

101 Mindful Arts-Based Activities

TO GET CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS
TALKING

WORKING WITH SEVERE TRAUMA, ABUSE AND
NEGLECT USING FOUND AND EVERYDAY OBJECTS

DAWN D'AMICO,
LCSW, PhD



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PREFACE

As we know, severely traumatized children and adolescents have difficulty opening up, feeling safe and talking about trauma, yet this is our goal. In order to achieve this goal, we need to establish rapport, safety and support so that these children and adolescents can begin to open up and tell their stories. Without their input we cannot help them. Therefore, opening up and the subsequent information gathering is critical. It is the first step in the therapeutic relationship and it is the most difficult step, especially with this population.

The techniques herein will allow the child/adolescent to open up and will allow you to collect the information.

INTRODUCTION

This book is designed to help clinicians, teachers, aid workers and students who are working with children and adolescents aged 5–17 who have experienced serious trauma, such as sexual abuse, physical abuse, removal from the home, child pornography or sex trafficking. There is an assumption that the individuals using this book will have a knowledge and understanding of trauma. Many of these children and adolescents are more closed or withdrawn than children and adolescents who are dealing with less traumatic issues, such as divorce, or adjustment issues, such as moving to a new home. The issue of serious trauma is becoming more prevalent and requires new and progressive techniques, for which traditional therapy and play therapy is less effective.

The new techniques in this book allow children and adolescents who have endured crisis and trauma to open up so that therapy can be initiated and better focused. It is common for a clinician or student to work with children and adolescents whose trauma level is so significant that they cannot talk. They are afraid. They have told so many people already—the first person they talked to for help, police, court systems, family—and now yet another person: you. This is a daunting task for clinicians. The brain does not always recognize the difference between remembering and retelling and actually being there. So it can be indeed a fear-filled, apprehensive undertaking on the part of both parties. As clinicians and students, we never quite know the extent of the abuse that we are about to hear.

I remember in my own practice when I had a case file several inches thick. I knew the situation was grave: several young children, all siblings under the age of ten, had been sexually molested by their 14-year-old brother. It was a difficult situation to work with the children and parents, who were not eating and not sleeping, and

who had already told the story to a forensic team, parents, social workers, etc.

How do you start? Where do you start? How do you make this OK for them and for you?

I created the techniques in this book to allow for children and adolescents to be “present” or “mindful” in the moment with me. I used objects with which children and adolescents could easily identify. I did this by utilizing “green” items. These items are timeless and recyclable. Timeless materials are also easy for parents and grandparents to understand and use. Recycling saves on every front.

This book also is designed to help practitioners, who often become discouraged, burned out or reluctant to approach such clients. The fact is, many practitioners are lost within the first five years of working with this population. They are burned out and they leave—not necessarily the profession but this population. The techniques in this book can restore interest and motivation in the clinician and alleviate some of the stress that the clinician feels in these highly emotionally charged sessions.

Who can forget the smell of markers, the feel of glue or paint, the sparkle of glitter? Easy-to-find objects, such as feathers, balloons, shells and paper, create a mini-footprint with a low impact on the environment and are accessible for everyone. That is what you will find here.

This book was developed based on 22 years of work with children and families in a clinical setting. It has been written to provide new techniques, which are much needed as we see a rise in child sexual abuse, child pornography and child sex trafficking, as well as physical abuse and neglect. All case studies in this book are anonymized.

Working with children and adolescents is both an honor and a privilege. True trust comes when parents and caregivers bring us their children and adolescents. To my colleagues and students, here is new help for working with these children and adolescents. The children, adolescents and families we work with have been through a great deal of pain. This book uses recycled and green items to move children and adolescents through pain to a place of healing and growth—to the present, mindful and safe.

USE OF THIS BOOK

This book is developmentally appropriate for children and adolescents aged 5–17.

All tools can be used in both individual and group formats. All tools can be completed in an individual session except Mask of Me × 3, which will take three sessions.

All tools will help children and adolescents to open up and the clinician to gather information.

Many of the children and families that clinicians encounter have experienced multiple traumas. It is with this knowledge that we recognize that some children have gaps in memory due to abuse or neglect. This book contains useful techniques for bridging memory gaps—for example, Green Flash. As children and adolescents begin to tell their stories, a sudden memory may occur or they may share memories they have been carrying with them.

Another example is the Life Story Book. An opportunity to express a life story, even if a child can't remember segments, or has memory gaps, can be thrilling and allow for the building of positive feelings and feelings of safety.

All children and adolescents have a life story, even if a limited one. It is his or her story and should be embraced in the places where it can be supported, and healed in the places where it hurts.

Everyone learns in different ways. As we get to know the children and adolescents we work with, we may find that they learn better using one sense than another. In the different types of activities in this book, using the different senses allows for a fuller and deeper understanding of the concept for the child or adolescent.



Tactile activities are activities that children, adolescents and clinicians use to connect with our sense of touch. We will be using many recycled and found items here.



Visual activities are activities in which children, adolescents and clinicians use sight or illustrations to help convey the message or the skill, such as coping.



Verbal activities are activities in which children, adolescents and clinicians use only words to convey the message or concept. We do not need any recycled or found items.

Try out different types of activities and determine which is the style the child or adolescent you are working with needs.

This book is easy to use. Simply choose the section you need and choose a technique. You will find directions to implement the technique, including questions that the clinician may ask or that the client or family members may discuss or reflect upon. Each technique is followed by two short examples. The first case sample represents a younger child; the second case sample represents an adolescent.

General art supplies are limited only by your imagination! Have on hand:

- lots of recycled cardboard
- glue
- washable paints
- finger paints
- markers
- glitter
- construction paper
- poster board
- feathers
- beads
- stones
- shells
- pretend “jewels”
- ink pad
- stamp of holding hands or shaking hands
- ribbon
- foil
- list of “feeling words” and emotions or flashcards of same
- stickers of happy, scary or sad faces and stickers of ocean creatures
- everyday objects, such as umbrellas, small mirrors and whistles, also are useful.