

Creative Writing

Creative writing may be a safe way for some children and young people to communicate their feelings in written form rather than talking. There are a range of ways workers can support them in this. Remember that the main aim of the work is to enable children to explore and process their experience not to produce a 'good' poem or story. The approach you take will depend on your role and the aims of the work.

Role and Purpose

With some children and young people, your role might be a supportive one, giving them some help and guidance to write on their own, as a diary or life story. This can help them find private and self-supportive ways of expressing themselves or be an empowering way for them to let others know about their experiences. Some young people might want to bring selected extracts from their writings to discuss with you as part of your work together.

You may alternatively be aiming to find containing and safe ways of enabling young people to bring troubling, repressed or overwhelming feelings into their consciousness so that these can be named, shared and processed within a trusted environment and relationship.

Getting Started

With all forms of creative writing the first stage of creation can be particularly cathartic. It is an opportunity for children's unconscious to be given sway, so that their internal world can emerge:

"the tough, the raw, the uncomfortable and the unresolved can first see the light of day and be given form" (Miles 1996:30).

Your task may be to help them select what is important and put things into sequence so that it becomes a poem or a story etc. Some young people may need a lot of support but you may not need to do anything more than give others some help and guidance and listen to a story or poem once written. The quality of your relationship, the respect you show, and the uninterrupted time you have for this will be key.

Points to Remember

- As with all artistic and creative work by children, their writing should be honoured and treated with care and respect.
- It is important you do not step outside the boundaries of your skill and experience. Unless you have undertaken additional training you should be wary of using creative writing as a primary method in more intensive or therapeutic work as a therapist would. Seek guidance from your supervisor or a specialist arts or play therapist if you are unsure.
- Instead aim to treat the writing as a way of opening up the communication between you and of helping the young person find safer ways to express him or herself.
- Always consider whether children might benefit more or additionally from some direct verbal communication about issues of concern to them.

Further Reading

Bolton, G. (1999) *The Therapeutic Potential of Creative Writing*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London.