



Upskilling Course for Childcare Professionals

Training Materials

Module 3. Trauma: Teaching Unit 3.4.



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Acknowledgment

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Module 3: Trauma

Teaching unit 3.4. Establishing trust and empathic relationship with traumatized children and families

Theory Input

Trauma is a deeply disturbing and upsetting experience that can affect a person, regardless of their age, gender, origin, culture, ethnicity or nationality. Trauma can have very serious and long-term effects on a person's mental, emotional and physical health. A person who has experienced trauma has a very vulnerable sense of self. Although it may seem that some people function in most situations without major problems even after the trauma they have experienced, in most of them signs such as anxiety, depression, hypersensitivity, sudden changes in behaviour, anger, aggressive outbursts, etc. can be recognized. Therefore, it is extremely important not to draw conclusions about someone's character and behaviour based on these signs, but to understand the cause of them and establish a relationship with the person based on trust and empathy.

Communication and behaviours that block trust and empathy

In order to know how to build a relationship of trust and empathy, childcare professionals should reconsider their own ways of thinking, communicating and behaving, which hinder the establishment of such a relationship:

- **Moralistic evaluations** - refer to the evaluation of other people's behaviour in accordance with our personal moral values, where we classify what we see as "right or wrong", "good or bad", "normal or abnormal" etc. E.g. *"What you did was rude. You mustn't act like that!"*
- **Comparing** – one person with another with the expectation that they behave the same (regardless of their different life experiences). E.g. *"See how nice Denis plays with others. You should try it too!"*
- **Giving advices** - although guided by the human intention to help, we forget that the advice we give comes from our experiences or specific knowledge that is often not (sufficiently) understandable or applicable to a person who has experienced trauma.
- **Avoidance** E.g. *"There's no need to feel that way, it's all over now."* or **Consolation** E.g. *"It will get better..."*

Although they are closely related terms that are often used as synonyms, pity, sympathy and compassion are not the same as empathy.

- **Pity** is an impression of discomfort or sadness for someone who is in a difficult situation. It has a paternalistic undertone. E.g. *"I'm sorry (for you)"* or *"I'm sorry that this happened to you"*
- **Sympathy** is a feeling of concern for someone, often a close person, accompanied by the desire to see that person happier and more satisfied. E.g. *"I'm worried about you."*
- **Compassion** is the feeling of one's own pain and sadness by observing and taking on the pain and sadness of others. General attitude is "I suffer with you" E.g. *"I'm sad because you're sad"*. With the person we show compassion to, we are essentially adding more pain (or fear or any other unpleasant emotion we experience). We can also cause the other person to feel guilty because he/she provoked unpleasant emotions in us. E.g. *"I'm sorry that you're crying because of me now"*

Avoiding, rejecting or minimizing feelings and needs, using inappropriate words and reactions by childcare professionals, a child or an adult who has experienced trauma can lead to the reactivation of previous pain or even re-traumatization. Therefore, building and maintaining empathy is an approach that should be an integral part of their relationship.

Empathy is mindful presence and connection with directing attention and understanding what the person feels and needs (regardless of the person's behaviour and words). The basic attitude is: **"I am here, I am fully present, I see/hear you, I recognize your feelings and needs."**

In empathic connection, we separate our own emotions and needs from the emotions and needs of the other person. Of course we can feel, for example, sadness listening to someone's story, but at the same time we are aware that it is our sadness. We may have a "need to fix" the situation, but at the same time we are aware that it is our need. In empathic connection, the focus is completely on the other person and what is happening in them.

Emotional intelligence / literacy as the basis of empathy

Empathy and emotional intelligence are two terms that are closely related, but there are differences between one and the other. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to recognize, understand and manage one's own emotions and needs, includes the ability of self-awareness and self-regulation. Therefore, the development of emotional literacy and emotional intelligence is the first important condition that a childcare professional must fulfil in order to be able to develop empathy in her/himself and the ability to connect empathically with others.

- **Emotions** - Recognizing, accepting and understanding one's own feelings are like the alphabet in developing emotional intelligence and empathy. Knowing the connection between body sensations, pleasant and unpleasant emotions, their cause and influence, are key abilities for understanding our own reactions, behaviour and words that we address both to ourselves and to others. At the same time, developing a vocabulary of feelings is an indispensable part of all this. Very often, the words that people express, thinking that they express their own emotions, actually hide judgments and criticism. For example "I feel manipulated." - is a hidden judgment and criticism of the other person, which actually means: "You manipulated me." Feelings that could be present in it are: disappointment, anger, sadness, etc.
- **Needs** - All our reactions and behaviours arise from an attempt to satisfy our needs. Needs are directly related to feelings: unpleasant feelings indicate that there is some unsatisfied need in person. Pleasant feelings indicate satisfied needs. Although it is an innate reaction of every living being, unfortunately, meeting needs is often seen as a selfish and egotistical act. The reason for this is mainly related to the fact that people do not even know the inner world of needs, they do not know how to name them, and they often confuse them with strategies - a way to satisfy needs. For example there is universal human need for closeness. This can be satisfied through conversation and/or hug and/or time spent together. Those are all different strategies. Misunderstanding and even conflict between two people mostly arise because the strategies of one and the other do not match or are not compatible.

Developing the ability to better recognize, understand and name one's own emotions and needs also increases the ability to understand other people's emotions, needs, reactions and behavior, which facilitates the establishment of trust and an empathetic relationship that will also have a positive effect on the very process of healing each person's traumatic experience.

Instead of: *"What you did was rude. You mustn't act like that!"* an empathetic reaction would be: *"I noticed that you pushed Philip when he got in front of you in line. (observation) It is possible that you were impatient and angry (feelings) because respect and order are important to you (needs). At the same time, I'm worried about Philip' safety. Please, next time he does something like that, come to me for help. (request)"*

Empathy actually plays a key interpersonal, professional and social role, enabling the exchange of different human experiences, needs and desires and providing an emotional bridge that promotes prosocial behaviour.

Resources for further reading

- Cunningham, J.,(2008), *Compassionate Communication and Empathy's Awakening*; Available at: <https://www.scribd.com/document/172838367/Compassionate-Communication-and-Empathy-s-Awakening-Booklet-Nonviolent-Communication>
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- Leu, L., (2003), *Nonviolent Communication Companion Workbook: A Practical Guide for Individual, Group, or Classroom Study*, Available at: <https://www.scribd.com/document/425255406/Companion-pdf>
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Activity resources

3.4.1. Activity name	Exercise: A wealth of feelings and needs (Erdeljac Senkas, I., 2020)		
Purpose of the activity	<p>The activity helps the participants to recognize the presence of their own feelings and their connection with needs in everyday personal situations, which later facilitates the recognition of feelings and needs in other people and enables the establishment of an empathetic relationship.</p>		
Learning outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● List people's pleasant and unpleasant feelings - enrich the feelings vocabulary ● List and understand the diversity of people's universal needs - enrich the needs vocabulary 		
Interactive method/technique	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Individual work <input type="checkbox"/> Work in pairs <input type="checkbox"/> Work in small groups <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Group work	<input type="checkbox"/> Brainstorm <input type="checkbox"/> Presentation <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstration <input type="checkbox"/> Discussion <input type="checkbox"/> Debate <input type="checkbox"/> Story <input type="checkbox"/> Round table <input type="checkbox"/> Problem solving	<input type="checkbox"/> Case study <input type="checkbox"/> Role playing <input type="checkbox"/> Questioner/quiz <input type="checkbox"/> Guided fantasy <input type="checkbox"/> Somatic exercise <input type="checkbox"/> Play <input type="checkbox"/> Other <hr/>
Timeframe for activity	40 minutes		
Resources required	Printed exercises for each participant, Printed lists of feelings and needs for each participant, Pencils		
Instructions			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Give each participant papers with the <i>Wealth of Feelings and Needs</i> exercise, papers with a list of feelings and needs and a pencil. 2. Give them following instructions to read the sentence/s and to imagine themselves in such possible everyday situations : <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1. Then let them try to guess / recognize which 2 feelings and 2 needs may be present in them in such situations. 2.2. Let them use the list of feelings and needs. 3. To make the exercise easier to understand, do the first example together with the whole group. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1. Read the first situation and ask the group to try to find 2 feelings and 2 needs using the list of feelings and needs. 			

- 3.2. Give the opportunity for more participants to find feelings and needs, and it is very likely that there will be different feelings and needs that they will express. Use this to explain that it is quite natural that people can have different feelings and needs in exactly the same situations, and that is exactly why there is no right or wrong answer in this exercise.
- 3.3. Say that the exercise will help them to become aware that they as well as every human being at every moment has some satisfied or unsatisfied needs and, accordingly, some pleasant or unpleasant feelings.
- 3.4. You can also say that this exercise serves to enrich our vocabulary of feelings and needs and to start using them more in everyday communication, especially in those situations when we want to connect empathically with someone or when we want to prevent conflict, etc.
4. Give instructions to the participants that they will do this exercise individually in the next 20 minutes. Tell them also that another 20 minutes, those who want will have the opportunity to share what they wrote and what they learned through the exercise.

The exercise paper A wealth of feelings and needs (Erdeljic, I., 2020) contains the following:

(First example a is to be presented to the group for learning purposes)

a) Situation: I got up at 5:30 in the morning. It's a grey, cold day outside and it's raining. I have a lot of things to finish today and I'd rather stay at home.

a) Connecting with feelings and needs: I feel dejected and tired because I need some peace and rest.

b) Situation: I'm waiting for a taxi. Cars pass by me. One goes right over a big pond and the dirty water splashes me.

b) Connecting with feelings and needs: I feel..... because I need.....

c) Situation: I'm waiting for a taxi. Cars pass by me. One goes right over a big pond and the dirty water splashes me.

c) Connecting with feelings and needs: I feel..... because I need.....

d) Situation: I meet a friend I haven't seen in a long time. She laughs, comes up to me and hugs me.

d) Connecting with feelings and needs: I feel..... because I need.....

e) Situation: I meet a friend I haven't seen in a long time. She laughs, comes up to me and hugs me.

e) Connecting with feelings and needs: I feel..... because I need.....

f) Situation: I'm standing in line at the supermarket. The man behind me is standing very close behind me and I smell an unpleasant smell.

f) Connecting with feelings and needs: I feel..... because I need.....

g) Situation: I sit down at the table and in front of me is a bowl of ripe strawberries, cherries, peaches, and figs. There are also a few pieces of chocolate cake.

g) Connecting with feelings and needs: I feel..... because I need.....

h) Situation: In the store, I listen to the saleswoman explaining to the customer why the price of an item on the invoice is different from the price on the shelf. The customer is very loud and visibly upset.

h) Connecting with feelings and needs: I feel..... because I need.....

i) Situation: I enter the house. The living room is lit by the evening sun and I see my husband / child / mom... preparing dinner. I hear soft music on the radio.

i) Connecting with feelings and needs: I feel..... because I need.....

j) Situation: My colleague promised me that he will finish his part of the work / project we are working on in the next 3 days. And after 7 days, he still hasn't finished it, and the deadline is approaching.

j) Connecting with feelings and needs: I feel..... because I need.....

k) Situation: A boy in my group / my class doesn't listen when I talk. At the same time he talks and disturbs others so that they can hear me. Even after I told him to be quiet, he continues to do the same. It seems to me that he is even louder now.

k) Connecting with feelings and needs: I feel..... because I need.....

l) Situation: I am in a workshop where I should learn something about feelings and needs. I complete the exercise according to the coach's instructions.

l) Connecting with feelings and needs: I feel..... because I need.....

Comments

The exercise can be deepened so that the participants remember some 2 of personal situations: one in which they were happy and the other in which they were frustrated. Then they should try to find from the list (or if they feel ready without a list) which pleasant feelings and satisfied needs were present in the first situation and which unpleasant feelings and unsatisfied needs were present in the second situation.

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