

Advice And Guidance PDF For Structured Or Directive Visual Activities

Introduction

Visual imagery can be used effectively in a number of ways with children and young people, e.g.

- Diagrams to help explain things clearly
- Assessment tools
- As a relaxed way of engaging together

Visual art, such as drawing or painting, can also be a way of helping young people to express themselves.

Structured vs Non-directive ways of working

The two main ways of using visual imagery with children are:

- Structured/focused/directive tools and exercises
 - those prepared or chosen by the worker to achieve a particular purpose, often within a set timescale
- Unstructured/non-directive activities
 - allow the worker to go at the child's pace and learn from them without imposing an agenda or a particular approach

Structured visual tools can be particularly helpful:

- a) When you are making an assessment in short timescales, e.g. trying to find out about what has happened to children, or when you are seeking their views
- b) Where there is something you need to convey to a child, e.g. explaining why they need to move to a different placement - a diagram or visual representation may help show this
- c) When you are implementing a particular intervention (e.g. working to reduce a young person's offending behaviour).

Non-directive approaches may be particularly helpful:

- a) During a broader assessment of the child's needs, concerns and difficulties
- b) To engage children who are particularly wary, distant or angry
- c) To achieve broader aims in the work, e.g. allowing the child to work through some difficult feelings

Some key points for directive exercises

- Directive tools and approaches are generally most successful where some rapport or trust is already established.
- Aim to go at the child's pace as many will struggle to focus and concentrate on a structured activity
- Do practise on yourself or a colleague first before using it with a child so you feel familiar and comfortable with it and have an idea of how powerful it can be.

Warning

If you always decide in advance which tool you are going to use, you risk trying to fit the child to the exercise which may not work or be too leading. An exercise which only offers certain options, for example, can suggest to a child that this is the only kind of information the worker wants to hear about. It may prevent them from talking about what is real or important and even encourage them to fabricate or exaggerate. This is particularly important with children and vulnerable adults as they may be more suggestible and open to influence by adults they perceive as powerful (Jones, 2003).

Familiarising yourself in advance will mean you are more able to create something individualised in the moment when it is needed.

Avoid Interpretation

It's important to remember that children's images are usually not literal statements, evidence of what has happened to them, but are more metaphorical in nature. They tend to come from an overlapping of their inner and outer worlds, a blend of fantasy and reality. For example, children might be more likely to show their experience of abuse through making a messy, abstract image rather than drawing what has happened to them (Case & Dalley, 1990). So it's safest to avoid interpretation and instead support children's self-expression through observation, comments and open questions.

Try these kinds of comments and open questions instead to help children verbalise their inner experiences and encourage them to continue:

- I see you've scribbled that all in black
- Can you tell me about the little boy there?
- What does the dog think of that?

Further Reading and Guidance with Examples for Visual Exercises

Geldard, K. & Geldard, D. (2008) *Counselling Children: A Practical Introduction*. 3rd Edition. Sage, London.

Sunderland, M. & Engelheart, P. (1993) *Draw On Your Emotions*. Winslow Press, Oxon.

Striker, S. & Kimmel, E. (1978) *The Anti-Colouring Book*. Scholastic, New York.