



The TOOLBOX

TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THEIR EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL NEEDS



HOW CAN WE HELP CHILDREN DEFUSE THEIR UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS?

TOOL: Prevention | Intervention

TARGET AUDIENCE: Elementary school

TOOL INTENDED FOR: Professionals | Parents

DESIGN

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– Details: Teachers, psychoeducators, special education technicians, psychologists, educational consultants, parents.

TARGET AUDIENCE:

– Elementary school children who have difficulty managing their emotions, particularly children who are stressed, impulsive, inattentive, hyperactive, oppositional, aggressive, anxious, depressed or those with autism spectrum disorder.

NEEDS AND BEHAVIOURAL MANIFESTATIONS

– Unhelpful thoughts that elicit negative emotions.

SPECIFIC GOALS

– To help the children address unhelpful, negative thoughts and replace them with helpful, realistic thoughts that are more likely to lead to positive emotions.

DESIGN

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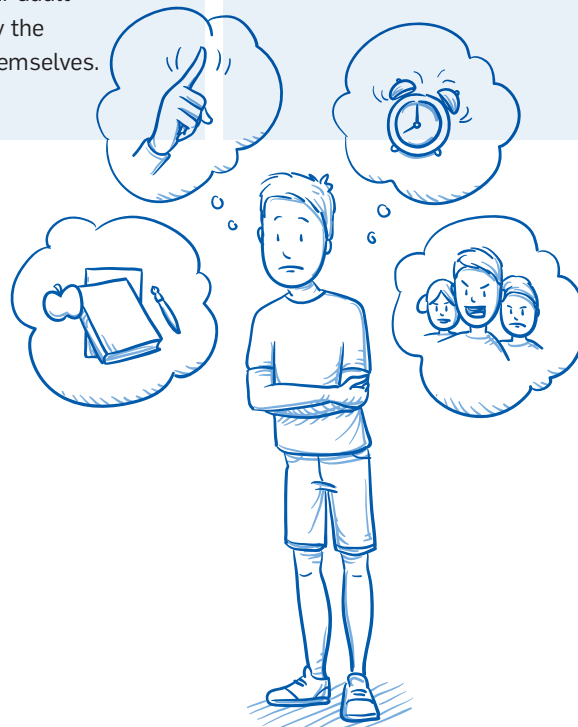
HOW CAN WE HELP CHILDREN DEFUSE THEIR UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS?

Thoughts and emotions are closely connected. Sometimes children come up with negative ideas that can lead to angry, anxious or sad feelings. These thoughts are considered unhelpful. Depending on the situation, they may be realistic (they reflect the situation) or unrealistic (the children have misconceptions).

When the children's perception is incorrect, adults around them (parent, teacher, professional, etc.) can help them feel better by addressing their unrealistic or exaggerated thoughts about this situation. The following chart briefly illustrates each step of this process with examples.

Note: In order to undertake this process, we need to have a trusting relationship with the children. Also, the children should not be having a tantrum when being questioned.

STEPS	EXAMPLES
<p>Step 1: Help the children objectively describe the problem.</p> <p>When the children have calmed down, invite them to explain what happened or describe the problem. What is the problem? What aspects bothered them? Who else was involved? How did they react? What were the consequences?</p> <p>Don't interpret the situation from your adult perspective or immediately downplay the situation. Let the children express themselves.</p>	<p>Parent: "William, I'd like to discuss what happened after school. Can you tell me what happened?"</p> <p>Child: "I wanted to go to the park and you told me that I had to finish my math homework before I went. I don't understand anything in my homework! Besides, you never let me go play in the park!"</p>



STEPS

Step 2: Encourage the children to verbalize their emotions, thoughts and physical sensations.

If they have difficulty expressing their emotions or thoughts that were going through their minds when the situation occurred, encourage them to relax and reconsider what happened. How did they feel physically and emotionally? What was going through their minds at the time? Reassure them that it's normal to experience unpleasant emotions and sometimes feel bad about their body. It's not pleasant, but this can be a good opportunity to take action and see how it might happen next time.

Step 3: Help the children determine how realistic their thoughts are by looking for proof.

Help the children examine the proof (or facts) that support their unhelpful thoughts in order to determine whether or not they are realistic. This proof may be related to the past (other similar situations experienced in the past), possible interpretations of this particular incident, or general knowledge about the problem (e.g. physical reactions when angry). The subsequent intervention will be different depending on whether or not the unhelpful thoughts are realistic. If the thought is unrealistic, the adult will use questioning to help the student come up with a more realistic idea. On the contrary, if the unhelpful thought is realistic, the professional will instead use a problem-solving approach.

EXAMPLES

Parent: "How did you feel?"

Child: "I was really frustrated."

Parent: "Do you remember what you thought and how you felt in your body when you felt frustrated?"

Child: "Yeah, a bit. I thought I'd never be able to finish my assignment on time. After that, I was hot and my fists were clenched as if I was going to hit something."

Parent: "What you felt is normal. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?"

Child: "It's not fair that I have to do my homework after school and that others can go play in the park. I'm afraid of being rejected tomorrow because I didn't play in the marble tournament. Also, my homework is probably poorly done because it was too hard. Ms. Francine is going to argue with me and I'll probably have problems."

Parent: "Do you think your friends can go play without finishing their assignments that are due tomorrow?"

Child: "No, but my friends' parents are not as strict."

Parent: "Has Ms. Francine ever got mad because you had too many mistakes on your assignment?"

Child: "No, but she's not happy when we don't try to write an answer."

Parent: "What's the purpose of homework?"

Child: "To practise, to find out what you understand and what you don't understand."

Parent: "Are there things you understand in your homework? What don't you understand?"

Child: "I know how to do the first step of problem solving, but I can't remember how to do the other steps."

STEPS

Step 4: Call into question unrealistic, unhelpful thoughts.

Based on the proof gathered by the children, question them to make them realize that their thoughts seem unrealistic. Do they have any proof beyond a reasonable doubt that what they believe is true? Help the children consider the positive aspects of the situation (not just its negative aspects), in order to put the incidents into perspective and consider the degree of control they can exercise in the situation they consider to be problematic. If their thoughts turn out to be wrong, suggest other interpretations of the situation. Based on your comments, you can help them have a more accurate perception of the situation by showing them that they lack proof to support their negative thoughts or that there is proof to the contrary.

Step 5: Help the children find more realistic thoughts.

After reviewing the proof supporting or not supporting the children's unrealistic thoughts, help them replace unhelpful thoughts with more realistic, supportive thoughts. They should be encouraged each time to determine the positive emotion, but also the potential benefits associated with this new way of thinking, in order to encourage them to adopt it (for example, improving a relationship, making new friends). Determine whether this new way of thinking seems satisfactory to them. If not, this process will need to be continued.

EXAMPLES

Parent: "What would really make your friends no longer want to play with you?"

Child: "If I say mean things to them?"

Parent: "Yes, it's possible that they won't want to play with you after that. Remember, your friends are in your class. They also have a homework assignment to hand in tomorrow. They're going to understand that for one night you can't go play with them in the park. Also, it's quite possible they haven't finished the assignment either."

Parent: "What do you think would really upset Ms. Francine?"

Child: "Obviously, if I hand in an assignment that's not done!"

Parent: "Exactly. I think if you do all of your homework, your teacher will see that you tried and she'll be satisfied even if all the answers are not correct."

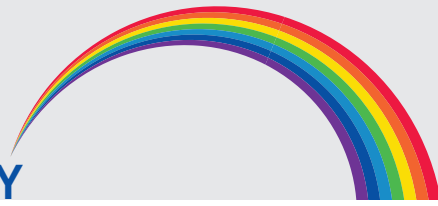
Parent: "How could you react when you're in a situation that makes you feel angry?"

Child: "I might think it's not the end of the world if for one night I can't go play in the park."

Parent: "Also, if you focus on finishing your assignment and ask for help if you have any problems, you'll be able to go meet your friends in the park more quickly."

NOTE: Impulsive children and those at the beginning of elementary school may find it more difficult to do this introspection.

BIBLIOGRAPHY



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