

Big Empathy Drawing (children)

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INFORMED
SCHOOLS

- The Big Empathy Drawing can be used as a key component of collaborative sense-making (see Psychological Formulation British Psychological Society). It is a vehicle to convey empathic understanding and to explore key underlying emotional themes/core feelings through drawing. It is particularly helpful for those children/young people who don't know what they feel and/or find it very difficult to put words to feelings. Alexithymia is integral to so many mental health issues and somatic complaints.
- After listening to the child, draw/write (short phrases only) what you believe are the overarching emotional themes in what the child has told you (not the factual details of what they have said) e.g., a feeling of overwhelming chaos, a sense of betrayal, a terrible aloneness, mistrust, a feeling of being un-helped when someone could have helped.
- You can include words or phrases like graffiti. It's great to offer your own associations "*I have an image of*" or "*When you were talking, I was reminded of the film/fairy story xxx*". These will either be taken up or not.
- After you have drawn and then offered and explained your drawing, give the pen to the child to change the picture in any way they want so it is the most accurate drawing of what they are feeling. They might change it a bit, a lot or not at all.
- Empathise with any changes they have made and acknowledge their correction of what you have drawn e.g., "*An so I didn't get the size of your painful feelings of loss, right. They are much bigger and over everything.*" "*And I didn't acknowledge your rage about what happened*" It can be vital supervision for you.
- You don't have to offer your drawing at the time (no points for speedy thinking). You might need time to fully digest and assimilate what the child has been telling you. So you can do your drawing between sessions and then bring it back to a subsequent session. This is because core pain/ core emotional themes don't suddenly go away. They will be a constant, until a time of transformational change. You might say, "*I've been thinking about what you said last week and so I drew this....*" Find an appropriate time to introduce it in the session.
- If appropriate, the drawing might also convey some psycho-education. e.g., "*It was not your fault.*"
- Make it clear to the child that it is "*their drawing now*" so they can do what they like to it and take it away.



Wanting to
cry and cry

Please make it
stop / please
make it go away

Haunted by
horrible
words /
things I've
heard /
seen



SHOCK

Too alone / no
one to turn to