Session 3 – Your Feelings: I will help (F = Feelings)

Concepts, skills & strategies

- Paying attention to other people’s feelings – parents, siblings, friends etc
- Thinking about ways to help other people feel better (empathy training)
- Recognising other’s feelings and thinking about how you would feel in somebody else’s situation

Tips for Parents

- Discuss with your child what certain people they know do when they feel certain ways, especially members of the family. E.g. “How can you tell when your sister is feeling sad?”
- Encourage your child to identify other peoples’ feelings. For example, “when you saw Sally crying, how do you think she was feeling at the time?”
- Encourage your child to recognise moments when they can support or assist others in times of need. For example “what could you have done to help Sally feel better when she was crying?”
- Provide praise for times when your child offers assistance to others or go out of their way to help. Praising “thumbs up” choices is going to increase the likelihood of that behaviour occurring in the future.
- Point out that there are lots of things they can do to help somebody feel better. Little things like smiling, getting somebody a glass of water, or patting them on the back can make a big difference!

Remember to...

- Encourage your child to look people in the eye when talking, use a brave voice, smile, and stand up tall!
- Catch your child being brave and praise them for it. Use your child's brave chart!
- Share your “happy things” as a family once a day and talk about times you were brave. Provide lots of praise for attempts to share ideas and feelings experienced from the day.
- Encourage your child to talk about their feelings and use “thumbs up” ideas to deal with unpleasant feelings

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Session 4 – Our bodies and relaxation games (R = Relax)

Concepts, skills & strategies

- Paying attention to the physical reactions we experience when we feel worried or nervous (our “body clues”) helps us to understand how we are feeling e.g. butterflies in tummy, tight muscles. This doesn’t mean we are sick! Our body is our friend!
- We can use different methods of relaxation to remain calm and manage our worries
- You might notice that you feel worried, your breathing quickens and becomes shallow. Practise breathing slowly, or milkshake breathing.

By taking slow, deep breaths, we can relax our body, our heart beats slower, and we feel less tense or worried.

- Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR)
- It is important to have rest and quiet time

Tips for parents

- Encourage your child to talk about what is happening inside of their bodies when they experience different types of feelings, and share examples of your own body clues. Let your child know that these signs are your body’s way of telling you how you are feeling.
- Notice your child’s physical complaints and when they occur. If they complain of a tummy ache/headache etc, remind them that it might be their body’s way of telling them something. Is this because they are feeling worried or nervous about something? Explain to your child what you notice, for example “I notice that when I mention going to school you say you feel sick in the tummy. I think this means that you are probably feeling worried about school?”
- It is important that as soon as children are aware of their body clues they need to take action. Engaging in relaxation strategies helps to reduce these feelings and to remain in control.

Spend time each day doing relaxation activities and having quiet time.

- Ask your child to teach you how to do “milkshake breathing.” Try this for yourself next time you find yourself feeling worked up or worried about something.
Sit still and close your eyes. Repeat this 10 times and see how you feel afterwards. Next time you notice your child is feeling angry, worried, anxious, remind them to slow down and take some milkshake breaths.

- Practise **progressive muscle relaxation (PMR)** with your child. Sometimes our muscles become tense (e.g. jaw clenched, shoulders up high, neck tight) when we are feeling worried or angry. When we notice this, we can help ourselves feel better by relaxing our muscles. In PMR, you go through each of the muscle groups one by one, tensing and then relaxing. You might talk with your child about the difference between being a stiff robot and floppy jellyfish or ragdoll. It can help to close the eyes, lie down, and using relaxation scripts when practising PMR (see example at end of handout).

- Another way your child can feel more relaxed is to do something they enjoy and find relaxing. Every child is different, so talk with your child and identify what is relaxing for them. It might be reading a book, jumping on the trampoline, playing with their dog or cat, going for a swim, drawing, listening to some music, or just lying down. You might refer to it as “quiet time.” Avoid activities such as watching television, using the computer, or playing video games.

- It is also extremely important that you make time for yourself and your own relaxing activities. Make a list of the things you can do to feel good and relax. When you notice yourself feeling stressed or worried, pull out this list and engage in one of those activities. It could be something as simple as making a cup of tea, or sitting in the sun on the veranda. Whatever works for you! Parents need special times too!

- The more you practice relaxation activities, the better equipped your child will be in managing their emotions in times of stress. They will also become more aware of their feelings and remaining relaxed will become a more automatic response.

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Example: Relaxation script for young children

Here is a script you might read to your child as they are going to bed. You could play some relaxing music. Speak in a calm and slow voice. You could even record your voice and play this back to your child when they go to sleep at night. Start with a story book, maybe even a backrub, then dim the lights and read the relaxation script. Have your child close their eyes, lie down, or sit comfortably. You can use your own words if you prefer.

Now make your hands into fists, go on really squeeze those fists. Feel that tight feeling,----- ------- And now go floppy. ----- Enjoy that lovely floppy feeling.

Make your hands into tight fists again and bring your hands up to touch your shoulders. Feel that tight feeling along your arms. Feel the tight feeling and relax, enjoy that lovely floppy feeling.

Now relax your arms, let them hang loosely by your side. Push your shoulders up and try and touch your ears. Go on really push upwards. Feel that tight feeling in your shoulders. Feel the tight feeling and relax, enjoy that lovely floppy feeling.

This time scrunch up your face. Really scrunch up your face. Feel that tight feeling in your face and relax, enjoy that lovely floppy feeling.

Now make your tummy muscles tight go on really tighten those muscles. Feel that tight feeling. Feel the tight feeling and relax, enjoy that lovely floppy feeling.

Push your tummy forward this time, make your back arch, feel the tight feeling all along your back, feel that tight feeling and relax, enjoy that lovely floppy feeling.

Tighten the muscles in your legs, feel those muscles tightening, feel that tight feeling and relax. Feel that tight feeling along your arms. Feel the tight feeling and relax, enjoy that lovely floppy feeling.

Now make your toes into fists, really scrunch up those toes. Feel that tight feeling. Feel the tight feeling and relax, enjoy that lovely floppy feeling.

Take a deep breath hold that breath, feel that tight feeling in your chest, feel the tight feeling now let the breath out slowly and feel all the tightness go away. Enjoy that lovely floppy feeling.

Keep your eyes closed, we are going to check each part of your body to see if there is any tightness. Think of your hands and arms if there is any tightness just let go of it. Now check your shoulders, neck and face. If you find any tightness just let go. Check your back and shoulders, your legs and feet. If you find any tension just let go.

You should now be feeling wonderful and relaxed and floppy. Just enjoy that wonderful feeling and when you feel ready open your eyes.
Session 5 - Red and green thinking (*I = I can try!*)

People who are positive thinkers are happier, healthier, have better relationships, and are more successful in school and work. Positive thinking, or seeing the glass as half full rather than half empty, is a skill that everybody can learn.

People are often unaware of their own self-talk, especially when they are nervous, upset or angry. If we pay attention to the thoughts going on inside our heads when we are feeling this way, we will mostly find that these thoughts are very negative. We call these “red thoughts” e.g. “I’m so hopeless”, “This is too hard”, “Everybody will laugh at me” etc.

It helps to pay attention to the voice inside our heads to identify when our self-talk is unhelpful.

Our thoughts have a big influence on the way we feel. In any situation, there is a link between the types of thoughts we have and the way we feel and act.

Let’s apply this to a real life situation to see how it works. Example: Going to school at the start of the year

A more helpful way of thinking in this situation would be:

In other words, we have the ability to change the way we think about different situations, which can change the way we feel and behave.

We can choose to think about situations in positive ways which make us feel happy and brave, or we can choose to think in negative ways which may make us feel fearful, tense, sad, angry or uncomfortable.

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Concepts/skills/strategies

• Understanding the difference between our thoughts and feelings (thoughts in our heads, feelings in our body)
• Paying attention to our thoughts
• Introducing the idea of different kinds of thoughts:
  • Unhelpful RED thoughts – stop! Red thoughts make us feel miserable, worried or upset.
  • Helpful GREEN thoughts – go! Green thoughts make us feel strong, brave, happy and confident.

Tips for parents

• Have your child explain what red and green thoughts are to all family members. It helps if everyone at home is using the same language.
• To help children recognise whether thoughts are helpful (GREEN) or unhelpful (RED), share out loud some of your own thoughts. Other family members can do the same.
• Provide praise when your child is able to say their thoughts aloud, whether they be unhelpful or helpful.
• Encourage your child to focus on the positives of any situation.
• Remember that we all have unhelpful thoughts and sometimes they occur without us knowing. Fun Friends teaches children to listen to their self-talk. You can help your child to become more aware of their thoughts. Having red thoughts is okay – it’s what we do with those red thoughts that’s important. Next week we will look at how to turn red thoughts into green thoughts.
• Thinking in positive and helpful ways is a skill that requires continual practice and reinforcement. When you notice negative thinking in yourself or your child, take a moment to stop and ask yourself “is that thought helpful?”. If it is not, try turning that thought around to find a more positive way of viewing the situation.