

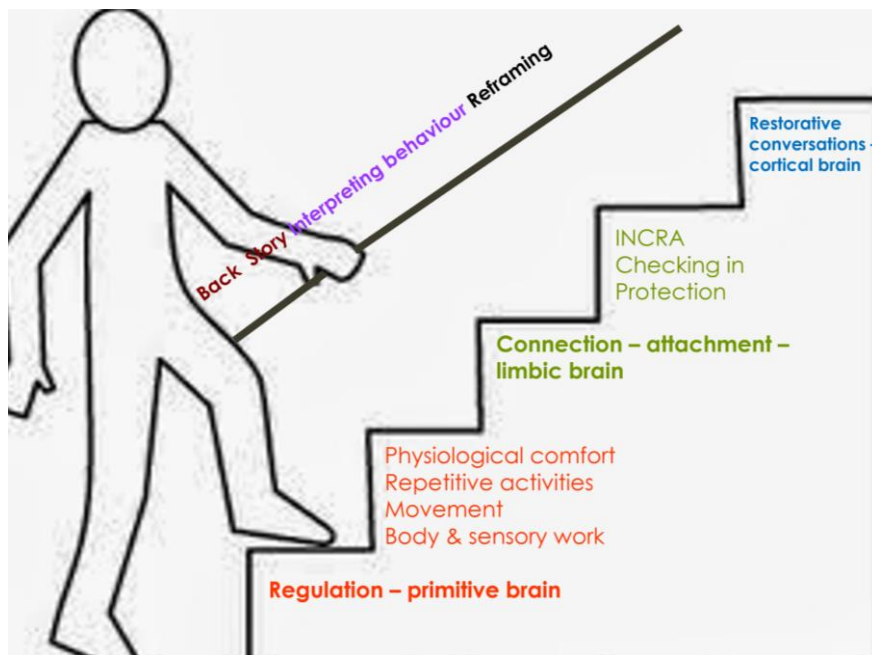
WENESDAY 29TH APRIL 2020 SESSION 17 STAYING CONNECTED AND CURIOUS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Knowledge and understanding of attachment and trauma

Regulate, Relate, Reason Part 3

Addressing the Thoughts

Today, we are going to continue to focus on addressing the thoughts through the top level – Reason, level on the Stairway model, shown below.



Just because we are focusing today on addressing the thoughts, it doesn't mean that we use talk and nothing else. As I said yesterday, using creative activities and resources help adults and children us to externalise thinking using more than language. Creative, externalised representations of ideas, feelings etc, can offer fresh insight and sometimes bring to light new ideas and deeper understanding. Recall your own experience of making and using your calm box and face masks, and making your representation of the baby in the womb. Creative expressions can provide a safe place for children, adolescents and adults to release their emotions and face their fears. The materials, which are experienced through the body and senses, can act as a 'lubricant', loosening the tongue and allowing thoughts, feelings and emotions to emerge. Using all our senses to express our thoughts and feelings

helps us to scaffold, extend, reinforce, enrich and embed the ideas that we are seeking to express, making them more meaningful and relevant. We reflected earlier in the series upon how trauma in childhood is experienced through the body and senses, therefore, it may be encoded as a sensory memory, and unavailable to the conscious mind. It makes sense then, when trying to work through painful experiences that body and senses are engaged and active. Furthermore, creative activities are usually playful in nature, and play is, of course, the language of children. It is a natural and necessary part of healthy human development. Creative activities allow children a means of expressing experiences, feelings and thoughts in a safe way. Through the activities, they can rehearse old and new life skills, resolve traumatic experiences, and build relationships. Such activities can provide a safe place for them to release their emotions and face their fears.

While the focus today is on connecting with the child's thoughts, supporting them in thinking rationally and logically, using cognitive skills to self-reflect, reason, process, problem-solve, evaluate, plan etc., some children may not be ready or able to express their thoughts verbally, so the creative materials are the vehicle through which the child communicates. This is fine. The goal is not to force talk or disclosure.

The process, not the product is the chain of communication, so there should be no evaluation of the end result as being 'good' or 'you could improve it by...' Notice, comment and wonder instead: 'I notice that you have chosen a shell to add to your calm box today. I wonder how the shell makes you feel/what it represents/what you like or don't like about the shell?'; 'I notice that you have drawn a bird in one of the patches on your Thinking Patchwork. If that bird could talk, I wonder what it would say?'

I hope to return to Noticing, Commenting and Wondering at some point, in a broader sense, but for now, I'm going to say a little bit about the skills needed to speak and listen to children, and then suggest some creative activities to support.

Skills needed when speaking and listening to children and young people

- Non-judgemental acceptance of the child's feelings - powerful and frightening emotions may lead children (and adults) to behave in strange and challenging ways. Through keeping boundaries, active listening, observation and helpful responses, we give the child space to explore thoughts and feelings.
- Empathy – the ability to make sense of the child's feelings and to understand those feelings and convey this understanding to the child, without being overwhelmed by the feelings.
- Authenticity – this requires us to have self-knowledge, to be aware of our own feelings and to have self-acceptance. Never ask a child to do anything that you would not do yourself. You should have personal experience of any activities you intend to offer, so that you have personal experience of the feelings and challenges they may evoke.
- Grasp all opportunities - Meaningful encounters can take place at any time: in the playground; in the bathroom; having lunch; in the classroom; on the minibus as well as in formal intervention sessions

Calm box cognitive reconstruction

- Experience your box alone.
- Try to engage your thoughts with the contents of your box.
- Notice how your body is responding...
- Notice how emotions shift and change...
- Take at least ten minutes and up to twenty minutes.

Reflection

How did it feel today, trying to bring your whole mind and body to the Calm Box activity?

Share some of your thoughts, feelings and emotions.

Activity

Complete a Thoughts Patchwork, based on your cognitive reconstruction. Make it as simple or ornate as you like.

There are some more suggestions for creative expressions at the end of this session.

Covid-19 relevance

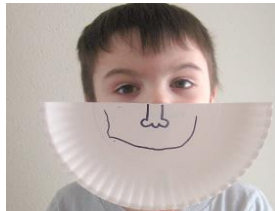
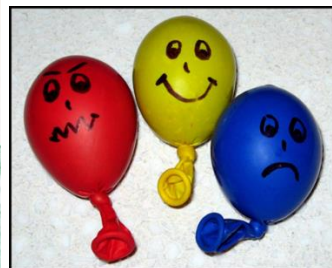
I have previously written that when we return to school, the environment and curriculum will need to be largely therapeutic, and for those children who are currently in school, that should also be the case. How can educators use this time to develop creative activities that will contribute to that therapeutic environment? I shall be talking a little about this in both Covid-19 webinars on 14th and 20th May. I also recommend two excellent books:

Sunderland, M. (2015) *Conversations That Matter: Talking with Children and Teenagers in Ways That Help, Worth*, London

Treisman, K. (2017) *A Therapeutic Treasure Box for Working with Children and Adolescents with Developmental Trauma: Creative Techniques and Activities*, JKP, London

This may be enough for today, but if you like, think about how you could use the Reason level for a calm box session, and the Thoughts Patchwork with a child with whom you work. You could of course, make a bodily feelings and an emotions patchwork for children who are not yet ready for reasoning.

Please share your Calm Boxes, Thoughts Patchworks, thoughts and ideas with me. Have a good day, keep safe and healthy and ring or email me to chat if that would help. Jenny x



Physical expressions

Run to different places in the room that represent different feelings

Feelings obstacle course

Feelings Twister

Feelings fishing

Throw feelings balls into buckets

Choreograph a feelings dance

Compose and perform a feelings rap

Play feelings hopscotch

Throw sticky hands at feelings cards