Once it has floated out of sight, watch the next bubble appear. What is inside? Observe it, and watch it slowly float away. If your mind goes blank, then watch the bubble rise up with 'blank' inside and slowly float away. (p. 88)

An infinite variety of images can be used to help children use their imaginations and access their feelings and thoughts. One of our own examples is a simple direction to float somewhere they want to go:

> *Barb*: I'll close my eyes with you so you don't feel weird about closing your eyes…In your mind, there's a really long rope. Can you see the big rope? It goes all the way up into the sky. Can you see it?
>
> *Lee*: Yes.
>
> *Barb*: Okay, I want you to get on that rope and you are just a magical climber. And you can climb the rope, climb the rope, climbing the rope, you're going up higher and higher. Keep going higher and eventually you are going to find the perfect cloud. And you'll know it; you'll just see it. You'll know it's the cloud that's going to take you for a ride. And

> when you see that cloud and trust that cloud, I want you to get onto the cloud and I want you to float anywhere that your mind wants to take you, and I want you to see where the cloud takes you.

Mindfulness and awareness of feelings

Learning to be present with feelings is an important part of living mindfully and being a self-aware person, because our feelings play an important part in directing our thoughts and actions (Hanh 1991). Being mindful of feelings means that we are able to understand and tolerate our feelings without repressing or suppressing them, and without acting out these feelings in an unconscious manner or projecting them onto others. Being mindful of one's feelings enables more conscious choices related to expressing or dealing with the feeling, or even changing our emotions. For example, one child explained how she had a negative feeling about attending a homework club. However, she used her awareness of this situation including her feelings, and an exercise (Bad Day Better p.136) that she had learned in the group about promoting positive feelings, to shift her feelings and thoughts. She stated, 'When I was going to my homework club, I had to go there every Tuesday and I thought it was going to be dumb. So then I thought it [was a bad day]… Using my mind [I changed my attitude] to think of it as a good day.' This child learned that she does not have to be controlled by her feelings and that she can even consciously make choices about how she feels and how she approaches activities if she wants to do so. This is akin to the idea in mindfulness that we should strive to be fully present and alive in the present moment, and that we have the capacity to live, as Thich Nhat Hanh (1991) says, in a way that will bring peace, joy and happiness to ourselves and others.

Another example that illustrates how children can understand that they have the ability to make choices about their feelings and perspectives occurred during an exercise in which a child was contemplating the feelings that she had experienced during the day (Feelings Inventory p.128). The child discussed how her 'positive' feelings are stronger than her 'negative' ones by comparing her

feelings to something that she learned in science class: 'I guess it's kind of like in science…we learned that…a bunch of negatives cancel out a positive, or how a bunch of positives can cancel out a negative…but you can take away as many negatives as you want but you can't erase the positives.' Importantly, developing awareness of, and tolerance for, feelings includes all feelings, not just pleasant ones. The goal in helping children understand and tolerate their feelings is not to erase or repress all of the difficult emotions that they have, but to assist them to cope more effectively with these feelings so that they do not ruminate and become stuck in pain, frustration, sadness or unhappiness.

This idea that choices exist concerning how we feel and act can be related to having the ability to understand and play with different viewpoints and perspectives. 'Ant Drawing' is an exercise that helps children to develop their imaginations and assists them in experimenting with different perspectives in having them draw everyday objects from the viewpoint of an insect such as an ant. Any item such as a container can be visualized from the perspective of something very small in comparison to ourselves. Imagining and then discussing different perspectives can help to develop understanding for one's own and others' viewpoints, which can lead to a variety of skills, such as increased empathy, improved self-awareness, and even the accomplishment of goals. For example, one child explained to us how he learned to use his imagination better outside of the group to achieve tasks and goals such as playing basketball. As noted in Chapter 1, he described how he visualized the basket as a cone and that the ball was the ice-cream on top of the cone – he stated, 'It's that easy!' In conducting this drawing exercise, discussions can also be facilitated about being mindful of what we say and think about others.

For almost all of the children that we have worked with, and for children with high needs in general, learning to pay attention to, notice and reflect on their feelings is a new skill and practice. This is the case even though they may be dealing with the emotional consequences of abusive and traumatic situations. Certainly, it is understood that children with trauma histories have difficulty modulating their affect, and have trouble remaining grounded

in the present moment (Hansen 2006). For some children, one of the outcomes of developing mindfulness of their feelings is an increased willingness, and indeed the ability, to understand, discuss and share their feelings.

One young girl (Sally) who had a history of sexual abuse at the hands of her mother's boyfriend exhibited many symptoms of this trauma when we first began working with her (she attended several group programmes). Initially, Sally was wary and hypervigilant, particularly of the male facilitator with whom she did not maintain eye contact. Her social skills were also poor and she did not often engage in activity with the other children, although she very much enjoyed attending the group. In this case, Sally was enabled to create on her own while the group activity took place, all the while being positively encouraged to take part with the other children. We found that, even if she was engaged in an activity individually, she listened intently to the group discussion. As Sally progressed through the group sessions, she engaged more fully with the other children in the methods, and her foster-mother explained that both she and the girl's teacher had noticed that Sally was talking about her feelings and thoughts more. In describing this she explained:

> I've noticed that she speaks more about her feelings…whatever bothers her which before that was a big no-no…and she talks to her teachers…she'll go and ask the teacher… to talk…they notice that [Sally] is deciding more when she needs to talk to them in private…[Sally is] thinking about things like keeping yourself safe and who you can tell things to.

This feedback, which occurred in a post-group interview with Sally and her foster-mother, was followed by spontaneous discussion by Sally about her past experiences with the abuse. In the following dialogue, Sally is attempting to make sense of her current life situation, having gained and developed the ability to be aware of what she was feeling and thinking, and to share these experiences with people she trusts. This is significant as Sally did not acknowledge or discuss her feelings prior to engaging in the holistic arts-based programme. She is understandably seeking confirmation that she

is safe from the abuser, and she is trying to make sense of what has happened to her. By learning to articulate her feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and so on, she has a good chance to recover from the traumatic experiences.

Sally: There's this guy…and I know that he is a very bad person and he's not safe. That's why I got taken away because my mom let him in the house by purpose. She'd done it before eh, once?

Foster-mother: That's right.

Sally: But I never remembered about that.

Foster-mother: You were too young honey.

Sally: Yeah. That's why I think I was only one year old.

Foster-mother: You were three years old then.

Sally: No, wasn't, didn't I leave when I was three?

Foster-mother: Yeah, that's why you were taken away the first time, at three years old.

Sally: And then I went back for…

Foster-mother: Five months.

Sally: Only five months? I thought it was only one year… Until she let him back in again.

Foster-mother: Yes.

Sally: He keeps on following us. It's like he has no home.

Foster-mother: Well, he doesn't follow you any more. He stopped a long time ago.

Sally: Yeah, because he doesn't even know where we live right now. So he can't hurt us and if you saw him, then you wouldn't even let him in the house.

Foster-mother: Nope.

Sally: You'd just shut the door on him eh?

Foster-mother: Yep. And he's not allowed around our house anyways. Not at all.

Sally: And plus, if he stayed on our lawn, then one of [the members of her foster family] would probably kick him off the lawn.

Foster-mother: No, we'd just call the police and the police would come and get him. That's it. He's not allowed around our house at all.

Sally: He broke the law…I don't even want him to be in my head right now.

This last statement is a creative way of saying that she does not want to think about him or the abuse any longer. At this point the conversation shifted to some rocks that were in the lab that Sally found interesting, which was followed by Tim reinforcing and praising her efforts at discussing her feelings and thoughts with people she knew she could trust. Focusing on the children's strengths and providing constant positive reinforcement is important as they engage with the holistic arts-based and experiential methods. This confirms for them that there is no right or wrong in the process of creating, playing and becoming more mindful people. Additionally, this conversation is a good example of how the children raise issues and share feelings and thoughts when they want to and not in response to any specific questions or probing by the facilitators. It is also typical for these children to change topics abruptly so that often there is no opportunity for sustained exploration and dialogue about a feeling or issue that might arise. But the facilitators can take note of the feelings, thoughts and issues raised by the children with the intent to address these matters, by way of an exercise and a theme, at some later point in their work together.

When people develop mindfulness, they often report that they feel more grateful for and appreciative of the things that they have

in their lives, including their relationships and abilities, having their basic needs met, and so on (Coholic 2006). Sometimes, recognizing what we do have can help to ground us in the present moment and assist in developing and fostering feelings of optimism and hope – something that children with high needs often require. In the following exercise, called 'Making Connections–Feeling Thankful', a variety of common everyday items can be placed in a pile on the floor. Children sitting on the floor in a circle can then be asked to choose one of the items that appeals to them and to see if they can relate the item to a feeling of thankfulness or gratefulness.

Barb: Alright, now we should take a look at the objects that we have and see if you can somehow relate them to feeling thankful.

Sally: I can!

Barb: Go ahead.

Sally: Okay. This is a hockey puck. This reminds me of my brother because he likes hockey and I am thankful for my brother. For having a brother by chance. He's always been there for me, he always makes sure I'm okay…that's my thing.

Tim: Genius!

Barb: Perfection!

Tim: Wonderful.

Barb: Does anyone else want to share?

Mary: I do…Well this ball has a happy face and I am thankful for being happy and people around me being happy and that's about it.

Barb: That's fantastic.

Tim: That's awesome!

Barb: Andrea, would you like to share?

Andrea: I'm thankful for this [a screwdriver] because it has a cross on it and that means it's for safety, and I'm thankful for safety.

Barb: Andrea, I noticed that you also very much like playing with tools and fixing things and seeing how things work. I'm not surprised that you picked that one because there's a lot of different things it could mean.

Sally: [asking Barb] How come you picked matches?

Barb: I picked matches because I like warmth and I like sitting around a campfire and so I just thought, I'm thankful for warmth.

Tim: I'm thankful for stories, and this rock reminds me of a story. So you probably already heard this story…you can put all your inner sadness into a rock. You pick up a rock and you can think really hard about what you are sad about, and you can just move it around in your hand…and then you put it into the rock…and then when you're done you can bury it and there's your sadness in a rock and not with you any more.

In this example, Tim uses the opportunity to teach the children 'Rocks and Feelings' another technique for dealing with feelings. Facilitators should always be prepared to use teaching moments, to remind the children about an activity that was performed in the past, and to address the needs of the children.

Focusing on the breath

Traditionally, mindfulness is taught by way of meditation and often by focusing on the breath and one's breathing. Although we cannot utilize these types of traditional methods for any length of time, it does not mean that we do not use them at all. Some practitioners find that five minutes is an achievable amount of time for children to engage in a meditative breathing exercise (Hooker

and Fodor 2008). In our experience with children who have high needs, even five minutes is too long; it is not achievable and is frustrating for the children. Meditations and breathing exercises that are achievable are typically one minute in length. However, we find that we can extend the amount of time spent in a meditative exercise when we utilize written guided imageries that are read out loud, but even then these guided imageries typically do not exceed five minutes. While it is difficult for children with high needs to sustain meditative practices and while they may not particularly enjoy them or find it hard to settle into the exercise, short physically interactive methods can teach these children how to focus on their breath and how to feel relaxed.

Group always begins with a primer activity that provides a definitive starting point and signals to the group that it is time to pay attention (these are described in Chapter 5). An example of a simple primer method using the breath that can teach children how to relax their bodies is a progressive relaxation exercise. In a progressive relaxation activity, children are taught to tense up and then relax different parts of their bodies along with paying attention to their breathing. By using this relaxation exercise first before other methods are applied, excess tension and energy can be released. Taking part in a body scan or progressive relaxation is not necessarily practising mindfulness, but this type of exercise is a useful and often essential way to begin to teach children in need to focus on their bodies and breathing. The following group process in which the facilitators are introducing a body scan exercise took place in the second group session of a 12-week group programme. It is evident that the children are having trouble focusing only on the activity.

> *Barb*: So, we're going to start with our feet and we're going to work our way up…So the first thing that we're going to do is with our feet and our toes is…Come with me Sally on this journey. [Sally is not paying attention]
>
> *Tim*: This is going to make us all nice and primed for the rest of these activities.

Barb: We're going to get nice and relaxed, absolutely. So, if you point your toes and you point your feet, can you feel a stretch down here in your legs?

Sally: Somewhat.

Megan: I know a really good stretch to stretch your legs.

Barb: Okay, just feel the stretch. This isn't really about stretching your legs. It's more about relaxing and focusing on your breathing.

Tim: So, we're kind of talking and relaxing.

Sally: Yeah, it feels the same.

Barb: Okay, well let's try another spot to see if it feels the same, okay?

Megan: I know how to make like your whole body relax, like mostly your back and your legs.

Barb: Do you?

Megan: Yeah, well when you're on the floor…and you lift your legs up and then your head up like this much, and then you try to stay there for as long as you can. And it's really hard.

Tim: And then relax, right?

Andrea: You have to try doing this with text-books on your hand and then…a whole bunch of them and then you have to stay like that for five minutes. We have to do that in class.

Barb: Okay, so you girls have all kind of experiences with this.

Tim: Yes, so we've all kind of done something like this and now Barb is going to take us through something pretty quick that we can do in this group so that it sets us up for the next activity.

Barb: And it's just like your thing except we're doing it in a sitting position, right?

Tim: Okay.

Andrea: Okay.

Tim: [addressing Barb] So, take it away.

Barb: Let's try our knees. Okay, squish them together… So we might just let everything else relax, but tighten it, squish.

Sally: This isn't good for my legs. I was running all day.

Barb: And then let go. Do you feel the relaxation after?

Sally: Of what?

Barb: Okay, let's try our stomach area. Suck it in, pull it in really tight, really tight, really tight.

Andrea: Pushing out.

Barb: Okay, but stretching it in hurts a little more.

Andrea: No it doesn't. I can walk around like this.

Barb: Really? And then let it out. Awesome. Now we're going to try a frown. Frown as much as you can and feel how hard it is. No cheating with your hand. Stretch, frown, frown, make a frown, frown more. [The group is laughing.] And then let it go and feel the relaxation. Now do the opposite, try to smile. It's a lot easier to smile. Can you feel that smile? Okay, and then relax it. And we're going to just do our eyes, but what we do with our eyes is we close them and…then squeeze your eyes tight, tight, tight, tight, and then let it go.

Tim: Now, we breathe in for five, hold for five, and exhale for five seconds.

Sally: Hold?

Barb: And we slow it down each time.

Andrea: I used to…breathe in for 15, hold for 20, exhale for 15.

Barb: You know it's kind of like that because we slow down the tempo, so breathe in and out and I'll count it out for you, okay? Breathe in, one, two, try to breathe in through your nose…breathe out, I'm slowing down, one, two, three, four, five.

Tim: [talking to the group] Could we do three of those in a row? Come with me, it's really good.

Barb: Come on, breathe in…Sometimes [with these techniques] we can quiet our busy, busy morning and we can just hear our own thoughts, which is really important.

Tim: What do you think Sally? Does it feel good to get your oxygen inside?

Sally: Yeah.

Megan: Ow, I hit my heel.

Andrea: Barb, remember the last time when we played a game?

The example above took place early in a 12-week group programme. By the mid-point of the group programme, the group has usually developed an improved ability to follow instructions and take part in breathing and meditative methods. Mindful breathing exercises are possible if they are short. For instance, the children can be asked to focus on breathing in for three counts, holding their breath for three counts, and then exhaling for three counts. This pattern can be repeated several times. These exercises often work better if the children can spread themselves around a room and do not have to face one another with their eyes closed. Particularly with teenage girls, sitting in a circle with their eyes closed can lead to uncontrollable bouts of giggling, which is not a bad thing, but

it is also not conducive to learning how to meditate and focus on one's breath.

Importantly, many children and young people in need have great difficulty remaining physically still. They require a more active way to learn to focus on their breath and breathing. We have found that Tai Chi movements coupled with engaging and amusing stories works very well. Wall (2005) also used Tai Chi and mindfulness-based stress reduction with students in middle school. We have developed ten movements that are each taught to the children. With practice, these ten movements can then be combined into one continuous sequence. Dr Hoi Cheu, a colleague who is a filmmaker and English professor with training and experience in family therapy and Tai Chi, trained us in these movements and the stories are his. The children are taught that for all of the movements it is important to be mindful of one's breathing. While inhaling, they should breathe in through their noses, keeping their mouths closed and placing their tongues against their top gum. Then, they slightly open their mouths while exhaling. In addition to mindful breathing, it is important to have the correct stance while doing Tai Chi.

One example of a movement is the 'Butterfly'. The children are taught to take a deep breath and exhale. While exhaling they place their feet on the floor shoulder width apart, bend their knees slightly, and place their arms down at their sides. Then, inhaling, they are instructed to slowly lift their arms up to shoulder height while breathing in. They keep their eyes slightly open while performing this movement and visualize themselves as a butterfly while repeating the up and down movements with their arms seven times. Another posture we call the 'Zombie'. After exhaling and bringing the fire in the belly to the heart, the children bring their arms to their sides and lift them up until they are at shoulder height and shoulder width apart. Inhaling, while their arms are up pointing straight in front of them, they bend their knees and squat down like a zombie. Repeating the movement, they breathe in while slowly bending down and breathe out while standing back up to the standing position. A third example is called the 'Little Grass'. In this movement, the children visualize themselves as a

little blade of grass blowing in the wind. They are asked to make their whole body soft. Taking a deep breath they exhale and bow down from their waist. Then they inhale and sway their arms and hands from side to side. They are encouraged to breathe in and out slowly to match the movement of the arms – breathe in when the hands move upward and breathe out when the hands move downward. They are told to focus on how soft they can be: 'You can stand up against any big storm when you are flexible.'

These movements teach the children several things: to focus, relax, be mindful of one's breathing, and to use their imaginations. We strongly advise some training and practice in Tai Chi before teaching children any movements, and we offer these three examples here only as an illustration of what works well with these children, and how meditative techniques can be adapted for use with children with high needs. We suspect that practitioners with experience and training in Yogic movements could also adapt some of these techniques for use in holistic arts-based methods.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, we also utilize short meditations/guided imageries that we read to the group. This type of activity works best with children who have already developed their listening and paying attention skills. There are many resources available (see, for example, Viegas 2004). One of our favourites is *Moonbeam* by Maureen Garth (Garth 1992). Keep in mind that these exercises should be short and engaging. Some of the children that we have worked with have asked for copies of these stories/relaxation exercises so that they could read them before sleeping and practise them at home. Not surprisingly, many children in need have trouble falling asleep or feel anxiety before bedtime. Some of the children find these stories very 'interesting' and, as well as reading them before bed, they report that they read them after school when they come home.

Most of the children reported to us that the short meditations, guided imageries and mindfulness-based practices were useful in helping them to relax and to become more mindful. For example, one girl explained, 'I never thought I could get that relaxed because I'm always moving and going and doing something… being able to take that ten minutes…just to sort of relax and settle

myself down…[it's] something that stood out.' One boy said that the 'relaxing…and the breathing, helps me get a lot of energy out…it helps you calm down'. This type of feedback along with the changes that we observe in the children affirm for us that the work involved in teaching children and young people in need to become more mindful is well worth the effort. Ideally, the children are learning methods and are provided with resources that they can use on their own in their daily lives. To this end, we have also helped children construct 'Mindfulness Mats', which are mats big enough to sit on that are created from a soft material such as felt. The mats can be decorated as a group exercise. They are taken home and serve as a reminder and a place for the children to practise mindfulness at home.

One final note about using guided imageries – as well as helping the children to relax and use their imagination, these methods can foster a connection with memories and feelings. For one example, after listening to a guided imagery about imagining oneself in a boat drifting down a river, Darlene explained that the meditation brought to mind memories of her mother:

> *Darlene*: That reminds me of me and my mom. When we lived in [a place by the ocean], we used to…hold hands and then we'd just lie there and float [in the ocean], and then we'd have the sun on us. It was really nice.
>
> *Barb*: And what kinds of feelings did you have?
>
> *Darlene*: Just happy and loved.
>
> *Barb*: Happy and loved, yes, thinking about her. Excellent. So what do you think about these readings then?
>
> *Darlene*: I really [like them]. They make me think of different things.

CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed how mindfulness-based practices are increasingly being studied and used across helping and health professions. The majority of research in this area has occurred within psychology and medicine, and has been contextualized within cognitive-behavioural approaches. Our own approach is consistent with a more holistic version of mindfulness that is creative, fluid and can meet the children's specific needs and goals. While research in mindfulness with children is just beginning, results are promising.

While children with significant difficulties may not be able to practise mindfulness in more traditional or formal ways, the concept and practice is certainly within their capabilities and can assist them in various ways, including developing coping skills and self-awareness. Mindfulness-based activities with children in need are effective, but several important considerations must be taken into account when using these methods. For instance, there is a dramatic difference in the children's ability to pay attention and be mindful after having completed a number of group sessions. These initial sessions should teach a foundation of listening and focusing skills before more complicated exercises are used. Furthermore, mindfulness-based practices for children in need should include methods that go beyond learning how to meditate, and holistic arts-based methods are a creative way to facilitate this practice in a way that makes sense for children. This is an important point for children who have difficulty processing abstract concepts, sitting quietly and focusing on their breath. Importantly, once the children learn mindfulness, they can practise and sustain these methods in their lives on their own.

Mindfulness is a different way of being in the world compared to how many people go about their daily business. It fosters feelings of gratefulness and appreciation, self-awareness, coping abilities, and living with present moment awareness. A holistic concept of mindfulness forms the foundation for the group work and all of the arts-based methods discussed in this book. Being a holistic philosophy, it helps to provide a context that is amenable to the incorporation of spirituality and spiritually sensitive methods.

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CHAPTER 4

Building Imagination, Self-Awareness and Strengths

ENCOURAGING AWARENESS OF FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS

We often use collages in the arts-based methods. A simple exercise that is often effective for a beginning group of children in need is to help them construct a Collage of Feelings. The question to ask them to begin this activity is 'What do your feelings look like?' After posing this query, the children look through various magazines and cut out any images and words that remind them of a feeling. For example, a picture of a volcano might be equated with being angry. A picture of a puppy 'makes me happy'. While working at this exercise, Andrea points to a picture of chocolate and asks the group, 'What does chocolate make you feel like?' Lots of discussion occurs about feelings while the children are flipping through the magazines and cutting out the pictures. Sometimes the pictures remind them of experiences that they have had or represent things that they like that they can share with the group members. This activity can even be done collaboratively as a group so that one collage is constructed. In the process of cutting out the

pictures and gluing them onto the paper, many negotiations occur concerning the placement of the pictures, which is good practice for group discourse and developing cohesion.

Many of the holistic arts-based methods are focused on helping the children express and better understand their feelings, thoughts and behaviours. In other words, developing their self-awareness. For one example, in constructing a 'Feelings Inventory', the children are encouraged to draw or paint their feelings within a big circle. Inside the circle the children can draw and label different shapes that demonstrate all of the feelings that they have experienced during the day. The size of the shape should denote how much each feeling has been experienced; for instance, if Mark felt happy most of the day, he might draw happiness as the biggest shape within the circle. Colours, words and images can also be utilized. Upon completion, children can discuss how they might reduce the size of some shapes (feelings) and increase the size of others. This is a good activity for participants to try a couple of times, perhaps even as a homework assignment.

The children are often creative and will even choose to develop their own depiction of their feelings in their own ways. Some have developed pie charts while others have used different sizes of the feeling words to capture the amount of time spent with each emotion or the importance they place on different feelings. Still others have used bar graphs. In the group discussion about the exercise, the feelings can be validated and normalized. Then the children should be encouraged to contemplate how they could experience more of the feelings they like or want to feel; for instance, how could a feeling of happiness take up more space inside the circle and in their lives?

Figure 4.1 is a picture of a particularly creative illustration of feelings that Beth is experiencing and struggling with. Beth chose to depict some of her prominent emotions using pictures that she drew and then cut out. These pictures are of fast food. She titles her creation 'Fast food feelings'. The individual french-fries are labelled *grouchy*, *thirsty*, *describeful*, *weepy* and *drowsy* while the hamburger prominently displays *hungry*. The sesame seeds on the bun spell *left out*. This picture poignantly captures and expresses

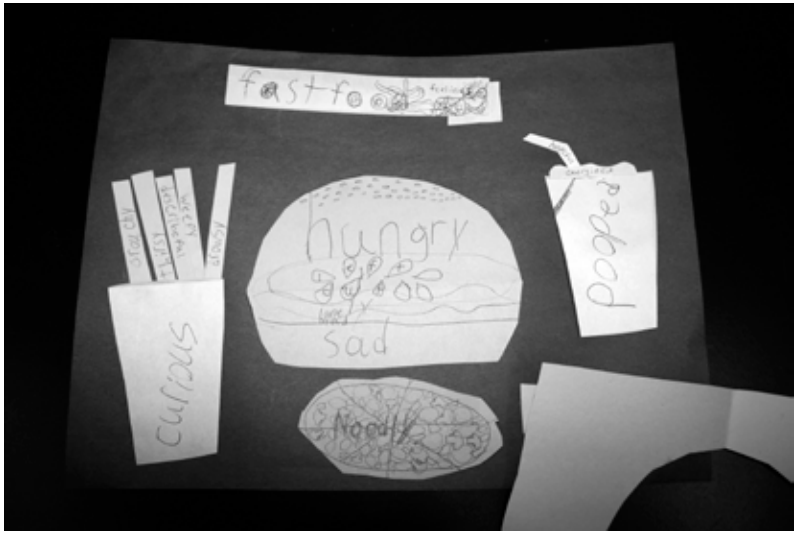

Figure 4.1 Fast food feelings

the dominant issues raised and discussed by Beth during the group sessions. She often expressed emotions of feeling lonely, sad and hungry, and these feelings were evident in her other creations of art throughout the group programme. Beth struggled with having few friends at school and the arts-based creations helped her to express that she felt lonely. This is a feeling and an experience that is often shared by other children who have high needs who are often marginalized or even bullied by their peers. Beth also felt very different from her peers, which again is a feeling shared by many people who have suffered abuse and is related to feeling lonely. The shame that often goes along with the experience of having been abused makes one feel inherently different from others who are perceived as 'normal' (not having been abused). Indeed, the themes that are raised by the individual children are usually shared to some degree by the other children in the group. For instance, there are a good number of children in need who have gone hungry due to neglectful or abusive parental care. Sometimes these children will attempt to hoard the snacks or talk about feeling hungry, even though they may just have eaten a meal before the group session. Many

of them are not aware of healthy food choices, which is certainly something that can be discussed in the group and reinforced with the healthy snacks provided during the group break. The facilitators spent much time reinforcing Beth's (and the other children's) strengths and creativity, and normalizing their feelings.

Once the feelings inventories are completed, the children can also be encouraged to construct and tell a story about their day and what they felt during the day. This type of activity helps them to reflect on their day and remember their feelings. For one example:

> I was tired when I woke up. And then I was glad because I was going to the community clean up. And then I got sad because I wasn't going to the clean up. And today my friends were playing a game, and I was curious of what they were doing. And then I was playing a game with my other friend and I was happy. And then I had to do a test and I was frustrated. And then I got hot coming here in the van. And now I feel kind of joyful [being] here.

I mentioned earlier that part of the feelings inventories activity encourages the children to contemplate how they can foster experiencing more of the feelings they would like to feel. To this end, the children can be encouraged to take one of their good positive feelings and, by way of a short guided imagery, can be helped to plant that feeling so that it can grow. First, they are asked to visualize a safe garden or a room; some type of safe space. Then they can imagine the feeling as a colour or a seed and they can plant the colour/seed in the ground, or they could fill the space with the colour, or even paint the walls of their safe place with it. The point of this method is to promote the positive feeling by engaging the children's imagination.

In Chapter 2, I discussed how the use of arts-based methods is particularly relevant for Indigenous children as their culture/spirituality and the importance of arts-based methods can all be intimately connected. In our arts-based group work and methods, Indigenous children have created feelings inventories and feelings bracelets (see below) according to one of their cultural teachings

and healing tools: the Medicine Wheel. Nabigon and Mawhiney (1996) explain the Cree Medicine Wheel and the 'hub', consisting of three circles, one inside the other, and representing the negative and positive aspects of personality, and how this is used for individual healing, self-exploration and understanding one's purpose (see also Nabigon 2006). By using a version of the Medicine Wheel, Billy organized his feelings according to four dimensions: (a) the spiritual dimension included feelings such as gratefulness, (b) the emotional dimension included feelings of happiness and feeling inspired, (c) the physical dimension included feelings of being tired, and (d) the mental dimension included feelings of frustration and optimism. Holistic arts-based methods enable Indigenous children and other children with spiritual and cultural beliefs to express these in the helping process.

As can be seen in many of the methods discussed in this book, activities often build upon each other. As an extension to the feelings inventories described above, 'Feelings Bracelets or Necklaces' can be constructed with beads, bobbles and string. Each feeling can be designated with a different coloured bead. When completed, the children can wear the bracelets (or necklaces) as reminders of the importance of all of their feelings, and to be mindful of their feelings. It is important to note that we are not working to delete or negate all of the children's difficult feelings from their lives or to ignore feelings such as sadness or anger. In fact, as one young person wisely stated, 'I don't think we should be trying to get rid of all of it [sadness] because if you are never sad, then you never have other feelings. If you have other feelings, sometimes you have to feel sad.' So, the discussion with the children and young people often aims to help them contemplate how they can feel more of the feelings that they want to feel, and how they can feel more aware and in control of themselves, rather than feeling controlled and overwhelmed by their emotions. A person who is self-aware and mindful of what they are feeling can make improved and informed choices about how they are going to deal with their feelings as they arise moment to moment, rather than simply reacting unconsciously to a feeling of anxiety or anger.

Many of the activities we use can be assigned as 'homework' to encourage the participants to apply what they are learning in the group to their daily lives. Along these lines, we have provided journals to children and young people where they are encouraged to record their daily intentions; for example, 'Today will be a good day.' Later in the group, they discuss whether their intentionality had any effect on their feelings and on how their day actually progressed. An exercise such as this can facilitate discourse on what we can and cannot control and the choices that we can consciously make that shape our moods, thoughts and actions. Similarly, personal mantras or messages can be developed in the group that can be written in a journal and/or said out loud to oneself during the day in order to promote mindfulness, the development of self-awareness and self-esteem, and positive coping behaviours. One child's mantra was 'I am unrestricted. Everything is possible. So be it.' This mantra might help this child focus on possibilities instead of limits, her abilities instead of challenges, and acceptance and mindfulness, which is different from hopelessness and giving up.

For many of the children, learning to notice, identify and reflect on their feelings is a new skill and practice. 'Emotion Mix and Match' is a simple beginning exercise in which children are encouraged to match coloured pieces of construction paper that have different feelings printed on them with a series of pictures of different facial expressions demonstrating different feelings. One variation is to have children draw their own facial expressions to match the coloured pieces of construction paper and feeling words, or to role-play feelings that the other group members have to guess and figure out. Sometimes children in need will physically experience an emotion in their body but might not have the self-awareness to notice it or the language to describe it. Or they get so used to feeling one way, for example hypervigilant and anxious, that this state becomes 'normal' for them. They may need help to identify and label a physical sensation as a feeling. Or they may know that they feel butterflies in their stomach but are not sure what this feeling is.

While the methods described in this book do not feature the use of music to a great extent, this is not a reflection of the

potential usefulness of music, which is often a part of expressive arts methods and other creative psychotherapeutic approaches. We do use music in the exercise 'Emotion Listen and Draw'. In this exercise, a number of short clips of different songs are played for the children, each approximately two to three minutes long. The children are asked to draw, on small pieces of paper, what comes to their mind as they listen to the song, or how the song makes them feel – What emotions does the song evoke? What does the song make them think about? After several different song clips have been played and captured in the drawings (each drawing should be on a separate piece of paper), all of the pictures are placed in rows on a table or the floor corresponding to the song they represent. So in one row, all the pictures for the first song are grouped together. The second row contains all of the pictures for the second song, and so on. Discussion can then focus on the similarities and differences among the pictures. Associations between the songs and the feelings can also be explored. Often, one can spot a theme running through all of the pictures such as a particular place, an activity or a feeling and mood. As the group develops cohesion and cooperation, this activity can be modified with the group collaboratively drawing their feelings onto a large sheet of paper. Discussion can follow regarding the individual drawings and the creation as a whole.

Stream of consciousness writing can be used to help children express themselves and whatever is in their minds. Using a writing tool and paper the children are encouraged to write non-stop for approximately five minutes on a word that the group chooses. The word can be chosen by way of brainstorming words that come to mind. Working from a list of approximately eight to ten words, a facilitator can then exclude words one by one until the group ends up with one that everyone likes and can agree to write about. So, for instance, the group might be asked to write about fun or family or sunshine. The children are asked to write without stopping, because often when a person stops writing, they begin to judge what they are putting down on the page and to think about it too much. The key point in this activity is to try and write down whatever comes to mind without thinking or judging it – it does

not have to be written in sentences or even make sense. After about five minutes the children can stop writing and can then highlight whatever words, sentences or phrases that stand out for them. These phrases can then be extracted and written down on another page of paper forming a poem, often without any editing required. Or the writing can be read and considered in terms of themes that arise. It would be difficult for most children in need to sit down and write a poem about sunshine but this process enables them to do just that, which can be empowering for some of them. Stream of consciousness writing can also be a useful journalling exercise if one is having difficulty journalling or unsure about how to use a journal or where to begin. Learning not to judge one's thoughts is an important part of learning mindfulness as well.

USING IMAGINATION AND FOCUSING ON STRENGTHS

In 'Creating a Memory' children choose from various colours of sand to create a picture. Coloured sand is a new art supply that we recently discovered and one that the children really enjoy working with. Facilitators introduce the activity with a discussion about creating positive experiences and memories that can last as a permanent picture or reminder in our minds of the good experiences in our lives. The sand is not permanent. But the positive experience of creating the sand picture, and remembering the joy of a memory or good experience, can stand as a powerful example of how we play an active role in creating and choosing what we focus our thoughts and feelings on. This activity also deals with the reality of impermanence and, therefore, the importance of appreciating all of life's moments and being mindful moment to moment. In a mindfulness approach, the most important moment is the present moment. As Tim explained in one group, 'When it's all over, all we're going to have is the memory of us doing the activity. What happens with sand when the wind takes it away? It just blows away. Today it will be an artificial wind, and that's us cleaning it up.' If a child does not have a lot of positive memories to draw on, then she can be encouraged to focus on the present moment and the

Figure 4.2 Camping in sand

experience of creating something that she imagines as positive, or she can simply play with the sand. If a child creates a picture of a past event, such as in Figure 4.2, discussion can explore this event and how they felt taking part in it. In this picture, Brad created a scene based on experiences of camping with his family and friends, which he really enjoys participating in. By telling us about the sand picture, we learn something about Brad and what brings him joy, happiness or contentment. Or the group can discuss what they like about playing with the sand, and the colours that appeal to them. In Figure 4.3, one of the children has created a more symbolic and abstract sand picture by swirling different colours (yellow, red and blue) into a circular/spiral shape. Some questions that could be asked to help this child explore this creation include: 'I notice a lot of yellow in the spiral – what does the colour yellow make you feel or think about?' 'Is the spiral moving and swirling – where is it going?' 'Is it speeding up or slowing down?' 'What comes to your mind when you look at the spiral?' 'What were you feeling or thinking about while you were making the spiral?' 'What do

Figure 4.3 Making a memory swirl with sand

spirals make you feel or think about?' 'What does the red sand in the middle of the spiral represent (symbolize)?' 'What about the blue sand – does that represent anything or make you feel or think about something?'

'Bad Day Better' is another activity that aims to help the children identify their feelings. The method can be used to introduce and reinforce the idea that the children can make choices about their emotions and how they are going to deal with them. A sheet of paper is folded in half and reopened. Children are encouraged to paint what a 'bad day' looks like on half of the page. The paper is folded and pressed down creating a mirror image on the other side of the page. The facilitator then asks the children to alter the mirror image to demonstrate symbolically how a bad day can be made better and improved. The alteration can be symbolized using different art supplies, such as sparkles, various coloured felt pieces, a variety of stickers, etc., that can be glued or stuck on.

Most of the discussion with the children about a concept, an issue, a feeling, and so on, occurs while the exercises and methods are taking place. Children are always encouraged to discuss the exercise

as it progresses and to comment on their adapted finished product. In Figure 4.4, it is evident in this creation that Andrea thought that a 'bad day' would encompass feelings of sadness and depression. When she changed the painting to a good day she changed the word 'sad' to 'happy' by painting 'happy' on top of the 'sad'. While Andrea worked on this activity, she and the other children were encouraged to think about and discuss what sorts of things contribute to making them feel sad and unhappy. How can we foster feelings of happiness in our lives? What can we do about the sadness?

Figure 4.4 Bad Day Better

In one post-group interview, Paul explained to us how he used his memory and experience of the Bad Day Better exercise to change his attitude about an event that he did not want to go to but that he had to attend. As a result, it was not as negative an experience as he had originally expected. Paul had learned that he has some choice over how he feels and how he approaches the activities in his daily life, even if he does not always have choice about the things that he has to do.

'Body beautiful' is an exercise that we have adapted from *104 Activities That Build: Self-Esteem, Teamwork, Communication, Anger Management, Self-Discovery, Coping Skills* (Jones 1998). One of the children lies down on the ground and her or his body is traced on a large sheet of paper. Then all of the children write down or draw on the various body parts positive attributes related to the corresponding body part. This activity encourages the children to contemplate, identify, discuss and express some of the positive things that they have to offer and can do, and to consider their positive traits and characteristics. This can help to shore up the children's self-confidence and positive self-evaluation. It is often difficult for children with high needs to identify and talk about good things about themselves, but they can be helped to do this through the group discussion and activity. For example, in one group of girls, statements that were depicted on the figure included the following:

- 'These feet are made for dancing!'
- 'A real angel.'
- 'Smoke-free lungs.'
- 'Heart of gold.'
- 'Great sense of humour.'
- 'Andrea loves to give hugs.'
- 'Making good choices with brain.'
- 'Smile, make the world a nicer place to live.'
- 'Fingers are made to touch.'
- 'This is a beautiful person.'

Sometimes browsing through craft shops can promote ideas for activities to utilize in the group. We found foam doorknob hangers (see Figure 4.5) that we used to promote thinking and discussion about the control and/or power that we have (sometimes) to determine how we feel and think about ourselves, and how we

Figure 4.5 Doorknob hanger

interact and go about our business in the world. This discussion also encourages consideration about our values and the things that are important to us. We cannot control other people but we can feel control over how we think about ourselves if we have a good sense of self-esteem and positive self-worth. Barb's instructions to one group were:

> We try to talk to you throughout group about your thoughts and how important and powerful they are. We've tried to talk to you about changing thoughts from when they're not so good to maybe more positive, and how we have the power within ourselves to do that. This is a doorknob hanger right, which you look at every day on your door, going into your room, waking up in the morning. We want

> you to create something that would be a reminder to you of how you want to be, how you want to be in the world…for example, 'I want to have fun. I want to be trustworthy. I want to be loveable.' Whatever is important to you is what we'd like you to make.

In Figure 4.5, the reader can see that stickers with words on them were provided for this activity as well as other items that could be glued on. On this particular doorknob hanger, the child chose *Treasure*, *Time*, *Memories*, *Forever* and *Wisdom* as words that were meaningful for her. Other words to choose from included *Dream*, *Trust*, *Remember*, *Joy*, *Pride* and *Share*. In explaining why these words were relevant to her, Liz explains that *Forever* never ends and that she believes that she 'lasts forever', and *Memories* means 'remembering what happens' and that 'everyone has memories'. Group discussion could explore Liz's ideas: What is meant by lasting forever? What is the importance of remembering and memories? What sorts of things do the children remember the most? What will they remember from the group and their experience in the group? There are a myriad of possibilities and directions to go with the conversation depending on the group's willingness to engage in the conversation, their needs and goals, and the issues/themes that are being addressed.

Another simple writing exercise that promotes the use of imagination and creativity involves the invention of new words. This can take place by writing the name of a game that the group has played, such as 'hazoo', down the left side of a page of paper. Another word can also be written down the right side of the page of paper. Then words need to be created using the first letters (on the left side of the page) and the last letters (on the right side of the page) of the words. Once the children have completed the activity, the words and their meanings can be shared in the group; or sometimes this occurs while the exercise is being conducted. In fact, as the meanings of the words are shared, often stories are made up about the words. Also, once the words and stories are shared, pictures can be drawn about the words and stories that the children have created. One group came up with:

- *cucaracha* = a dance
- *zoombeeb* = an annoying fly
- *ookoo* = a tribe
- *oceia* = a huge swarm of big bugs (they are friendly and can be kept as pets)
- *obeewatchy* = an animal almost like a raccoon (but much larger).

DEVELOPING SELF-AWARENESS

A simple activity that we often use both in the group and with individuals involves having the children draw or paint themselves as a tree – 'Me as a Tree'. I have also utilized this activity in training workshops with helping practitioners and within the social work classroom as a 'get to know you' activity and an introduction to arts-based methods. Everyone can draw a tree even if they think they have no artistic or creative ability. Sometimes this exercise is useful as a warm-up activity enabling children to become comfortable with the arts-based methods. However, depicting oneself as a tree has also lead to interesting and informative descriptions of how the children view and understand themselves. In a group, everyone's tree will be different and unique. We have also used this method as a before-and-after group activity; for example, the children will draw themselves as trees at the beginning of a group programme and then again at the end when they have completed the 12-week process. This allows for a comparison of their feelings, thoughts and beliefs. Often the children will depict themselves as stronger, more positive trees when they have completed the group programme. A strong positive tree might have more leaves, a larger and more solid trunk, and sunshine and animals around it.

Figure 4.6 Me as a Tree

In Figure 4.6 Jamie has drawn two trees. How can this picture help us discuss with Jamie her self-perceptions and viewpoints? It is important not to make assumptions about any of the children's creations but to use them as a tool with which to engage the child in discussion about themselves. For example, looking at this picture, one could ask the following open-ended questions: I notice that there are two trees. Can you tell me about that? Why do you think that one of the trees has a happy face on the top? One of the trees is bigger than the other one – I'm wondering why that is the case? If you were one of these trees, which one would you be? One could also comment on colours, movement and placement of objects on the page.

Regarding this drawing of two trees, Jamie's narrative was that she was the smaller tree on the right and the larger, more solid looking tree represented her sister, whom she felt often bullied her and 'pushed her around'. The smiley face on top of the 'sister tree' represents or symbolizes her family and the positive feelings she has for her family. So even though at times she felt dominated by her sister, she also felt a strong desire to reunite and be with her family.

In another example, Ann drew a rather forlorn looking tree: it was colourless (drawn in black pencil), all the leaves had fallen off, and it was isolated behind a fence of barbed wire. In fact the tree looked like it was dead or dying. In discussion about this picture, Ann did reveal that she felt like dying and that she also felt like she had to protect herself against others, hence the fence so no one could come near her. She displayed a very low sense of self-esteem and the theme of dying turned out to be quite a consistent one with this young person who had suffered much abuse and upheaval in her life. This theme was raised in various exercises throughout her work with one of the facilitators. Obviously, in cases such as these, one must be prepared to conduct an assessment of suicide and to refer the person to appropriate resources. Because our group programme is offered as part of a research programme and is not a therapy group *per se*, we maintained good communication with Ann's helping practitioners while she attended the holistic arts-based group programme. This example demonstrates that holistic arts-based methods can access deep and painful emotions and thoughts. The methods do not always elicit such troubling ideas and feelings, but one should be prepared for this to occur when working with children with high needs. This example reinforces the comment made in this book's introduction that, prior to using holistic arts-based methods with children and young people in need, people should have some basic training and experience in helping/health practices.

Understandably, the theme of protection and safety often arises in the holistic arts-based methods. For many children and young people in need, their notions of being safe in this world have been challenged and shattered through experiences of emotional hurt

and psychological, physical and spiritual trauma. In our experiences, this is true for children such as Ann above who are displaying strong symptoms of having been abused, and for children who are not demonstrating these effects. For example, Fred was a very energetic, happy-go-lucky, charming and kind boy. In Fred's description of his drawing of himself as a tree, he explains how he is going to keep himself safe from harm. His tree trunk was coloured bright orange and red, and the tree was located in the middle of water – see Figure 4.7.

Figure 4.7 Me as a Tree in Water

Tim: What do the different colours mean?

Fred: This colour means that it is tough. Brown means agility. This one is sneaky. Yellow is ummm, karate.

Tim: Okay, like athleticism.

Fred: Yup. The orange is a shield. The red is for balance.

Tim: Oh okay. Why does a tree need a shield like this?

Fred: Protect itself.

Tim: From what?

Fred: Lumber jacks.

Tim: The tree needs a shield to protect itself from lumber jacks?

Fred: Yeah.

Tim: You said that you had this hole [in the trunk] because you liked animals.

Fred: Yup.

Tim: I have another question for you.

Fred: What?

Tim: If your tree is in the middle of the water, how are the lumber jacks going to get to you?

Fred: Boat.

Tim: So you do have some protection around your tree.

Fred: Yeah, and if they get too close, my tree roots stick them out of the water…There, it can't go past this tree right here [but if the lumber jack does] and then the lumber jack is right there and it [the tree root] opens [and stops him]!

In a similar method to representing oneself as a tree, children are encouraged to draw or paint themselves as a river. The rivers depicted by the children often have many twists and turns in them, and many obstacles, in the forms of rocks for one example. Bridges are also a common theme in these 'Me as a River' pictures. Some children describe feeling like a big rock, stuck in the middle of the river with fast-flowing water on both sides, always being pushed by outside forces, yet unmoved and fairly steady. Others acknowledge that there have been many obstacles in their lives and the picture can help them discuss what these have been. Still others describe the bridges as abilities and skills they have learned that have helped them traverse rough waters. These types of analogy can provide a starting point for, and can facilitate, discussions about resilience, developing coping skills and abilities, and developing self-awareness of one's challenges and strengths. Sometimes these pictures simply depict what is important for the children; for instance, people enjoying themselves by the river partaking in activities such as fishing, swimming, camping and playing.

The next activity is called 'Things that Matter'. Using a jar and water, the aim is to assist the children to contemplate what is important to them in their lives, to learn what others value, and to demonstrate that, even though life may seem so busy and chaotic at times, there is room for everything that we value. It is important to think about and find balance – to create space for our goals, values and the things that matter to us. This activity also promotes discussion regarding what is important in life versus what we can and should live without. For instance, kindness and love for ourselves and others is important, but greed and a need for power over others is destructive.

The materials required for this activity include a large glass jar, small rocks or golf balls, beads, bobbles and coloured sand. The children place rocks in the jar, which can represent people or things of most importance in their lives. They can identify each rock as it goes into the jar. Once this step is completed the jar should appear full. Next, the facilitators demonstrate how the jar appears full but that there is still more space to add smaller items. So the children place beads in the jar representing things that bring them feelings

of happiness. Finally, coloured sand is added, which can symbolize all of the things that they enjoy doing but do not get to do often enough. Water can even be added at the end to illustrate that there is still some room for the things that are really important to us that we desire to have in our lives. In an adaptation of this exercise, glass jars can be decorated and then symbolically filled with things that the children want to manifest, create, accomplish or do in their lives. Discussion can take place concerning the power of our intentions and the importance of setting goals in one's life if we desire to reach our goals and achieve our potential.

Finally, it is a good idea to be open to developing exercises along the way that emerge from the children's interests and concerns, and to fully utilize spontaneous teaching moments. For example, one time when the children and the facilitators went outside for a break, they noticed a raccoon behind a chain link fence. The children really enjoyed noticing everything about the raccoon and they were encouraged to be mindful of their observations. Later, in the group discussion (and in subsequent groups), the children expressed their ideas and concerns about the raccoon. They wondered if he felt lost, unloved or scared, and they worried that he felt alone, perhaps projecting some of their unconscious feelings onto the raccoon. Also, the symbolism of the raccoon was used to encourage the children to contemplate the masks that they construct and wear in their lives (Coholic and LeBreton 2009). This discussion could then lead into an activity of making masks, which is something that we have done by pasting newsprint onto blown-up balloons that are then painted.

For a second example, in another group the children were all very interested in the cartoon *Pokémon* in which the characters have special powers. As a result, we had the children create their own 'power boxes' and group discussion focused on what they could place in their power box to help them feel more powerful, for example making healthy choices and sharing feelings with people you trust, versus what takes their power away. The latter could include projecting a feeling onto someone else and being unmindful of what we say to other people (being hurtful of other people's feelings) (Coholic, Lougheed and LeBreton 2009).

Practitioners who work with children understand the importance of learning about their interests – what they watch on television, the video games they play, and the music that they listen to – and how these things can be incorporated into psychotherapeutic practice with children. By doing so, we are also helping the children to build feelings of group belonging and ownership, and are validating their interests. As always, these interests can be used as a tool for deeper discussion and exploration by way of arts-based and creative activities.

WORKING WITH DREAMS

We work with dreams because everyone dreams (Hill 2003) – it is a reality that we should not ignore in helping people to understand themselves. Helping professions are currently experiencing a renaissance in their interest in dream exploration although there is a long history within helping professions of working with dreams. Several reviews of the history of dream work are available (see, for example, Blum 2000 and Pesant and Zadra 2004). Psychoanalytic, Jungian, existentialist and Gestalt approaches have traditionally received the most attention in the literature. In general, dreams have been thought to reveal divine will, to foretell the future, to be therapeutic, and to be a rich source for creative work (Miller, Stinson and Soper 1982).

Briefly, psychoanalytical approaches, which include ego psychology, object relations theory and self psychology, argue that dreams give expression to repressed wishes from the id and protect sleep from being disturbed. Free association is typically used to inspire dream interpretation (Maarszalek and Myers 2006; Pesant and Zadra 2004). Object relations theorists use dreams to analyse transference, while modern analysts contend that dreams reveal much about the person's total personality structure (Alperin 2004). Jungian approaches emphasize the transparent and creative nature of dreams, which are viewed as a natural expression of the psyche's current state (Pesant and Zadra 2004). Dreams can reveal material from the personal or collective unconscious, the source of archetypes (Maarszalek and Myers 2006). Existentialist approaches,

including Alfred Adler's work, seek to describe things as they are and to understand what the dream expresses in and of itself (Pesant and Zadra 2004). The feelings that are aroused by the dream are stressed (Bird 2005). An Adlerian perspective reflects a strengths-based approach, as there is a central recognition that the dreamer is the expert on their life. Gestalt approaches emphasize experiential approaches to understanding a dream (Provost 1999). The idea is that all parts of the dream represent aspects and dynamics of the self (Edgar 1992). The dream simply tells the client what is currently occurring in their life (France 1993).

A connection with dreams and a spiritual/existential/transpersonal dimension is also evident and relevant for holistic arts-based methods. Although dreams certainly do not have to be linked with spiritual themes, ancient civilizations left evidence of their reverence for the importance of dreams as a form of communication with the gods (Adams 2001). Also, Jung (1964) argued that dreams were linked to spiritual life and could be inspired by transcendental forces. Some researchers argue that little is known about how spirituality and dream work are integrated in practice, and how helpful dreams with a spiritual component are (Crook Lyon and Wimmer 2005; Phillips and Pargament 2002). However, in one study, Adams (2005) reported a project in which she explored children's divine dreams. Divine dreams were defined as dreams in which God/Allah appeared or that are sent by God/Allah. These divine dreams included spoken words that the children interpreted literally. For example, some messages were related to an aspect of the children's behaviour that the dream was telling them to change, while others gave reassurance related to issues such as bereavement.

In harmony with an eclectic approach, practitioners can use different theories to help a person understand the meaning of a dream (Feinberg 1981). As Alperin (2004) states, each school of dream analysis is valid in its own right, highlighting different aspects of psychological functioning, and more than one theory may be needed to determine the full meaning of a dream. Nowadays, it is understood that one does not have to be a psychoanalyst to work with dreams or be engaged in long-term psychotherapeutic work

with clients (Barrett 2002; Merrill and Cary 1975; Ullman 1984). In fact, more recently other approaches have been developed such as a developmental counselling model (Maarszalek and Myers 2006) and eclectic models that combine client-centred, psychodynamic and behavioural theories (Hill 2003). Similar to explorations regarding spiritually sensitive methods and children, research with children and their dreams is a growing area of interest. As Siegel (2005) explains, dream research is a fertile area for studying child development and the changing functions of dreams over time. For example, as children grow older there are developmental changes in the process, structure and content of their dreams, which reflect cognitive and psychosocial development.

Reflecting current emphases, our approach to working with dreams is focused on the children's strengths. We follow an eclectic approach to dream work, which includes exploring the meaning of a dream within waking life (present experiences) (Barrineau 1996). Our aim is similar to that described by Edgar (1992) – to facilitate the children's own understanding of a dream but with help from the group. Talking to children about their dreams is another way to help them identify and process/understand feelings. Similar to other arts-based methods, dream work presents a less threatening approach towards expressing and experiencing feelings than verbal discourse of specific experiences (Cooper 1999). The primary objective of having the children consider their dreams is to use them as a tool for self-exploration and to also promote the understanding of others in the group. We do not interpret the dream for the child but use it as a tool for exploration of their thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

Children can be encouraged to tell the story of a dream in various ways. One way to do this is to create a picture narrative in the form of a comic strip that is created in squares. They can even be encouraged to change the story of their dream if they did not like the dream, or if they cannot remember a dream, to create a dream or something that they would like to have happen in their lives. The stories can be shared with the rest of the group members when the comic strips are completed. We have also used collages made from magazine pictures and words. Children can be encouraged

to browse through magazines and, using a type of free association method, cut out things that are related to their dream that stand out for them or strike them as important.

Queries about the collages or comic strips are focused mainly on the here and now, and emphasize feelings and thoughts about the dream. For example, children can be asked to discuss what stands out for them in the collage, why they might be dreaming this particular dream now, and how they would describe the various pictures in the collage or comic strip. How does the dream make them feel? If they could change parts of the dream, what would they change? Does the dream have a message? Children can also be asked to relate some of the dream elements to parts of themselves, reflecting Jung's (1969) distinction between objective and subjective dream interpretation. Objective interpretation occurs when dream elements are related to something or someone who is part of external reality; for example, asking a child what a locked door or clouds in the sky symbolize about herself. We agree with Bird (2005) that symbols do not have a universal meaning but sometimes using a dream book can be interesting and fun as long as one stresses that the meanings provided are not accurate for everyone. For example, dreaming about falling or being chased, or having one's teeth fall out, does not necessarily mean the same thing for everyone. In the following example, a child describes a dream that contains spiritual themes. In an exception to the rule, Dan simply told us about this dream while the group was engaged in some type of arts-based activity.

> The dream I had yesterday was kind of like the devil coming to Earth and God came to Earth and they had like these people in cloaks…black and white cloaks…have you ever played the game Halo? It was kind of like the battleground, kind of like Halo…And you had to like jump across really far…because they [God and the devil] were like fighting… I don't know what was going on but then somehow I was on the devil's team and so I jumped across and asked God if I could be on his team, like because I don't really like the devil…And so for some reason I had a half white cloak

> and half black…I was like on both teams…there was this angel thing in a black cloak that came to the door and the door had six doors, like the car had six doors, and then so, I don't know if it was an angel, and then he/she opened the door and said 'Come with me to [my little brother]' and I said 'No', and then shut the door and went to [my sister]… so anyways, I don't know, they were driving, they were all driving the car, and my whole family was there, even my grandparents, and then one by one they all started disappearing and I'm looking behind me and looking in front of me and I'm just looking like that. And then before we got in the house, I think I died like four times trying to get out of the house. Because there were these little like dog things…that kept like tearing everybody apart…The last thing I remember is destroying the devil's team and then the aliens came. And so because like my family was gone so I brought them back to life with my powers that I had. And then we beat the aliens and then I kind of just woke up.

This dream, like many dreams, is rich in imagery and potential themes for exploration. Importantly, many if not most of the themes that seem to be evident in this dream are issues that are shared amongst children with high needs. These include (a) the battle between good and evil and feeling torn in these different directions, (b) making good versus 'bad' choices, (c) feeling like they have to protect family members such as younger siblings and even parents, and (d) blaming themselves for the losses or traumas that they have suffered; for example, the splitting up or tearing apart of their families. Also, researchers have noted that aggression is a common theme in children's dreams, especially within young boys (Siegel 2005). These issues noted above arise within the group discussion not just in dream exploration but through many of the other arts-based methods.

We aim to help the children understand that they are not inherently 'bad' and that they are not to blame for the difficult events in their lives. When they come to this realization, they are

in a stronger and more stable position to cope positively with other stressful life events. Similar to the analogy of building a house, they have a better foundation from which to build other capacities and skills. As Siegel (2005) states, if parents, helping/health practitioners and educators learn how to listen to children's dreams, we can help children cope more effectively with waking-life events. In the dream described above, the child triumphs over the adversary and saves himself and his family. It is a lot to ask of a child, to make sense of why their family is not a healthy place for them, and to deal with the rejection and loss that they feel. Dream exploration and arts-based activities offer tools with which to explore these themes in a less emotionally threatening and more accessible manner.

Children who do not typically remember their dreams can be encouraged and assisted to improve their memories of their dreams. We have provided 'dream journals' to children, encouraging them to keep these beside their beds and to write down any memories, feelings and thoughts that they have about their dreams as soon as they wake up. We have also made 'Dream Pillows' that can serve as a conscious reminder to pay attention to one's dreams and to use one's dreams for greater understanding of one's problems, questions, and so on. Sew small pillows for the group members. Then bring these to the group with one side of the pillow left open (not sewn together). In the group, the children can add lavender (believed by many to promote sleep), more stuffing and anything else that they want to add to the pillow. The pillow is then sewn up by hand and pockets are added to one side – pockets can consist of a small piece of felt that are hand-sewn onto the outside of one side of the pillow. The children can even be encouraged to write down a question or intention that they have before they go to bed and insert this into the pocket. Encouraging them to do this may help some children learn to pay attention to their dreams and use them for the development of improved self-awareness and understanding.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter some holistic arts-based methods were described that focused on helping children in need to use their imagination, better understand their feelings and thoughts, and develop their strengths and abilities. A person who is self-aware and mindful of what they are feeling can make improved and informed choices about how they are going to deal with their feelings as they arise moment to moment. We encourage the children to utilize the methods that they are learning in the group in their day-to-day lives so that this learning can be reinforced and further developed.

While the holistic arts-based methods are taking place, discussion is facilitated with the children about a concept, an issue, a feeling, and so on – whatever arises during the activity. Children are always encouraged to discuss the exercise as it progresses and to comment on their finished product and creation. However, unlike with adults, an analysis and discussion of a finished product does not work well with children and young people in need. Once they have completed an activity, the children are eager to move on to the next exercise. They can also express themselves far better while they are busy creating and through the creative process, which serves to enable their expression and takes some of the direct focus off the issue so that if feels safer to address. The issues that children in need express are often shared amongst the other group members. These can be thought of as threads that run through many different activities. These threads include, for example, a need to feel safe. It is a good idea to be aware of these themes and to be open to developing exercises along the way that are based on the children's interests and concerns.

We have found that working with dreams is a very useful holistic arts-based method. Dreams are rich in imagery and action, and can help us understand a child's anxieties, concerns and important issues. Dreams can also be connected with spiritual or existential themes. We can use dreams to help children explore these matters with the aim that they will develop their self-awareness. In our experience children often have recurrent dreams or very vivid dreams that they can express and share via a creative activity. For children who do not have good dream recall, one can focus on

their aspirations for their life or goals that they have, which are also fruitful areas for exploration. Helping and health practitioners should be encouraged to ask about dreams and to incorporate dream work into their practices.

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CHAPTER 5

Working in Groups

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

Offering the holistic arts-based methods in a group format makes sense for several reasons. Coming together in a group offers specific benefits for the children. Certainly, the benefits of group work have long been established. Benefits that are especially relevant for children in need include learning interpersonal skills, cooperating toward a shared goal, learning about values through comparison with others, and alleviating isolation (Whitaker 1975). Also, arts-based methods are often facilitated in a group format. In fact, many of the activities that we have developed and adapted aim to build group cohesion and communication, and address the benefits of a group listed above.

As with any helping process, there are both benefits and challenges when facilitating holistic arts-based methods in a group format with children and young people in need. A group format can provide children with opportunities that they will not have working one-on-one; for example, peer support and affirmation, learning social skills and lessening isolation through interactions with peers, and developing self-awareness by comparison with others. This being said, working in holistic arts-based groups with children is not better or worse than working individually with these

children – it is simply different. Both formats can teach children how to understand themselves better and how to improve their self-esteem, and all of the methods described in this book can be facilitated and adapted for use with individual children.

Some children may not be ready to participate in a group because of various reasons, such as the severity of the symptoms that they are experiencing or behavioural difficulties. Most children feel a sense of trepidation or nervousness prior to beginning a group. However, the group methods certainly help the children to take part in the group and demonstrate to them that the group is a fun, supportive and non-threatening place. As Amanda stated at the end of her first group session, 'My rose [one good thing about the group session] was that I had fun today. I didn't think that I was going to like this group, but I actually kind of do!' It is often a much more difficult process to recruit the children for the group programme than to maintain their interest and participation. In our experience, once they come to the group, they want to keep attending for as long as they can. Children who attend the group are interested in doing so because their participation is strictly voluntary. In terms of criteria for recruitment and referral to the group programme, the children must be able to participate in a group; that is, they should not be experiencing an active crisis or severe breakdown in functioning. Indeed, our criteria for inclusion in the group are not stringent but include a need for self-esteem improvement, a willingness to attend, and an ability to function in a group. Given the stressful life experiences of most children in need, it is not difficult to identify children who require improved self-awareness and self-esteem.

Although the holistic arts-based activities may be similar in individual and group work, when we work individually with children there is sometimes a greater opportunity for discussion and reflection because the child does not have to share the facilitator's attention or time with other children. However, this does not necessarily mean that an individual child will more deeply share their feelings and thoughts. It may also be possible to facilitate more exercises in the same amount of time because one does not have to

seek group cohesion or deal with distracting behaviours that often occur in a group. Furthermore, when we work individually with the children, the facilitators are more apt to share something about their own life experiences with the child in order to engage them in the exercise since the other children's experiences are not available for discussion, comparison and consideration.

For example, in an individual session with Sally, the discussion was about dreams, including dreams that we might imagine for ourselves. The sharing that is evident in the following discourse was done in fun and helped to engage a serious and sad child in the method. It also demonstrated to Sally that everyone imagines things for themselves no matter how silly these may be. In fact, our silly fantasies can often tell us something important and relevant about ourselves.

Barb: Do you ever make up dreams?

Sally: What do you mean, make up dreams?

Barb: When I was younger, I remember doing this a lot. I would imagine the things that I wanted to do in the future or in my dreams that I would love to do. My biggest dream…and don't laugh at me…I always wanted to be a back up dancer. Like at a concert, they have dancers moving around the stage. Look, you are laughing at me [Sally is chuckling]. That was always my thing. Obviously you can't see me doing that…My husband teases me about it all the time…So that was my silly kind of thing.

GROUP STRUCTURE

The use of creative activities has long been a part of group practice. Sometimes facilitators will use a specific creative exercise to achieve a certain goal, to address a particular issue or to help develop the group process. Music and writing techniques have been particularly popular (DeCarlo and Hockman 2003; McFerran-Skewes 2004; Tilly and Caye 2004; Wenz and McWhirter 1990). Our group also builds on this foundation. However, our group is also different

in that it is not a treatment group for a specific issue, and we are not incorporating arts-based methods to elicit particular narratives about certain life experiences. Rather, the arts-based methods work with children and young people to help them develop their self-awareness and self-esteem from a holistic perspective, which is a novel thrust within the area of arts-based group work.

Overall, the group is always focused on using methods that teach the children how to:

- pay attention and listen
- use their imaginations
- understand and practise mindfulness-based exercises
- explore their feelings, thoughts and behaviours
- recognize and develop their strengths and skills.

Children attend the group programme for 12 weeks, and each group session is held weekly for two hours in length. The group structure follows this basic outline:

- presentation of the plan for the group session
- primer activity
- various arts-based exercises based on a theme consistent with the group's needs/desires/goals; for example, learning about feelings, building group cohesion or practising mindfulness
- break at the halfway point where nutritional snacks are provided
- more holistic arts-based exercises
- a group closing activity.

So, an example of a plan for one group session might be as follows:

- Primer activity

- Relaxation reading
- Decorate dream journals
- Bad Day Better activity
- Break
- Painting feelings
- Closing.

In this plan, the children are focused on learning to listen and relax, preparing for dream work, and exploring feelings. In a 12-week group programme it is a good idea in the first few weeks to focus on (a) building trust, group cohesion and functioning, (b) listening and paying attention abilities, (c) social skills, (d) comfort with the methods, (e) reviewing group rules and processes, (f) beginning to teach concepts such as mindfulness and meditation, and (g) discussing the relevance of self-awareness. This does not mean that these concepts and practices are not repeated throughout the programme, but emphases shift as the group progresses. In the middle of the group programme, children should be encouraged to practise outside of the group the skills and methods that they are learning in the group. At this stage, the children are building on the skills that they have developed in the beginning and are continuing to develop their self-awareness. It is hoped the group has by this time developed a positive process that includes supporting one another, cooperating towards shared group goals, and feeling connected to the group process. Methods can be repeated at this stage with an emphasis on group activity and collaboration. The latter group sessions will prepare the children for the ending of the programme, foster the use of the arts-based activities outside of the group process, and engage them in some discussion concerning what they enjoyed about the group and what were challenges for them.

Standard group-work practices such as developing group rules and taking part in a closing exercise should always be an important part of the group work. Group rules are discussed, negotiated and agreed upon at the beginning of each 12-week group programme.

These rules are usually recorded by the children on a large piece of paper that everyone can see, and the children are encouraged to phrase the rules in a positive manner; for example, 'Don't stand on the tables' could be positively reframed to 'Please always stand on the floor'. A list of group rules from one group of girls aged 13 to 15 had the following rules: 'Keep secrets' and 'Don't open up windows' (both of which refer to confidentiality); 'Be loud and proud'; 'It's okay to laugh but not in a dissing [making fun of] way'; and 'Be yourself and exercise free will'. Other examples of group rules include 'Be nice and kind', 'Have fun', 'Play lots of games', 'Take turns talking' and 'Mean what you say'. As is evident, the rules are written down by the children using their own language and vocabulary.

Other groups have included very specific rules unique to the group members, such as 'Spin on the chairs for five minutes at the end of group'. We encountered a problem in a few of our groups where the children began spinning around on the chairs during the group, which understandably is a huge distraction to the group activity and processes. Consequently, we had to negotiate with the children that they would be allowed to spin around on the chairs but only at the end of the group session when all the activity was completed. This is an example of how we have learned to anticipate potential problems, in this case with the furniture. We now have comfortable chairs that do not rotate and that are not on wheels – the latter can lead to chair racing!

The one rule for which there is no negotiation is confidentiality. Confidentiality is explored in various ways with the children, as most of them are not familiar with the word 'confidentiality'. The idea of confidentiality is explored as a requirement for trust, for group functioning and cohesion, and essential for helping the group members feel safe sharing with each other and in the group. Examples are provided to the children so that it is clear what is being agreed upon; for instance, 'When you are at school and people are asking about the group, you would not repeat someone else's story from the group, and definitely not say anything or mention any names of the people in the group.'

At the halfway point of each two-hour group session, a break

is initiated where nutritious snacks are provided. Facilitators use the break as a reference point to move the group activity along and to keep the children focused. We make room for the children to choose some activities in the second half of group, and this is important in that it creates a sense of group ownership and belonging. In many of the group sessions, the children are encouraged to keep track of the activities that they would like to repeat. They do this in a space that is designated theirs for the duration of the group – sometimes a sheet of paper that is taped on the wall or part of a whiteboard. Along these lines, we attempt to involve the children in meaningful ways in the group; for example, asking them what a facilitator's drawing indicates about the facilitator. This process can teach them how to understand their own creations as well and to engage in the process of reflecting, discussing and developing self-awareness. For instance:

> *Tim*: First I want to talk a little bit about this. What do you think this says about me?
>
> *Mark*: That you really like the ocean and trees, nature, people.
>
> *Tim*: Yeah, I do like trees, I like the ocean, there's some people, yeah. Do you think it says anything about how I'm feeling today?
>
> *Mark*: Happy?
>
> *Tim*: Yeah, I am feeling happy. What about yours? Does yours say anything about how you're feeling?

I will note that facilitators should always be prepared to change exercises if a particular intervention or method is not working for the children in the group. Children and young people in need can become quickly frustrated and disengaged, and sometimes methods do not work out as expected. It is always a good idea to have many more activities planned for a session than you will have time to do. The children must achieve and experience success in the group activities.

In the first few weeks, the children need to be introduced to the concept of mindfulness and to the arts-based activities. Some of the children and young people might be reluctant to take up the art materials because of anxiety concerning their expectations or ideas about art; that is, they may think that they are not 'good' at drawing or painting. The facilitators should explain that the creations are not judged according to what they look like but are a means for self-exploration and discovery. There are also exercises such as 'Doodle Draw' that can be used to help the children become more comfortable expressing themselves through the arts activities. In 'Doodle Draw' the facilitators encourage the children to doodle for approximately ten minutes and then, with a variety of materials, the child is asked to modify the doodle by colouring in spaces with different colours, or identifying shapes that then become objects. Children can also be encouraged to sculpt something out of clay, such as the person beside them, without looking at what they are doing, which hampers the ability to judge the final creation.

Our group rooms are physically set up so that all of the art materials are visible on shelves. When some of the children enter the space, they gravitate towards the art materials that most interest them, and we encourage activity while they are waiting for the group to begin. Others really enjoy writing on the large whiteboards in the room and playing games such as 'hangman' before the group begins. Some children are comfortable sitting and waiting but others would prefer to be engaged in creating something or playing and this is always encouraged.

THE NUMBER OF SESSIONS AND SIZE OF THE GROUP

When we began working in holistic arts-based groups with children and young people in need, we started with a six-week group format but we quickly learned that this was not enough time to teach the children skills, to develop group functioning, or to effect change in the children's self-awareness and self-esteem. Given their desire to keep attending the group programme, it was not difficult to extend

the group to a 12-week format. As the weekly sessions progress, the children can be engaged with more depth and complexity in the group methods. It is essential that the first few sessions (typically four to six) are focused on building some basic skills, such as listening and paying attention, developing group rules and guidelines and creating a sense of belonging to the group.

Based on our experiences of facilitating the holistic arts-based groups, we believe that an optimal number of group participants is four children. Generally, the literature states that an optimal number of group participants ranges from five to twelve if everyone is expected to participate and there is emphasis on group relationships (Reid 1991). However, there is no consensus on an optimum size for an effective group. As Wickham (2003, p.42) states, 'the smaller the group the higher the level of intimacy and interaction' and that 'consideration must also be given to the specific problems and characteristics of the clients'. Along these lines, children with high needs often feel anxious, nervous and/or excited when attending the group. They often do not know how to interact with the other group members in appropriate and effective ways. For some, it takes a few group sessions for them to feel comfortable enough to engage with the other group members, while for other children competition is evident for the facilitators' attention, and acting-out behaviour such as teasing can occur. Clearly, all of the effects that these children are experiencing as a result of the traumas, losses and difficulties that they have encountered in their lives contribute to the behaviours that they bring to the group. One of the benefits of working with arts-based methods is that the children who have difficulty engaging with the group can still partake in creating something while they are watching and listening to the group activity.

Therefore, although four may seem to be a small number, children and young people in need are a challenging population and, importantly, this number allows the two group facilitators to attend to all of the participants, to manage the group discussion and interactions, and to engage all of the members in activity and discussion; to help the children interact with each other and the facilitators. The children who had attended more than six group

sessions (initially, more than one six-week group) also agreed that a smaller number of participants 'works better' because 'there wasn't competing against each other…it was not too crowded and people were more on task'. Having two facilitators is essential because one will often be engaged in delivering the content of an exercise while the other facilitator needs to manage the behaviours that are interfering with participation in the activity and the process of the group interaction.

Initially, the children's abilities to stay focused are poor. It is important not to become too frustrated with this process but to expect this to occur, and to develop exercises that can teach the children how to improve their focus and attention. Patience is required! Often the children will be very distracted and not focused on the facilitators' directions. They will make comments about something in the room or something that is not related to what is happening in the moment. Other times they are having multiple conversations between themselves while the facilitators are attempting to provide instructions, which will have to be repeated several times, and instead of responding to a direct question, they will state something that is unrelated to the question. Also, sometimes the children just act silly, which can be entertaining at times and fun for everyone. As can be seen in some of the examples of conversations contained in this book, many of these children have a good sense of humour. The trick is to find a good and productive ebb and flow between having fun and being focused on an activity. Ideally, both occur at the same time.

It is important always to have several exercises planned for any group session so that methods can be utilized that interest the children. This is true especially at the beginning when facilitating an intervention that they are interested in will engage them and begin to teach them the foundational skills that they require. The mood and energy of the group on any given day could modify the original plan. Sometimes the facilitators have to negotiate with the children about an activity or a plan for the group session. But on other occasions, it is better to encourage and persuade the children to follow the facilitators' lead. The following abbreviated group discussion illustrates these points:

Tim: I don't know what we're doing.

Mark: Four Square.

Peter: Yeah!

Tim: Well that's interesting that you want to play Four Square today because,

Peter: Every day!

Tim: We want to go outside today.

Peter: No.

Barb: What do you think of that [asking the group]?

Tim: Well, what's wrong with Four Square outside?

Josh: Outside? Because it's better inside.

Tim: What? You guys don't want to go outside?

Josh: I'm too lazy today.

Barb: Oh my goodness. You guys can even take turns with that camera…we're going to bring the camera outside.

Greg: We can do graffiti.

Tim: Exactly.

Peter: I'm thirsty. Do you have any cups?

Josh: Tired, falling asleep.

Barb: Instantly he's tired and not wanting Four Square. Remember I even mentioned the outside thing and you said 'Oh yeah, that sounds good'.

Josh: I want Four Square inside. I'm too tired to go down the elevator.

Tim: Okay, well the plan for today is that we're going to spend half the group inside and half the group outside, but we're going to go outside first.

Josh: Why don't we do the first half inside?

Tim: Because we want to end on a nice, quieter note.

Peter: But I'm going to get thirsty, I'm telling you because I ate too much cheese…Whenever I eat cheese I get really, really thirsty and I never stop drinking.

Barb: [providing the child with some water] Keep that in your hands for now, okay?

Tim: Yeah, we always go outside first so that we can come back in and have a break…we'll have some food, we'll have some fun, and at the end if you're not Four Squared out, we can finish it up in here. What do you guys think?

At this point, the facilitators had encouraged the group members enough so that they were willing to follow the original plan of completing an outside activity first followed by ending the session inside with a less energetic exercise. The facilitators did change their plans for an activity however and decided to incorporate the children's desire to play Four Square. Four Square involves having the children write and/or draw some good qualities about themselves in one quarter of a square – this could also include something that they learned in group or something that they are proud of. Then the square is rotated and each group member writes and/or draws something positive about each other in each child's square. One of the advantages of working in a group is that each child can receive positive feedback from all of the other members, not just the facilitators.

With four participants in a group, a justifiable concern would be attrition from the group. When we initially began working with holistic arts-based methods and children with high needs, we believed that we would experience attrition given the characteristics of this population. Thus, we began with more than four participants. However, we have consistently experienced almost no attrition from the group programme. In fact, given the chance to continue participating, almost all of the children choose to do so.

This desire to continue to attend and participate in the group is convergent with the positive results and feedback reported in Chapter 1, and with the positive changes that we are able to observe in the children over time. It also demonstrates that, for these children, having a positive place focused on strengths where they can have fun and learn something about themselves and others is important and relevant for them.

PRIMER ACTIVITIES

Group always begins with a primer activity that provides a definitive starting point. The primer activity signals that it is time to pay attention and come together as a group. Along these lines, the facilitators always participate in the primer activities. We have found that simply launching into an exercise is not as effective. A primer activity lasts no more than five or ten minutes and is meant to be fun. The activity often involves a game that can also help to develop listening skills and group communication and cohesion. In general, the primer activities increase participation through the use of non-threatening fun activities. The activities that we have developed and adapted require varying levels of cooperation and coordination. Using a diverse variety of primers can help to develop different skills and abilities.

The facilitators need to choose primers that will work best for a group and recognize when they have made the wrong choice, quickly changing directions and activities before momentum is lost. For example, with some groups, the use of balls and balloons in an activity works quite well while for others it does not. In one group of boys, having access to balloons quickly degenerated into chaos as they began releasing the air out of the balloons so that they were flying around the room. These boys had a lot of energy and were at the beginning of the group process so their ability to listen was not well developed. Clearly, it is a good idea to have several primer activities planned in case an activity does not proceed as planned.

At the beginning of a group, an exercise that can be used to help the group learn each other's names is as follows. Everyone

shares their name and something that they like, which begins with the first letter of their first name. For instance, 'My name is Sean and I like Smarties.' For a challenge, the group participants can be asked to repeat the other participants' names and favourite items, which assists the children to practise paying attention and using their memory. So, if there are four children and two facilitators in a group, the last child to share their name may have to repeat five names and objects as well as their own.

Another exercise that can be used at the beginning of a group is called 'Moose Antlers'. We have also used this game several times in training that we have facilitated with helping practitioners. With everyone standing in a circle, one child forms antlers by raising their hands to their ears and wiggling their fingers in the air. To pass the antlers, the participant drops their left hand and the person to their right raises their left hand to re-form the antlers. The first person's right hand drops next and the person to the right raises their right hand now holding both right and left antlers. The object is to try and move the antlers around the circle. To increase the difficulty of the game, introduce the moose mating call, which sounds like 'WOOOOP!' So, a participant, while holding both antlers, may choose to sound the call and pass the antlers across the room simply by pointing both index fingers straight out in front of their body with the accompanying call. In this manner, the antlers are moved around the circle in a random manner.

The children and young people really enjoy playing games. The 'Quarter Game' requires two teams who sit at a table across from each other. The team members sit shoulder to shoulder. One team is given the coin and they all place their hands under the table. This team has to confuse the other team about who has the coin in their hand. They can pass the coin between them until the other team calls 'Hands up!' At this point, the team with the coin all place their elbows on the table holding their fists closed tightly. Then the opposing team calls 'Hands down!' and the team with the coin, in unison, slams their hands – palms open – down on the table thus masking the noise of the coin as it hits the table. At this point the coin is under one of the team member's palms, and the opposing team has to guess which hand holds the coin. Games such as this

one can encourage children to cooperate, to form cohesion with their team members, to listen to and follow instructions, and to share their thought processes.

The children also enjoy using their imaginations and role playing and acting. Certainly, we want to encourage the use of imagination and imagery because this can help them to achieve tasks and goals. Additionally, by developing their imagination, their ability to contemplate other people's viewpoints and perspectives is improved, which can also be an important part of developing one's own self-awareness. By play acting and imagining, the children also have an opportunity to be active in the group. For some children this is a challenge to participate outside their own boundary of comfort. In 'Invisible Object' the children are invited to pass an invisible object around the circle. Depending on the group, the facilitator may wish to add a description of the object (for example, a heavy ball or a bag filled with feathers).

DEVELOPING GROUP COHESION AND FUNCTIONING

One of the messages that we communicate to the children is the idea that, while we are all unique individuals, we are also all connected to each other, which means that we can influence how group members feel, think and behave. Certainly, we all play a role in how well the group functions and progresses. I have elsewhere discussed this idea of connectedness in an analysis of a holistic arts-based group with adult women (Coholic 2005). For instance, women taking part in this group described the deep connections that can occur in groups stating that the group was about being at peace. 'Like nobody judged what you said…And now I see how much confidence everybody had in one another.' For another woman, the experience of spiritual connection felt inspiring and encouraging even after the group was completed. Even as adults we sometimes lack the language fully to describe and capture these processes, so it comes as no surprise that these abstract concepts have to be discussed with children in a way that they can grasp and understand them. For example, in one group with girls, the

facilitators used an exercise in which the girls were encouraged to make a chain out of construction paper – each link, which is made from a rectangular piece of paper glued together at the ends, represents a group member and is decorated by that person before being chained or linked together to form one long chain. However, in response to a question asking them 'What is one way that we are all connected?', one of the girls raised a story that she had viewed on the television about Siamese twins being connected and sharing body parts – a very literal understanding of the question and concept.

In developing group cohesion and functioning, we seek to engender feelings of support for one another, and feelings of loving kindness and compassion, to use the terminology found in the mindfulness literature. We want the children to feel a sense of ownership of the group and belonging to it. Unfortunately, many of these children feel marginalized and excluded in their daily lives, and the holistic arts-based group is at least one place where they can feel that they belong. This is one of the benefits of the group programme for these children; that is, they meet other children who have experienced similar situations. Sharing experiences is normalizing for them and can be affirming of their life experiences. They have a chance to be, and to discover, who they really are. Children have commented that they can be authentic in the group and that they do not have to pretend to be something that they are not. They learn that they can trust others and their confidence grows as they take risks within a supportive context. Consistently, the children and young people identify 'making friends' and 'meeting new people' as two of the things that they really like about the holistic arts-based group programme. In their own way, they let us know that they feel connected to the group experience.

One exercise that helps the children to consider the characteristics and nature of their specific group is to have them capture these characteristics in some type of symbol. The symbol could be a mandala, a coat of arms, a logo, and so on. Each participant can be represented on the symbol in addition to the characteristics of the group as a whole. One of the things that we do is hang these symbols somewhere in the group room for the duration of

the group to reinforce the group identity. While the children work on the symbol, discussion can be facilitated concerning what each member brings to the group, how they would like the group to function, what the group's goals are, what works well, and what the group's challenges are, to name a few examples. Other exercises can be used that demonstrate that we are all part of a whole; for instance, cutting different shapes for each child out of one piece of cloth or felt. We often utilize wooden clothespins and have the children decorate each pin to symbolize something about themselves. They can then hang these on a string, connecting all of the pins together. It is useful to have the children describe their clothespins, which also helps the group members learn about each other.

A version of the next exercise, 'Trust Leans and Falls', has probably been experienced by many readers who have attended summer camp or some type of leadership training. This activity should only be attempted if the children are able and ready to commit to safeguarding other group members against injury. However, if used properly, it can be fun and challenging, and can build trust by encouraging the children to take a risk and believe in their fellow group members. For some children, taking that leap of faith can be 'scary' but, by proving to themselves that they can feel this fear and carry through with the activity anyway, their self-confidence can be strengthened. If the children cannot perform this activity to full completion (or any other activity for that matter), it is important to stress that the group is okay with that too. Participating and trying may be great accomplishments for some children in need. As Tim explained to one group:

> And that's as far as you have to go the first time [preparing for the exercise]. Now here's the neat part. The part at which – there's a point – I call it the point of no return. And the point of no return is usually when one of two things happens – the person leans back and trusts, and the other person catches them, or they step back like this [takes a step backwards]. That's okay if that happens, that's fine, it just means that you might want to take a deep breath and

try again. It doesn't mean you don't trust the person, it just means that you're not ready to lean.

To engage in this exercise, the first participant stands with feet slightly apart and arms crossed over their chest. Eyes may be closed. A second participant stands behind the first participant with one leg in front of the other and hands positioned just behind the shoulder blades of the first participant. The facilitator explains that there is a set communication exchange that takes place before the first participant leans back. It is as follows: Participant 1 says 'Ready to lean'; Participant 2 says 'Lean away'; and Participant 1 responds by saying 'Leaning' and then endeavours to lean back without taking a step backwards. The participant standing behind the leaning (falling backwards) group member has to prevent that group member from falling to the ground. They should bend their knees to absorb the impact and push against the shoulder blades of the backward-leaning child. The challenge for the children is to complete the activity without taking a step back when they finally begin to lean backwards.

As the children become more comfortable in the group, exercises that were previously completed individually can be adapted to be completed by the group as a whole. One example of this is the 'Emotion Listen and Draw' activity where different clips of music are played and the children draw what each song makes them feel or think (see Chapter 4). In a group-oriented activity, all of the members can gather around a large sheet of paper that can be divided, for example, into large bubbles or into pieces of a pie for each clip of music. As the music clips are played, the group can collaboratively draw or paint in the same space. Discussion can ensue regarding what feelings and thoughts each music clip engendered, and about the creation as a whole.

Finally, 'Group Island' works well and enables the children to discuss together what their island is going to contain and why. A rough outline of a large island is drawn onto a large sheet of paper, and the children are told that the group has packed and is going to live on this deserted island. Few other instructions are provided in order to allow for creativity and the use of imagination.

The children then discuss what they have packed to bring to the island and draw what their island will look like once they have settled onto it. The discussion can focus on the boundaries created, the rules established, the aspects of survival, and of play, and so on. Children will often claim a part of the island for themselves and draw barriers such as a fence around their space; for example, 'Yeah, I should make a fence to protect myself.' This is not surprising given the lack of control some of these children have experienced in their lives and the need they have to protect themselves against real and anticipated harm. However, as the activity progresses, the children indicate ways that they will enable the other group members to enter their space (via pathways, for one example) and how they will cooperate as a group to survive on the island. For instance, 'One person will shoot at the sharks, while the other person goes and gets the fish.'

ADDITIONAL BENEFITS – LEARNING ABOUT VALUES AND NEEDS

Working in a group includes learning interpersonal and social skills, developing and cooperating toward shared goals, alleviating isolation and feelings of marginalization, and learning to support each other and developing feelings of kindness or empathy. Learning about one's values through comparison with others is also an important benefit of participating in a group. By learning about what other children value, each child can explore and contemplate their own values, thoughts and feelings, helping them to develop their self-awareness and self-understanding.

An exercise that works well, particularly with older girls, is based on the idea of shopping. In this activity, shopping is coupled with a point system that allows the children to earn 'Shopping Dollars' for each group exercise that they initiate and participate in. This part of the exercise encourages them to take part in activities that they have learned in the group. The last part of this activity takes place in one of the final group sessions where the children can redeem their shopping dollars for various items such as craft supplies. The 'store' itself is also used as a teaching tool regarding

desires and values. For instance, items are placed on the table and tags are provided to write prices. The children determine the prices based on how valuable they think each item is; for example, discussion occurs concerning why one person might price a journal higher than another person. This discussion points out how different people place different values on things based on their own perspectives and experiences.

We sometimes use food as a medium. Having healthy snacks as part of the group is an appealing aspect of the group for the children. 'Recipe for Success' is an activity that focuses on developing a list of what one needs to be happy or successful in life. For this activity, the facilitator brings various food items in order to create a 'Recipe for Success'. Before the food items are presented, the children and facilitators brainstorm a list of what one requires for happiness and success. Often examples will include things such as love, education, family and friends, determination and support. For older children, things such as money and a nice house sometimes become part of the list, but this provides an opportunity to discuss how our peers and society influences our desires.

Once the group is satisfied with the list, the food items are revealed. For one example, wraps can be made with vegetables, such as red and orange peppers, tomatoes and olives, and cheese. The next step is to decide what quality each food item will represent. So, the red peppers could represent love and the cheese could represent family. Labels are created for each of the food items and each child then records their own recipe card before the wraps are assembled and eaten. An individual recipe card might contain a list such as this: 10 per cent love, 15 per cent friends, 10 per cent creativity, 10 per cent education, and so on.

The list in Figure 5.1 was created by a group of boys approximately ten years old. It demonstrates activities that they enjoy playing, such as soccer, and budding interests, such as girls. It also indicates many thoughts and values that could provide rich exploration for the group discussion. For instance, 'Punks' were described as 'cool guys', which can lead to a discussion about what being cool is and why it is important. 'Not go crazy' was described as having the ability to be calm and focused rather than anxious

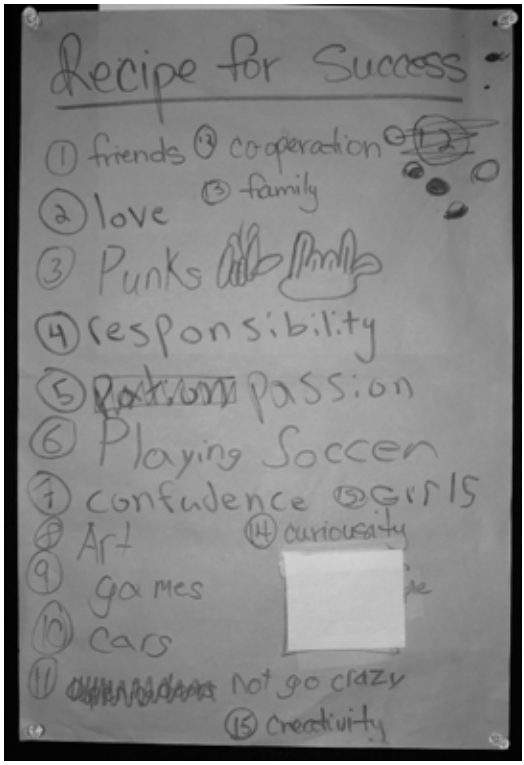

Figure 5.1 Recipe for Success

and stressed. This provided an excellent opportunity for the facilitators to review with the group what they had learned that could help them to exist in a calm and focused state of mind. The fact that they had included this on their list demonstrates the influence of the group methods, and that they are thinking about the importance of being mindful and feeling in control of one's feelings, thoughts and behaviours.

In an example from a group with girls all about nine years old, their 'Recipe for Success' list included family and friends, honesty, respect, love, patience, passion, goals, values, confidence and empathy. Similarly, another group of boys around ten years old

brainstormed the following list: get along, listen to each other, be kind (don't be rude), ask for help, friends, remain positive, creativity, smart and work harder. We can compare this with a group of older girls: education, money, job, house, family, friends, love, animals, boys and responsibility. While all of the children's lists of what they need to be happy and successful share commonalities, such as values and the importance of friends, as the children grow older their interests and priorities begin to shift. Obviously, relationships with significant others are going to be a topic for discussion in the groups with some pre-teen and teenaged young people.

Similarly, 'Cookie Recipe' is designed to elicit comments, feelings and discussion about what the children value and what good healthy feelings, attributes and processes are. Ingredients should be purchased to create no-bake cookies. As a first step, the children create a recipe for no-bake cookies. This is not a regular recipe, however, as the children quickly learn that each of the ingredients, such as sugar, chocolate and oats, are provided with new names, such as love, honesty and respect. Labels are created for each of the ingredients corresponding to these values and processes, and affixed to the actual ingredients. In the second stage of the activity, the recipe is created and then recorded.

CLOSING EXERCISES

It is often difficult for the children to end a group session and especially a group programme. Not only are they having fun in the group and receiving a lot of positive reinforcement, but typically they have already experienced much loss in their lives that can make yet another ending emotionally difficult to bear. As Benson (2001) states, facilitators should look out for several possible themes in the final stages of a group: denial that the group is ending; regression to earlier group experiences and relationship patterns; flight, which can include aggressive behaviours; and reviewing the group experiences and learning. The facilitators also have to sort out their own feelings related to the ending of group. Certainly, it is not easy for us to tell the children that they cannot attend

another group programme when they have completed their group. However, this is a reality that mirrors life and the many varied endings and beginnings that are constantly occurring for all of us. It is part of the work.

We begin to prepare the children for the end of the programme from the beginning of the group by reminding them in every session of the number of group sessions that are left to participate in, and by encouraging them to utilize the methods, techniques and skills that they are learning in the group in their daily lives. We affirm with them that it is sad that the group experiences will end but that their memories of the experiences can last a very long time. We encourage them to take their creations home if they so desire, or they can leave something that they have created in the group room that will be shared with others who will attend future groups.

Closing exercises symbolize that the group session is completed and can be used to:

- reinforce teachings from the group sessions
- leave the participants on a positive note
- help them make the transition back to life outside the group
- help us understand what did not work particularly well (or what worked really well and was enjoyed) in a session.

Mementos of the group work can also be created and taken home by the children. For one example, each child can use their recipe card created in the 'Recipe for Success' activity – for each quality that they identified as important to them, they can choose a bead and construct a bracelet or necklace that they can take with them to remind them of what they value and what is important for their happiness and success.

The 'Wish Stick' activity helps the participants to focus on their intentions, goals and wishes. Earlier in the group session, the group finds and selects a tree branch. We often take the children

outside during the group break so that they can expend some energy by running around, or there are several activities that take place outside in the natural world. The criteria for choosing the stick is left up to the group and they discuss what would make a good stick. Back in the group room, each of the children writes or draws a wish, intention or goal on a long thin piece of paper that can be tied onto part of the branch. These intentions are something the children would like to manifest or create in their lives outside of the group. The wish stick can be taken home and burned (in a fire place) by one of the facilitators, which releases the 'wish molecules' into the world. Or it can be hung in the group room as a mobile and reminder of their goals. The intentions and goals can even be revisited in a later session and revised if need be.

A very simple closing exercise that can be used if there is not enough time to engage in a more thorough activity is to have each child share one positive aspect of the group session and one challenge. This can be called 'Roses and Thorns' or 'Thumbs Up and Thumbs Down'. Constructing a group story is another simple activity. The story can be about the experience of the group that particular day. In the following example, the children are told that they can only use three words that are added to the previous group member's three words. Barb begins the activity:

Barb: Today in group,

Sally: It was fun,

Liz: Was very fun,

Tim: And also we,

Andrea: Made beads together,

Dawn: And played games,

Sally: We ate an apple,

Liz: That was four words! We ate an apple.

Sally: We ate apples!

Similar to the Four Square activity that was described earlier, good feelings and thoughts about oneself can be identified, reinforced and fostered by having the other group members identify some of each other's strengths and positive qualities. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways. We have used the method of having the children decorate envelopes that they then hang on a line in the group room. At the end of a group session, each member can write something positive about the other members on separate sheets of paper that they then insert in the appropriate envelopes. Some children like to take these home with them to read later, others like to read them right away, and still others prefer to collect a number of them and take them home when the group programme ends.

Finally, it is always a good idea and important to reinforce what the children are learning in the group. The shopping activity discussed earlier in this chapter can also be utilized to reward the children for conducting activities and practices that they have learned in the group in their daily lives. Shopping dollars (positive reinforcement in the form of fake money) can be provided to them for activities that they perform outside of the group to be spent in the last group session. The following group discussion that took place in a second last group session illustrates how this process can work to encourage the children to engage in the arts-based methods, to share what they have learned, and to remind them of what they did in the group programme. Reinforcement (the fake dollars) can be provided for doing activities outside of group and during the group session as well.

Barb: I want to bring back all of the ideas that we have talked about in the last three groups and at least kind of help you to remember them and to practise them. So, I have devised a shopping guide [putting this on the whiteboard].

Liz: We have to pay you?

Barb: No, I'm going to pay you!

Liz: But we don't get to buy anything.

Barb: You do, because the next time we come to the last group, there will be a store here that you will have money for if you want to buy something. So do you want to know what you have to do to get money? [The children are nodding their heads.] Alright. Do you remember some breathing exercises that we have done? Anybody remember any breathing exercises?

Sally: Yeah, like when you breathe in for 10 or 15,

Lee: And then you got to hold, or breathe in for like five seconds and hold for five seconds,

Sally: And then you got to hold it,

Liz: Breathe in for five seconds, hold for five seconds, breathe out for five seconds.

Barb: So…every day that you practise that breathing exercise for one minute, well, say you did it for ten minutes, well, that would be worth 100 dollars to you.

Liz: At home?

Barb: At home. You're in charge of it. We fully and completely trust you. If you do it here, you could start earning your money today. [The girls begin the breathing exercise.]…Slow it down…Now see, this is your first 10 dollars.

Liz: Why thank you!

Sally: Mindfulness.

Barb: Do you remember any mindfulness exercises?

Sally: What is that again?

Barb: When we can pay attention to things that are in the moment. Not our past…Do you remember when we have done different things…mindful listening and mindful eating, and mindful looking, mindful walking? Can

you remember any of those?…What about when we played Camouflage?

Lee: Be in the moment kind of.

Sally: I remember when nobody found me in Camouflage because I was under that tree.

Liz: [looking at the whiteboard] Visualization is 50 dollars, what?!

Barb: Do you know what a visualization is?

Lee: When you like visualize yourself somewhere…There was a story I had, and it's called 'Going Batty', and it said, why do you think the author picked that title? And I said, because going batty, you could visualize yourself as a bat doing what they do and stuff.

Barb: Good job at describing visualization. And visualization was also when we used our minds to take us somewhere that we wanted to be…You do it on purpose. So you put yourself on a cloud and you visualize yourself doing that.

Sally: Well today I visualized myself going to track and field, and winning. Yay me!

Barb: Yay for you! 50 dollars, oh wait, that's 500 dollars.

Sally: Okay, I'll take it!

Barb: We can come up with some exercises that you can use at home if you want. Now journalling and writing… Do you remember the feeling charts that we did with Tim? Where we talked about how much space each feeling took up?

Lee: So like tomorrow if I wrote a journal, I would say like 'Today I was happy?'

Barb: You make a feeling chart, right?

Lee: And then we bring it in here to prove it?

Barb: Yes, you can bring it in here so we can see it.

Sally: Can I make a journal of being mindful?

Barb: Yes, and that would be 20 dollars plus 20 dollars.

Sally: Oh cool!

Barb: Right. Now here's another big money ticket – a new perspective. We spent a lot of time in group talking about new perspectives. Does anybody remember what that is about?…If you can find a time where you have had a new perspective, you changed your thought or your feelings about something, and you can tell me how you did that, 50 bucks…Or it can have to do with being aware that you have a choice to make, and you make a choice based on what feels best to you.

Sally: Today when I was doing my test, I thought I wouldn't get a good mark. But then I changed, like I changed my mind and stuff, and then I guessed probably I would get a good mark. Then when my teacher was handing out the pages, I got a B plus.

Barb: You did get a good mark. So I owe you 50 dollars… [giving them journals to write in]…You get the deal about what shopping is about, right? You're going to come in and describe your list in your journal, and we're going to trade it for shopping dollars, and you're going to take our cash and go shopping, okay?

Lee: What about today, as a choice we make?

Barb: Yes, I am listening.

Lee: Do I get any money for saying that?

Barb: No, but you can share what you're thinking about.

Lee: Okay. Today this girl named Melissa came up to me and she was like, 'Come sit with us in the shade.' And I was like, 'No…I don't like you.' Because she is a really bad

girl that makes fun of everybody in my class…And she was like, 'Is that at me or your stupid friend Molly?' And I'm like, 'My stupid friend Molly, she's good at everything – you're just a bad trouble maker'…And I was like, 'I'm going to go sit with Molly.'

Barb: Did that choice feel good? If it was in your journal, it would have earned you 500 dollars. As a matter of fact, that was such a good story, I'm going to give it to you anyway.

Lee: Yay! Thank you!

Liz: Like what [will be in the store]? Tell us, like what are some examples?

Barb: There could be things like nail polish. There could be treats…I don't want to give it all away. But there will be fun things in the store.

The last closing exercise that will be described involves having the children construct something – whatever they want – using clay that represents one thing that they learned in the group session, or that reflects something important to them that they learned in the group, or even a feeling that they have experienced during the group (this activity is based on an exercise from the Corporation for National & Community Service 2005). Each group participant is given a small piece of clay. The group members are encouraged to share their object's meaning with the group, one at a time. When the second participant has finished presenting, the first and second group member mash their objects together to form a ball of clay. The third participant, after talking about his/her object, then adds it to the big ball of clay, and so on. When everyone has finished presenting, each person is invited to take a small piece from the large ball, which represents a piece of themselves and also a part of the whole group. This process also symbolizes that they are taking a piece of the group with them when they leave. For instance:

Sally: I'm going to make a foot.

Andrea: [addressing the facilitators] I don't know what to make.

Tim: You've got to make something that represents something that you learned in group today. It could be a symbol, could be a feeling…It doesn't have to be perfect. It's more that we're just working with our hands and doing something fun to end group.

Barb: [speaking to Sally] If you're going to make a foot, what did you learn about feet?

Sally: Being as quiet as possible.

Barb: Ah, what you were doing was mindful walking.

Beth: Okay, I'm done.

Andrea: I'm not okay you guys, it's going to take me a long time – I didn't even start.

Sally: [speaking to Andrea] What is it?

Andrea: I didn't start yet.

Tim: Why don't you just make a symbol of it – it doesn't have to be perfect.

Sally: [speaking to Barb] Hey that's a mouse trap, right? No, that's a clothespin?

Beth: Hey, good clothespin. [Speaking to Andrea] Let me see what you're making. A giraffe?

Sally: A donkey?

Dawn: A horse? An animal?

Barb: I'm making a music note. It's for the sounds of your poems.

Andrea: Can mine be something that I learned last week?

Tim: Sure it can.

Barb: Okay, Dawn, what is yours a symbol of?

Dawn: I can't tell you. I'm not done yet.

Tim: [speaking to Andrea] A turtle! Andrea, what is that a symbol of?

Andrea: Like slow.

Barb: The turtle reminds us to slow down and to pay attention!

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, a group structure and plan was presented as well as a discussion of some of the benefits of participating in a holistic arts-based group programme. Working in a small group can (a) teach children and young people in need to better understand themselves and others, (b) help them to connect with other children with similar backgrounds and experiences, and help them to feel more 'normal' and connected to a positive peer group, and (c) provide them with a safe and creative place to explore issues, thoughts and feelings. Arts-based methods that are especially pertinent to working with groups were described in this chapter and include developing group cohesion and functioning, and beginning and ending the group processes.

Group facilitators should be creative, flexible, energetic and open, but cognizant of good professional boundaries, attuned to the children's needs and patient. We know through common factors research and other research on the effectiveness of helping practices that the helping relationship accounts for a large percentage of client change (Hubble, Duncan and Miller 1999). Thus, group facilitators have to be able to form relationships with children and young people that are positive, empathic and supportive. Importantly, through the development of these relationships and through the utilization of the holistic arts-based methods, one must engender a sense of trust, safety and hopefulness. We believe in the resilience, intelligence and creativity of children. Children and young people in need can have positive and productive lives.

But it is up to us to keep developing our helping and health practices so that we offer effective and relevant methods that can help them recover and move forward in their lives in healthy ways.

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Afterword

Looking to the future, we plan to continue our research for the next several years. From a research and practice perspective, we do not know how long the positive effects of the holistic arts-based methods last. Nor can we say with absolute certainty that the positive changes reported in this book are due to the children's participation in the holistic arts-based programme due to a lack of comparison and control groups. To this end, now that we have developed holistic arts-based methods that are reported to work and that have positive effects in these children's lives, we are going to study the effectiveness of the methods. Certainly, there is great need for research that explores the effectiveness of holistic arts-based methods especially within the current context of evidence-based practice. Our work is a small step in this direction.

Finally, I will note that the holistic arts-based methods and processes discussed in this book are not a panacea for all children and young people in need. However, they are an effective way to engage many of these children who otherwise might be unlikely to attend a helping process such as counselling. They also represent a useful and meaningful way to work with children and young people in need, and can teach them essential skills for healthy development. We all benefit when children and young people are helped to reach their potential and become fully functioning healthy adults. Based on the discussion in this book, I hope that the reader will be encouraged to incorporate holistic arts-based methods into their practices in the ways that make sense for the children and young people that they work with.

Subject Index

Author Index

Art-based activities can help to develop resilience and self-esteem, enabling children in need to cope better with ongoing stress, trauma and loss. *Arts Activities for Children and Young People in Need* offers interventions and exercises drawn from practice and research for practitioners to use as a basis for their own arts-based groups or one-to-one sessions.

Drawn from approaches the author has used in her work with foster children, this book offers a wealth of activities designed to encourage children to use their imaginations and explore their feelings, thoughts and emotions. Exercises include drawing and painting pictures, making clay models, inventing words, talking about dreams and group work. These techniques can be especially beneficial for children who are not ready to enter into traditional therapies or counselling, but who will become more able to talk about their experiences and build their self-esteem through these activities. Extensive examples are given of how the facilitator can talk to the children and develop the exercises.

This accessible book will be of great use to health and education practitioners from a wide variety of disciplines who are involved in working with troubled children and young people.

Diana Coholic is Associate Professor in the School of Social Work at Laurentian University, Canada. Her research programme studies the effectiveness of holistic arts-based methods with children who have significant problems. She has been a social work practitioner for 18 years, and also maintains a small private practice working with children and young people. Diana's website can be found at www.diana.coholic.com.

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