

Multiple topics

Emotional work with young people

This learning activity supports:

- Topic 2: Attachment theory and research
- Topic 3: Child development theory and research
- Topic 8: Measuring/monitoring parental capacity
- Topic 9: Communicating effectively with children and young people
- Topic 10: Multidisciplinary working
- Topic 14: Placement stability and permanence

This exercise has been adapted from the Fostering Now Fostering Service Development Exercises¹.

Methods

Suitable for a facilitated workshop.

Learning Outcomes

- To develop awareness of the importance of listening and the qualities/skills required to listen effectively.
- To understand the impact of past experience on the ability to listen.
- To develop knowledge and understanding of how to talk with young people about the possibility of seeking additional help.
- To develop an appreciation of both the carer's relationship with the child or young person and that of others.

Time Required

90 minutes including:

- 30 minutes individual and paired work,
- 30 minutes debriefing,
- 30 minutes group discussion.

Process

Introduction

Placements were less likely to disrupt when carers...were rated as able to respond to the young people in relation to their emotional rather than their chronological age (for example by providing regular opportunities for play and nurture appropriate to a much younger child to meet earlier unmet needs) and the young people said that their carers listened to them and enabled them to talk about their past adverse experiences and current concerns.

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Foster care relies on large quantities of emotional labour. Children and young people in foster placements may never have experienced secure relationships. They greatly appreciate placements where they feel that they are accepted and where others respond warmly to them. Warm close relationships with other adults are also likely to benefit them greatly.

Fostering Now: Messages from Research (Sinclair, I,2005)ⁱⁱ p80

Activity set up

In this exercise, participants are asked to remember details of a hurtful personal experience (but only what feels safe to remember and share) and then to take turns to speak about it with a partner and to listen to their partner's experience. (Some groups may prefer to start with an ordinary experience before moving on to a more hurtful one). Participants are then asked to consider what made it easier or more difficult to talk to a partner about their hurtful experience and what made it easier or more difficult to listen.

Part 1 (30 minutes)

1. Individual work (5 minutes): ask participants to remember an experience in their life, perhaps as a child:
 - When they were emotionally hurt.
 - When in their life did this happen?
 - What happened?
2. Working with a partner, ask the participants to take turns to discuss the following:
 - Did they tell anyone about what happened?
 - If so, who and when?
 - Why did they choose to tell that person?
 - What was that person's response?
 - Did telling the person affect their relationship with her or him?
 - If so, how?
 - If they didn't tell anyone, why not?
 - What did they fear might happen?
 - If they didn't tell in words, how did they express their feelings?
 - Did they want people to notice their feelings?
 - How do they think this experience has affected their ability to:
 - talk about their feelings and experiences
 - help others talk to them about their feelings and experiences?

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Part 2: de-briefing (30 minutes)

Lead a discussion with the whole group.

Ask participants the questions listed below, about how it felt to talk about their experience and to listen to their partner's experience. Move the questions on and around the group, drawing out key points. Try to draw out learning points relating to:

- The skills required to listen (verbal and non-verbal).
- The beneficial effect of listening to and containing disclosure about, difficult experiences.
- The emotional blocks we may have to listening.
- The importance of the relationship between speaker and listener.
- The rights of people (including children) to disclose only what they feel comfortable and/or ready to disclose and to whom they choose.
- The role of adults in providing support.

Questions

- How easy or difficult was it for participants to talk about their experience?
- How did the response of the person they told affect how easy it was to talk?
- How easy was it to listen?
 - Did listeners have particular feelings about what was being said?
- When listening, how can one recognise when there is a need to refer on, or when a professional counsellor might be beneficial?
- What made it hard to listen?
 - Do participants think this showed in their body language?
- What blocked listening?
- Summarise the factors that affect how easy or hard it is to listen to someone talk about difficult or hurtful experiences.

Part 3: possible issues to draw out of the discussion (30 minutes)

Continue the discussion with the whole group drawing out other key issues. For example:

- Children have a right to talk to whoever they feel comfortable talking to.
- It is important that counsellors are not seen as the only people with whom young people can talk and that carers (or others) who may feel burdened with confidences and uncertain about how to respond are able to talk through the issues with someone with the appropriate skills.
- Foster carers and social workers need to be knowledgeable about the resources that are available locally. One task could be to find out if local counselling

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services will offer short-term assessments, support and advice to carers, as well as long-term counselling for young people in stable placements.

- Is it sometimes the case that young people find it easier to bring up a difficult subject with someone with whom they are not living, but then find it useful to talk things through with their carers?
- Are there skills-based workshops that could be organised to help carers and young people make the most of their relationship?
- What support do carers have and need in order to develop or use these skills?
- How would participants explore with a teenager the possibility of seeing a counsellor?
- What would they do if the teenager said they would rather talk to them or to someone who was unqualified?

ⁱ Research in Practice (2005) *Fostering Now: Fostering Service Development Exercises*

ⁱⁱ Sinclair, I. (2005) *Fostering Now: Messages from Research*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London.