



JUNIOR AND SENIOR INFANTS

Parent Support Sheets

Lesson 6: Friendships

Lesson Summary:

In class today, the children learned “Head, Heart and Hands”, a technique to encourage showing empathy to others. They were also introduced to a Friendship song. They created a Friendship wall in the classroom, displaying pictures they drew showing kindness in friendships.

Try It At Home Activity: “Child-led Play”

In this “Try It At Home” (TIAH) activity, we encourage parents/caregivers to spend 15 minutes playing with your child/the child in your care and offer tips for playtime [See Lesson 6 TIAH Sheet]. Your child/the child in your care can choose what they would like to play (within limits), and we encourage you to follow your child/the child in your care’s lead and enter into their world. You are introduced to the same concept your child/the child in your care learned in school - “Head, Heart and Hands”, and you will get a chance to practise this whilst playing.

Dr. Malie and Linsey’s Top Tips:

We have chosen [playing with your child/the child in your care](#) as today’s “Try It At Home” activity, as play is a child’s natural language of expression. Playing with your child/the child in your care deepens your emotional connection and helps them to feel special. A short blast of quality time with parents/caregivers gives children the chance to counterbalance the negative feelings they can carry around with them all day. Consider this “special play time” as refilling your child/the child in your care’s emotional cup so they can go back to exploring their world full-up with love and possibility. They will love you for it!

Below, you can find an explanation of [Reflective Functioning](#) (“Head, Heart, and Hands”), which is the technique you will be practising today while playing with your child/the child in your care.

Empathy can be described as the ability to understand and share someone’s feelings. The metaphor of “putting yourself in someone else’s shoes” is often referred to when explaining empathy. Being empathetic towards others, and being able to understand their experience is a great skill to have. Researchers have discovered something called “Reflective Functioning”, which correlates with children feeling safe and secure in their relationship with adults.

We like to call Reflective Functioning “empathy with bells and whistles”. When we practice empathy, we understand our child’s experience, how they might be feeling, and what they might be thinking. The “bells and whistles” come in when we let our child know through our actions that we understand how they are feeling and thinking. By letting children know that we get it, we help them to feel understood, which further deepens our connection.

Debi Maskell-Graham created a 3-step process (“**Head, Heart and Hands**”) which helps parents to practice empathy with bells and whistles with children [See Lesson 6 TIAH Sheet.]



Linsey McNelis has also adapted this process for use in friendships, which was shared in school today, believing children can start working on this wonderful skill from very young.

You can watch a great example of “empathy with bells and whistles” in a clip from the movie ‘Inside Out’, when Sadness (the small blue emotion) comforts Bing Bong (the pink character): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QT6FdhKriB8>

Clearsky Children’s Charity have a **free downloadable** resource for parents [see left image], available in the link below. This resource gives parents/caregivers lots of lovely playful ideas to try with your children. It also shows how play can help when children’s behaviour is challenging, like when they are getting dressed, refusing food, or not wanting to go to bed (Pgs 14-18). On pages 29-33, there are some lovely tips for 1:1 child-led play “You and Me Time”. There are also fun games to help practise “Head, Heart and Hands” (Pgs 78-87), which your child/the child in your care was introduced to in school today.

Resources:

- You can find Clearsky Children’s Charity’s free downloadable Parents Play kit at: <https://clear-sky.org.uk/shop/>
- The “Learning through Play” website has lots of information on why play is so important for children’s development and wellbeing. It also has lots of games to play with your child/the child in your care: <https://learningthroughplay.com>
- Here is a great podcast on playing with your child/the child in your care with Hayley Rice, Play Therapist: <https://play.acast.com/s/a-little-birdie-told-me/14-hayley-rice>
- Here is a comprehensive list of 24 picture books about how to be a good friend: <https://teachingwithchildrensbooks.com/books-about-friendship/>
- Here are 12 brilliant evidence-based tips on helping your child/the child in your care to make friends: <https://parentingscience.com/kids-make-friends/>