IDENTIFY, CATEGORISE AND TAKE CONTROL OF FEAR

Creativity applied to fear (Activity 1/12)

DESCRIPTION

We all suffer from fear in some way. It exists in our lives as a protection mechanism to keep us safe, though it can also be a blocker, reducing the size of our comfort zones and potentially restricting our actions and activities – even from doing things we used to do in the past. Some of our fears or concerns are about things we can do something about, while others may be about things we cannot control or influence. Through identifying and categorizing our fears/concerns, we can divide them into

a) things we can control and

b) things we cannot control, or at least have less control over.

Understanding these differences can enable us to take control, where we can, and perhaps begin the journey of accepting the things we cannot control. We might also see that we can identify areas of control we may have previously felt were uncontrollable.

Emotional intelligence is the ability to reason with our emotions. When we can understand that fear will always exist, and we start to acknowledge and accept certain fears or concerns, we can begin to bring more peace into our lives. We can then enter a state in which we are less limited or controlled by them.

This activity uses a guided discussion to help older people identify, categorize and take control of fears they may be facing, and which are within their control to influence. In this activity, we focus on the emotion of fear as may be faced by older people. However, this activity has a transversal character – it may be appropriate in situations when the older person feels other emotions such as sadness, loneliness, or anxiety.

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It's important to have in mind that the person who is leading the activity should be sensitive to the fact that the activity may trigger difficult memories or emotions in the older people doing the activity and adapt it accordingly. This could be done, perhaps, by focusing on 'concerns' or 'worries' rather than 'fears.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this activity is to help older people overcome feelings of lack of control over fears (or related emotions) they may be facing which are COVID-19 related or otherwise.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- A pen and paper (per person)
- A flipchart for the care worker to introduce the activity and categorisation format, if available, though
- A pen and paper would also be enough

IMPLEMENTATION - INSTRUCTION

This activity is suitable for one-to-one or small group discussions.

Stages:

DISCUSSION

Lead an open discussion about fear/worries in general and about their effects. It's important to set up the activity in a safe and controlled way, for example by identifying some things that are generally within people's control to influence such as

- Fear of being late (solution: plan ahead and leave early)

- Fear of being cold later (solution: bring a blanket with you)

- Fear of being thirsty later (solution: bring a bottle of water with you)

You could begin with a personal story of some low-risk or low-consequence things you might worry about

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and what you do to manage them. Then ask the older person or group in your care to think about other typical (and low risk) fears or worries and what people generally do about them to manage or control them. If you're using a flipchart, write these out. It'll be useful for the older people to have this list visible and the range of ways that people can manage them.

IDENTIFY THE SOURCES OF FEAR (MAKING A LIST)

Next, give everyone a pen and a sheet of paper. Ask the older person/people to make a list of some of the things that they are concerned or worried about. They could be related to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic or other fears/worries.

CATEGORISING FEARS

Ask your group to categorise them into things a) we/they feel they can do something about and b) those they feel they can't (easily) do something about. You might end up with a list of fears/worries like the examples in Step 1 above in the a) section and other fears such as fear of illness or death in the b) section. Focus first on the fears in the a) list.

RATING YOUR FEARS

Look at the category of things they can do something about and rate them on a scale from 1 – 5, with 1 being: things they can do something about easily and 5 being things they feel they cannot easily do something about.

ACCEPTING FEAR

Look at the fears that have a 1 or a 2 rating. Discuss what behaviours or actions can be taken to reduce those fears. It's important to celebrate progress and success. Highlight the positives and possible success of identifying approaches to managing these 'low-level' fears. Approaching fear with positive emotions and an "I can do it" attitude is a crucial step in overcoming these feelings. Another approach, especially with low-level fears or worries, is to think about what the worst thing could be that would happen as a result of this fear coming true. Perhaps the thing being feared is not too bad, easily accepted or mitigated. Then look at the fears that might have a 3 – 5 rating. Lead a discussion about what they could do to

overcome these fears. If you have a group, they might be able to support each other with ideas, shared fears and experience, and empathy. It might not be possible to identify a final way to resolve these fears, though if you can help the older person to identify a first possible step in managing and controlling this fear, then there will be progress to be celebrated. You can continue the discussion after some time, e.g. after a few days, when they have had time to try certain measures they might have discussed or decided. Noticing and talking about emotions is a key step to overcoming them.

CONCLUSION

When you end the activity, it's important to focus on the positive progress that has been made rather than dwell on the fears that are difficult to influence or take control of. Review the success from Steps 2 – 5 and help the older people to decide on some behaviours or actions they would like to take in the coming days or weeks to manage these fears. After some time, review these and celebrate the progress they have made.

POSSIBLE MODIFICATIONS

Be sensitive to the reactions of the older people as you guide them through this activity. If they become upset anxious, you should adapt accordingly. Possible adaptations could include:

- Slow the pace of progression through the stages of the activity

- Skip over some of the stages

- Reduce the depth of detail of focus on some or all of the stages

- Don't feel that you have to go through all stages in one sitting.

Rather than stopping abruptly and risk the older person seeing the activity as negative or a possible failure, before you end you should acknowledge the progress they have made through the activity, give praise and positive feedback, and agree to park the topic/activity until another time. If you then pick it up another time, begin by recapping the progress made last time, give praise again, and aim to re-start with positivity.

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EXPECTED RESULTS

The older people will come away from this activity…

- Feeling supported
- Understanding that fear is natural, normal and necessary
- With raised awareness of how to view fear in different ways/from different perspectives
- Able to categorise fear according to subjects they can control or influence and those they can't
- Motivated to take steps to actively manage fear that is within their control or influence
- Open to talk about fears that aren't in their control
- Acknowledging that talking about fears is good, but that limiting exposure to the causes of fear is also important.

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