

Case Example Of Using Non Directive Visual Imagery

Jaycee, aged 6, and her younger sister Kayleigh, aged 18 months, have recently come into foster care following the making of an interim care order. Professionals involved with the family had been concerned about the neglect the two girls were experiencing. Both parents had been misusing alcohol and illegal substances since before they were born and the children were failing to thrive. The parents had allowed little previous professional contact with the children so little is known at this point about their needs and experiences. It is apparent that Jaycee is quiet and nervous, hiding herself away wherever possible.

Joanna has been asked to carry out some non-directive work with Jaycee to help make a broader assessment of her needs and give her a safe space to talk about any worries or concerns. Joanna will meet with Jaycee every week for the next six weeks and then provide a report as part of the care proceedings.

Joanna begins by booking a room at the local children's centre where she can meet at the same time every week with Jaycee. She visits Jaycee first in the foster placement and talks with her and the foster carer about why she will be meeting with her and the purpose of the work. She explains that what Jaycee tells her cannot be confidential as the court want to learn as much as possible about her so they can help her. The foster carer agrees to bring Jaycee to the sessions and wait in the children's centre for her so that she feels safer.

The foster carer brings Jaycee into the room for the first session and reassures her that she will be outside if she is needed. Joanna offers Jaycee a drink and a biscuit and encourages her to look around the room and try things out. Jaycee is quite quiet and nervous but Joanna notices that her eyes seem drawn to the wide array of paints available. Joanna suggests they might want to do some painting together and Jaycee agrees to this. The rest of the session is spent with the two of them companionably painting together. Joanna paints too so that Jaycee does not feel she is under too much scrutiny, but at the same time can be encouraging about what Jaycee is painting. She notices that Jaycee is very sparing with her use of paint, almost as if she is nervous of using too much.

During the second session Jaycee becomes very nervous when she is asked what she would like to do, so Joanna suggests painting again. Jaycee seems more able to tolerate Joanna sitting by her and looking at her painting. Joanna encourages Jaycee to become more aware of what she is doing, saying things like: "I see the little dog is right in the corner of the page". She sees if Jaycee will talk to her about her painting, e.g. "Tell me about that little house coloured all in black.... Does anyone live there?".

In the third session, Jaycee continues to paint neatly using materials and paint sparingly but accidentally knocks over the paint pot so paint splatters everywhere. She looks terrified and runs to hide under the table in the corner. She sobs quietly. Joanna talks

to her in a calm and soothing voice: "It's okay, Jaycee, there's nothing to worry about. There's just some paint on the table but look how easy it is to clean it off. It's okay to make some mess together because we can also sort it out together."

Gradually Jaycee feels able to come out again and Joanna encourages her to pour some more paint out of the big pots so it can be mixed together. Jaycee becomes quite excited and giggling.

During the last few sessions Joanna is able to encourage Jaycee to use more of the paints with some glue and collage materials explaining that Jaycee needs to help Joanna learn more about Jaycee. Jaycee is able to make images of herself, of her home and family and of her foster home.

By the end of the six sessions Jaycee has formed a trusting relationship with Joanna and has started to express herself more freely. Joanna is able to provide a report for the court detailing how Jaycee has been during the sessions. She also gains permission to carry on working with Jaycee in more therapeutically-oriented work as the importance of the relationship they have formed and what it can offer Jaycee has been recognised.