

Name of activity: Tower of Strengths

Source Dr Karen Treisman. Published in Gilly the Giraffe: A self-esteem workbook and toy.

Recommended Age Range: 5+

Treatment Modality: Individual, Group, Family sessions

Goals: To increase children's identification and expression of their strengths, skills, and positive qualities.

Materials: The tower can be created using jenga, Lego or building blocks, pillows (if wanting something soft), or if materials are not accessible, the tower can be drawn.

Advance Preparation: Ensuring that the materials have been made available, and that the child/family is in a safe place to work on their self-esteem (this might include the child's readiness and their emotional regulation, and ability to tolerate positive feedback). Some children might need some scaffolding to think of their strengths, so, this is supported through preparation conversations around strengths, through having prompt resources, such as strengths cards, or through having a list of strengths, as found in my Gilly the Giraffe book.

Description

This activity is versatile and can be implemented in several different ways depending on the aims of the session, the relationship, the stage of the therapy, and the time length. However, the most common way is as follows:

The child is supported to identify and highlight some of their strengths, skills, positive qualities, achievements, steps taken, progresses, resilience etc. Some children can find this difficult, therefore they may need the therapist to prompt them e.g. "What might your best friend or someone who loves you say are your strengths?", "If you had to give yourself an award for something positive what would it be?", "If you could travel back in a time machine to your proudest moment where would you go?" etc.

The therapist can act as a memory bank e.g. "Last week you told me that your teacher called you kind", "I have noticed...", "Something I have learned and appreciated about you has been...". If there are family members in the room or other members of a group, they can add and contribute to the list. It can also be useful to have prompts so the client isn't working off a blank slate. For example, provide a list of strengths or strengths cards that they can refer to for ideas.

Once several strengths have been identified, the child can be supported to write on the blocks of the tower these strengths. This can be directly onto the blocks, or on labels, or on small post-it notes. It can be nice to have a combination of strengths, tangible skills, and sparkle/feel good moments. These sparkle moments also give the young person moments to anchor on to and draw on.

The child is then supported to look at, reflect, and soak in the skyscraper of their strengths, and to share what this feels like, means to them, when they can use these strengths etc. It can be powerful to visually see the height of one's strengths.

If possible, take a photo of the tower so that the child can have a visual reminder of their strengths.

To enrich this activity, expand and explore each of the strengths. For example, if the child has shared that they are brave, discuss or draw a picture of times that they have been brave, how they learned to be brave, if bravery was an animal/ type of weather/ item/object what would it be, how do they feel in their bodies when they are brave, who appreciates and notices when they are brave, who else do they know who is brave, etc.

Providing the child with an anonymous client example can also be helpful, such as:

Alice regularly showed the skill of being brave, which when explored, she likened to the qualities shown by a lion. So, Alice made a list and drawing of all of the times she had been brave, strong, and courageous; she also was asked several questions about how these positive qualities developed, and whom she had known in her life who had shown these qualities or taught her them. Alice was also encouraged to tell some stories of these specific times of being brave; and to write them down and place them in a special memory treasure box. Alice also was supported to make and draw her very own lion shield of strength which was filled with symbolic pictures, patterns, and photos of her showing strength and bravery. Stories were shared about lions and bravery and a diary recording all of her "lion moments" was kept. Alice also made a lion and bravery collage decorated with inspiring images and quotes. In addition, she was supported to make a portable miniature version of this collage in the form of a lion keyring, so, that she could take it with her to school.

Discussion:

This activity can be used in many different contexts, for example, to explore the strengths of a parent/child relationship.

Another variation is for the child to create a tower of tools by writing onto each brick a coping regulating, soothing, or grounding strategy which they can use when, for example, feeling upset/ dysregulated/ anxious etc.

About the Author:

Dr. Karen Treisman, Specialist Clinical Psychologist, Trainer, Organisational Consultant, and Author. Founder and director of Safe Hands and Thinking Minds Psychological Assessment, Training, and Consultancy services. Specialising in trauma, attachment, foster care, adoption, asylum-seeking and refugee young people, residential, child protection, and court work. For further information and to see a list of updated publications, please go to: <http://www.safehandsthinkingminds.co.uk/about-us/>