

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR TALKING TO CHILDREN

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Working with children

You

- Its demanding work
- Helps to have high degree of self awareness
- and good powers of observation
- Need to like children!
- Need to be comfortable with children for it to be rewarding
- Need training and support



Your training needs

- Child development knowledge
- Talking with children
- Opportunity to self reflect
- Factors which can confound children's communication and impair language
- Practice the skills in non-threatening environment



Steps

- Child Focused environment
- Preparation/explanation
- Rapport
- Talking to children



Environment

A child focused environment helps child's:

- Stress level
 - Improve co-operation
 - Child's attentiveness
 - Resistance to suggestion
 - Ability to communicate
-
- Sit at their level
 - Sit alongside, not opposite



Preparation/Explanation

Lack of explanation leads to misunderstanding, anxiety, fear, self-blame

- Explain what is going to happen
- Set ground rules
- Explain your role
- Explain roles of others eg judge
- Not just a chat – important ‘work’



Explaining Your role

Assume most children are confused

- Be careful of language
- Ask what they know about why they are there
- Don't talk in generalities
- Only explain what they need to know



Rapport

- Multiple closed questions can inhibit rapport
- You are gauging their cognitive, linguistic level
- Creating a space for safe self disclosure
- Letting them know you are interested
- Showing this is about you listening to them
- Eye contact, relaxed body posture, warm intonation, smiling, nodding



Tips for Talking

- Open ended questions.. “Tell me...”
- Don’t assume
- Don’t interrupt
- Summarize back in their words to verify
- Repeat last few words of what they said
- Don’t interpret
- Don’t reassure or confirm (not therapeutic)
- Give time for answers (10-20secs)

Don’t pressure



Tips for Talking (2)

Language

- Children will answer questions they don't understand. They assume adults know the answer and they want to get it 'right'
- Use short, simple sentences
- Be clear (names not pronouns)
- Simple tense
- Active not passive voice
- Avoid jargon, metaphor, idiom
- Avoid double negatives
- Avoid "hard" words and abbreviations



Tips for Talking (3)

Be careful with concepts

- Time
- Distance
- Relationships
- Comparative/superlative
- Size



Talking about feelings

- Is a high order communication skill
- Draws on cognitive, psychological and social factors
- Need the vocabulary
- Need familiarity in labelling and describing



Words

Think before you speak – big words/jargon?

- Court (basketball)
- Hearing (you do with your ears)
- Matter (what's the...)
- Represent (?)
- Orders (?)



Language Impairment

Will impact on your conversation

Cognitive Disorders

- Downs Syndrome/Foetal Alcohol Syndrome/Autism/Hearing Loss

Acquired Disorders

- Brain injury/infection

Plus – ADHD/conduct disorder/anxiety & depression/exposure to trauma/English not first language



Language Impairment (2)

- Can be mistaken for rudeness, inattention, low IQ
- Can lead to over-acquiescence, suggestibility

Watch for inconsistencies which can indicate comprehension problems



Key messages

- Keep an open mind
- Use language child will understand
- Ask open ended questions
- Don't assume
- Be curious, ask for clarification if not sure
- Be patient
- Some children will not want/be able to talk
- Don't lead or pressure
- Enjoy! Children are endless sources of fun and revelation



References

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