

STORYTELLING – FROM WITHIN COMFORT ZONES

Creativity applied to fear (Activity 9/12)

DESCRIPTION

Many people may find it difficult to talk about strong emotions they may be feeling, such as fear, loneliness, sadness and so on. To dwell on these emotions may intensify them and increase the negative effects on their wellbeing. One approach to help people talk about these emotions in a safe way is through creative storytelling.

Through creative storytelling people can talk about emotions or difficulties they may be facing while staying within their own comfort zones by focusing on the characters in the story and their emotions rather than focusing on themselves. In this way, the storytellers can talk about the emotions they may be feeling through the eyes of the story character. This can enable people to put some emotional distance between their own feelings and the emotions of the character and make it easier not only to talk about the emotions, but also to discuss and find solutions or actions which can improve the situation for the story character and indirectly also for the person telling the story.

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.

What is a narrative arc? A narrative arc is a typical story structure that can be said to follow three key stages: Stage 1: Introducing the character and the main background details of the story. It sets the scene. Stage 2: An incident happens, or situation exists, which creates a problem or a struggle for the character. Stage 3: This is where the problem or struggle gets resolved. It is this structure that the activity below uses to help the older people to create a story about a character that is feeling fear of some kind. This activity



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can enable them to perhaps talk about their own fears in a controlled and safe way.

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.

OBJECTIVES

Our emotions, such as fear, keep us inside of our comfort zones. Creativity happens outside of our comfort zones, where we can put out fears behind us, in a space without structure, rules, or boundaries. Through creative expression, we can step outside of our comfort zones and beyond emotions (like fear) that might be holding us back. The objective of this activity is to enable the older people to talk about fears they might be facing through the eyes of a character in a story they create.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- A pen and paper (per person)
- A flipchart for the care worker to introduce the activity and narrative arc 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. Guide the person or group through the stages as described below.

Stages:

INTRODUCTION TO STORYTELLING

Tell the older person or group that today you'd like them to write some stories. Begin by introducing them to a typical narrative arc, as described above. Ask them to think of an example of a story they know if which fits this structure. Many novels and movies follow this pattern. Then set the task of thinking of a story of someone who afraid of something and how they overcame it. Note: this is not a writing exercise. The story they create can also be documented in drawn pictures, key words or some other way.



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CREATING A STORY

Stage 1: Setting the scene and identifying the main character(s). Consider asking questions such as:

- Who are they?
- What are they like?
- Can you describe how they live, where they live, what they like doing?

Stage 2: Building up to “situation” Consider asking questions such as:

- What happens?
- What changes?
- How is this ‘not good’?
- What are they worried about?
- What will happen if they do nothing or ‘the wrong’ thing?

Stage 3: The resolution Encourage the ‘storytellers’ to draw from their own ideas or life experience to find the resolution. Consider asking questions such as:

- How did they overcome their fears?
- Who helped them?
- How will they change their behaviours or thinking in future?
- What did they learn from this?
- How have they changed from this experience?

DEBRIEF

Ask the older people you’re working with to reflect on the story and how it might relate to any fears they might be facing. What can they learn from how the character in their story resolved their fears or challenges? When you end the activity, it’s important to focus on the positive progress that has been made, both for the characters in the stories and also in relation to any fears the older people may be facing themselves.

POSSIBLE MODIFICATIONS

The idea of this activity is to create the whole story in one sitting. However, if interest is there, this activity could be spread over a number of sessions. Alternatively, you could guide them to create a story series with episodes or multiple stories with the same character.

You could even make a project of this activity and consider writing/illustrating/sharing the story with a wider audience or even self-publishing it on an online platform.

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
- Interjecting to help the story character find a positive solution to their fears/challenges
- Reduce the depth of detail of focus on some or all the stages

If you do decide it's better to shorten or stop the activity, 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.

EXPECTED RESULTS

The older people will come away from this activity:

- Feeling motivated by the activity
- Feeling supported and creative
- Understanding that fear is an emotion faced by everyone
- With a solution-oriented mindset when it comes to facing fears or other related issues
- Ready to support each other with fears they may be facing
- Perhaps ready to apply some of the fear-resolving perspectives to their own fears