

Post-A-Paper: #004

Loss/grief and lips

Author: Michael R. Jay, LCPC, CCT

Part one: Issue, Problem or Diagnosis

Joey a 12 year old boy presents with a diagnosis of Adjustment Disorder with Depressed Mood due to the recent death of his father. His mood is marked by verbal aggression towards his mother, younger sibling, and school peers. He is resistant to the idea of meeting with a counselor, but quickly realizes that counselor utilizes the principles of CLAYtherapy© and is visibly interested in the numerous clay items in the office. He appears to comprehend counselor's statement of: "Sometimes when you visit me we will just play, sometimes we will just talk, but mostly we will play and talk at the same time."

Part two: "CLAYresolution"

The counselor engages Joey by establishing a fondness for developing clay projects. A pair of lips is formed by the young boy and the counselor working in very close physical proximity to one another, as if forming instant rapport and a common goal. Counselor creatively begins to develop generalizations between the clay lips and the boy's presenting issues. Joey is very excited to learn that counselor will allow him to take the completed lip project home. Counselor emphasizes to Joey and mother that the lips serve the purpose of reminding Joey of coping skills learned in session.

Part three: Techniques/Questions/Strategies

The counselor asks Joey, "Is there a clay project in my office that you like better than the others?" He replies, "I really like those airplanes you make; especially, those jets. I think my mom would also like one of those roses." Counselor validates Joey by stating, "You know, I really believe that you have the ability to make those jets and even roses." Joey challenges counselor and states, "I could never make that stuff!" Therapist candidly replies, "You know, I felt the same way when I first started trying to make this stuff; in fact, my first attempt at making a frog looked more like a turtle." You know, after practicing easy stuff like snakes, balls, and cones things got easier for me. Think you can make a snake, ball, and cone?" Joey responds, "I think I can do that, but I might need a little help." Counselor is able to assist Joey in developing snakes, balls, and cones and quickly the boy is eager to make his first clay project, lips.

This project begins with counselor and child talking into the can of Play-Doh®: "Hello Mr. Play-Doh, today I'm going to make you into a pair lips." Other therapeutic concepts are taught through "one liners" like: "If I mess up its okay because there is hardly nothing I can't fix." "Mr. Play-Doh, I'm going to have to be the boss of you just like I can be the boss of what I think, feel, do, and say even when I'm mad or sad." While developing the clay lips with or without accessories, such as a clay tongue and/or teeth, counselor reminds the boy, "Sometimes

when you visit me we will just play, sometimes we will just talk, but mostly we will play and talk at the same time. So let's give it a try talking and playing at the same time." Joey simply agrees by saying, "Okay." While continuing to develop the clay project, counselor inquires, "I bet you know a lot about lips. I wonder if you can tell me some of the things that lips do." Joey quickly remarks, "Well, lips help us chew our food, kiss, talk, make noises, eat, lick, spit, smile, or even frown, oh and I guess they help us breathe." Counselor validates the young boy's list by saying, "Wow, great job, that's some list you have there! I think it would be best for us to talk about how your lips talk and help you breathe." Counselor and Joey then process how Joey expresses feelings of sadness, anger, anxiety, etc. He is able to disclose, "When I miss my dad and feel lonely, I don't want anyone to bug me. I just want to be left alone. I yell, growl, and call people names sometimes; especially, my annoying sister!"

Counselor further demonstrates empathy and understanding, "You feel lonely and just want to be left alone." Joey begins to lose his eye contact and begins to manipulate his clay lips again. Counselor reengages him, "I know a lot about making things out of clay (Play-Doh®), but I know a lot more about helping a good young boy like you feel better when he is sad." The boy timidly looks up. Counselor then begins to generalize the clay project to the boy's life and to coping skills, such as, positive self talk, deep breathing exercises, and simple phrases (Words are not for hurting, Good face, good hands, good words). Counselor also engages child in a simple paper and pen activity whereby the child is able to identify members of his support system, such as his mother, grandparents, and school teacher that he may talk to when upset. Counselor ends session by role modeling how to ask for help when angry: "I'm feeling very sad and angry today. May I talk to you about it?"

Part Four: How to/Art Work/Steps

Please utilize Paul R. White's (Licensed Clinical Social Worker) CLAYTherapy© A Manual of Therapeutic Applications of Clay with Children. This manual is available at www.playtherapyclay.com.