



Welcome to our spring edition of **MIND MATTERS**, the **bccc** professional newsletter where we share information, thoughts, ideas and reflections.

In this edition we will be:

- looking at 'The Parental Model', thinking about why we sometimes start work with the parent whilst keeping the child at the centre of our thinking.
- finding out what goes on 'Behind the Therapy Scenes'.
- exploring what Art Psychotherapy is.
- offering some ideas and resources to promote mental and emotional well-being for primary and secondary pupils.
- providing some tips on how to have a conversation with a bereaved child.

The Parental Model

We work in many forms therapeutically. A favoured model of ours is Parental Therapy and we thought it would be useful to introduce this model to you. It can feel unusual for a school if we recommend a parental intervention when a child/young person is presenting with clear issues; we would like to explain why we do this.

What is parental therapy?

It is not a parenting course, neither is it a "how-to". It is a more complex intervention, founded within psychoanalysis which is considered more of a specialist intervention than direct therapy. A therapist must be able to hold the child at the centre of their thinking, whilst supporting a parent to connect to their child-self which is evident within their interactions with their own child. A brilliant, must-read article for all therapists is Selma Freiberg's "Ghosts in the Nursery". Freiberg emphasises that:

"In every nursery there are ghosts. They are the visitors from the unremembered past of the parents."



The reality for parents is that, in wholly positive and negative ways, we are the most powerful people to our children. We create them, nurture them, develop them, interact with and mould them. But we also identify with them; we connect unconsciously from places of our own pain, and this can, over time, feel evident in our interactions with them. Children internalise unconscious parental projections as failings of their own: are they unlovable? too much to handle? do they damage their parent? And so, a vicious cycle can commence. Our job is to identify that cycle and essentially support a parent to understand their child-self within their relationship with their child.

WHAT DOES THIS WORK WITH PARENTS LOOK LIKE?

In therapeutic work with parents on behalf of their children, we seek to understand the impact for children who are troubled by the negative influence of the parental past. We know when parental therapy will be effective when a parent can't explain to us, for example, why they become so angry/worried/distressed/frustrated within interactions with their child or young person. They tell us that they're doing their best, that they are desperate to communicate with their child differently but become overwhelmed in the moments of stress. They tell us that they don't like their child, or that their child leaves them feeling de-skilled or hopeless. We listen for this language. Our training enables us to understand when, essentially, a child isn't being thought about, free from any former, unprocessed, distress within their parent. We recognise that this distress actually exists within their own childhood experiences, and not within their role as a parent.

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David

Meet "David". When we worked with his parents, David was eight. He presented as angry, uncontrolled, ruling the roost at home, and then at other times, withdrawn, distressed, and seeking to isolate himself from others. Our assessment showed us that David's mother was berating herself, to the point that she was distancing herself from David, with the belief she didn't love David and that he hated her. She believed that David felt her disdain and need for space and felt persecuted when he showed emotion about this, whether that emotion be anger or distress.

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WHAT DID OUR WORK INVOLVE?

David was carrying the unrepaired experiences of his mother, who couldn't connect with him. He internalised a belief about himself that he was damaging his mother, that he was unlovable, and that at any moment she would disappear. This was, at times, her fantasy – that she would just run away from these difficult emotions.

We worked with David's mother, without ever having met David. She needed our understanding, our care and our experience to name the guilt and shame she felt about her supposed feelings towards David. She learned that her feelings were actually not about David which (a) freed her from intense guilt and (b) freed David, over time, from experiencing her to be a confusing mixture - absent, angry and unavailable.

David benefited from our work as we held him at the centre of it, whilst supporting his mum to understand which of her childhood "ghosts" were present within her role as a mother. This is always painful work for a parent, be it mother or father.

They need time, care and complete non-judgment from us. They need our language and to trust that we can think about their child as being "not ok" so that they can be free to think about how *they* are "not ok" first.

Once a parent is able to work through some of their parental distress, we are then able to support them with strategies - the all-important "how-tos" when addressing conflict with their child. We can empower them to interact with their child from a parental place, rather than a place of fear or avoidance. It enables parents to put boundaries in place where they didn't exist, to 'see' their child free from any of their own pain, and to enjoy their time with their child. The benefits of this work to any child are immense and entirely sustainable. Wherever possible, and increasingly, we work with schools to ensure this parental work can take place.

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BEHIND THE THERAPY SCENES



When a school buys in a **bccs** counsellor or social worker, a school also buys in a comprehensive network of support for that worker. This means that every time a child in your school is in session with us, you can be assured that, behind the scenes there are several mechanisms in place to make sure that each and every session is safe, effective and professional. All our workers undertake rigorous safeguarding training which is updated on a mandatory basis. Alongside this we have a Designated Safeguarding Lead and Deputy who are always available to offer advice and reassurance to both workers and their links at school.

All our social workers and counsellors are assigned a case manager who they meet with on a regular basis. This meeting is a two-way process whereby workers can air queries or worries about their work in schools and for the case manager to discuss record keeping, workload and any feedback from schools which may be useful to the worker in terms of professional development and client/school liaison.

All workers are offered clinical supervision in accordance with professional body standards. Supervision is a specialised form of professional mentoring provided for practitioners responsible for undertaking challenging work and ensures standards, enhances quality and creativity, and enables the sustainability and resilience of the work being undertaken.

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Supervision provides practitioners with regular and ongoing opportunities to reflect in depth about all aspects of their practice in order to work as effectively, safely and ethically as possible. Supervision also sustains the personal resourcefulness required to undertake the work. We have a team of five in-house supervisors and we also make use of external specialists, for example, for our play and family therapists. At **bccs** we actively encourage workers to seek help and guidance whenever they feel they need to. We know how challenging it can be to work one-to-one with children and young people and that the workload is increasingly complex and diverse. There is always someone at the end of the phone to chat things over with on an informal basis and to ensure that practitioners remain reflective and open to new ideas in order to offer schools the best possible service.



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As well as offering supervision to our therapists, we also offer professional supervision to schools so staff can understand and unpick their encounters with a certain child. Please visit our website for details.



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ART PSYCHOTHERAPY



Art therapy is a form of psychotherapy that uses art media, materials and activities as its primary form of expression and communication. Within this context, art is not used as tool to diagnose but as a medium to address emotional issues which may be confusing and distressing for the individual. An art therapist uses art materials and directives that will both encourage the young person's sensory responses and also generate imagery that is directly connected to their emotions. This process helps the individual to re-experience their emotions in a way that allows them to organize their feelings and form a narrative around an overwhelming or traumatic experience.

Although influenced by many psychological theories, an art therapist will draw on a variety of approaches that are relevant to the work, for example, attachment theory. Art therapy sessions are supported by a trained and registered professional who will typically have an artistic and creative background.

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The individuals that we work with, do not need to have any skills or experience in art and people of any age can use art therapy to communicate thoughts and feelings that they may find difficult to put into words. Visual language in this context can help people to make sense of things and understand a better sense of self, all within a safe non-judgemental and confidential space. Art therapists might sometimes provide ideas or prompts, for example, some art therapy groups might focus on a particular theme or activity in each session. Usually, the work is non-directive which allows for freedom of expression.

A common misconception is that art made in the session is analysed for content, however, an art therapist never judges the art or tells the individual what it means. Instead, they will help the client explore what it means to them and how they felt about making it, bearing in mind also, that not everything made will need to have a meaning.

Art therapy is empowering and transformative and by allowing people to access their creativity it can open many possibilities to the goal of self-awareness and a better sense of self.



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RESOURCES FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Wellbeing Sandwich



Why don't you get your class to create their own wellbeing sandwich! You could think with the children about different things they can do that make them feel happier, more relaxed and less stressed or worried. Then, you could suggest that the children cut out two pieces of paper in the shape of a slice of bread, (perhaps they could draw around a template?) and then cut out some coloured paper shapes to represent the items they would like in their sandwich. Encourage them to be as inventive as possible.

Then once they have done this, the children could think of the things they could do that could help them feel more relaxed and happier. Once they have a few ideas in mind, they could then write their ideas on the different food items shapes they have cut out. Now, the wellbeing sandwich is made, and the children will have had fun, whilst learning ways to increase their sense of wellbeing.

Mindful Hand Tracing

A simple exercise to show children how to calm their body down when they are feeling stressed.

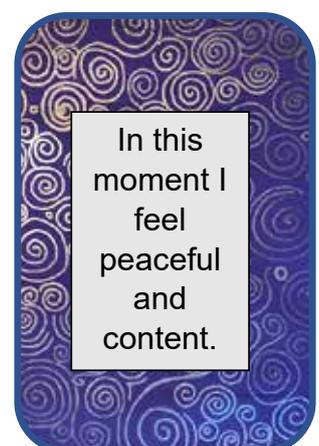
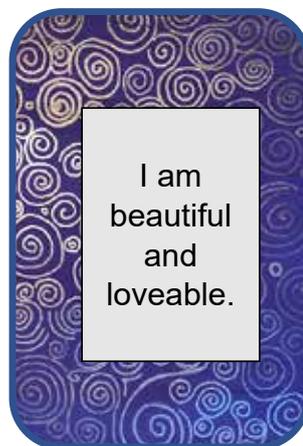
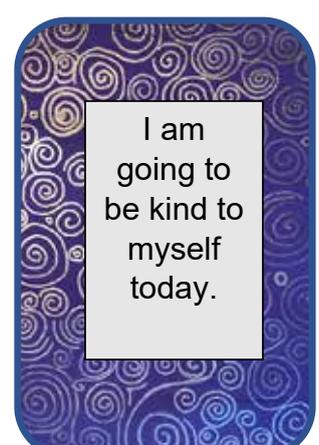
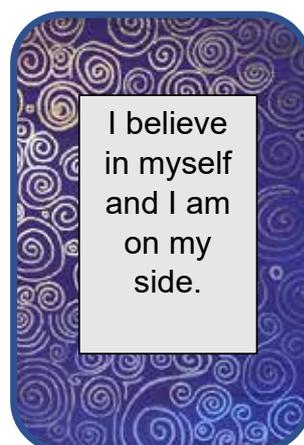
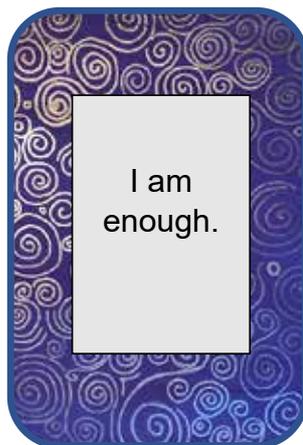
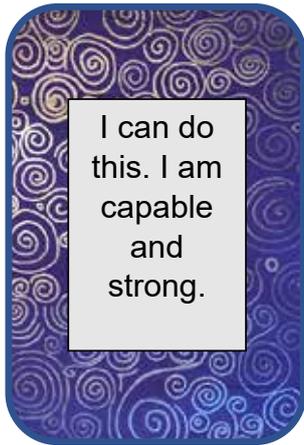
Hold one hand out flat. With a finger on the other hand, trace slowly up and down the fingers and thumb of the other hand. As you do this, breathe in through your nose when you trace up a finger, and breathe out through your mouth when you trace down a finger. Make sure that it is done nice and slowly. You could all do it together as a class perhaps if things are feeling hectic as a way of calming down the mood, or alternatively you could do it together with one pupil who may be feeling anxious or stressed.



RESOURCES FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Positive Affirmations

Positive affirmations are a powerful way for young people to begin to take charge of their thoughts, and they can help to reduce fear, negative thinking, worry and anxiety. Affirmations need to be repeated over and over again to oneself in order to slowly change patterns of thinking. If you have a pupil or groups of pupils who seem to have low self-esteem or a negative outlook, these affirmations below may be useful for them. They might find a particular affirmation will resonate with them more than others. Perhaps they could perhaps be printed out and stuck onto card.



Here is a quick exercise to help your pupils calm their body down when feeling stressed and anxious.

Two Mindful minutes...

Take one minute...

- What can you hear?
- What can you smell?
- What can you see?
- What can you taste?
- What can you feel?

Take another minute...

- Focus on right now.
- Breathe and release.
- Relax any tension in your body.
- Remind yourself 'all is well'.

HOW TO

In this edition, our How To article is focused on talking with a bereaved child.

When a pupil in your class has had a bereavement, it may seem hard to know how to help them and what kind of conversations to have. Below are some ideas about how to support them and what to say:

1. It is important to take time to acknowledge with the child their loss. If it is not spoken about at all, it will be harder for the child to feel they can express their feelings and they may feel the death they have experienced is something to be hidden.
2. When you speak with a younger child, try to avoid ambiguous language, such as 'lost' or 'gone to sleep' as this can lead them to become confused about what has happened. It is better to be direct with your language and acknowledge with them that their loved one has died. Phrases such as "I understand that Daddy has died" is more helpful than "I understand that you have lost Daddy."
3. It is worth considering the way that you communicate with the bereaved pupil as it is not always what you say that is important, but how it comes across. So, the timing, the place, your tone of voice, and your body language are vital. Empathy, compassion and understanding go a long way.
4. Identify a 'link person' for the child to talk with about what has happened, someone they can trust and feel that they can talk to. It might be that the child can speak with this person at allotted points in the day, or it could be set up that the child has a 'pass' where they can go and find that person when they feel they need to talk.
5. Be aware of special days – anniversaries, birthdays, Mother's Day etc and be mindful of special areas of school life that may strongly remind them of their loss, for example parents' evening, or a topic that focuses on death or family. Acknowledging this with the child beforehand, will also let them know that you are aware and have them in mind. Maybe you could set up a signal with them before a potentially triggering lesson, where they can tell you they are struggling and need time out or just a little bit of reassurance. It could be a hand signal, a code word or holding up a card.
6. Remember to look after yourself too. The topic of death affects us all in different ways, so allow yourself to feel your own emotions and take care of yourself, perhaps take time to talk to a colleague, or do something nice for yourself.
7. Supporting parents is also vital. Here are some tips of the kind of things that would be useful to suggest to parents:
 - Children benefit from being included as much as possible and need clear, age-appropriate information about their loved one's death and the rituals and ceremonies that will follow.
 - Keeping to familiar routines as much as possible can help provide reassurance and reduce anxiety.
 - Most children, especially younger ones will benefit from hugs and cuddles.
 - When there has been a traumatic death, information can be given over weeks, months or even years. Give simple facts at first which can be followed by more information later, perhaps prompted by the child's questions.
 - Reassure your child that they are not in any way responsible for the death. Young children are still learning the difference between things they caused to happen and things that are not their fault.

We hope you have enjoyed this edition of Mind Matters. If you need any further support or help, please use the contact details below or follow our social media channels for updates and news.

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