

The Talking Method and the Drawing Method

(4 Page section)

In using the General to Specific approach, many methods or activities may be effective. Two suggested methods/techniques to use in your class after a critical incident are: The Talking Method and The Drawing Method. The following pages provide suggested questions or themes, and specific techniques.

Suggested questions to ask/themes to represent:

- Where were you when it (the disaster/event) happened?
- What were you doing?
- Where were your friends? Where was your family?
- What was your first thought when it happened?
- What did you see? What did you hear?
- What sound did it make? What did you smell?
- Was anyone you know killed or injured?
- What can you do now to help others to feel better?
- How did you feel?
- What did other people around you do (during, after)?
- What was the silliest thing you did?
- Were you or anyone else you know injured?
- What happened to pets or other animals around you?
- What dreams did you have after it?
- What reminds you of it? When do you think about it?
- What do you do differently since the event?
- How do you feel now? What makes you feel better?
- How have you gotten through rough times before?
- What would you do differently if it happened again?
- How did you help others? How would you help next time?
- What can you do now to help others?

Special Considerations:

- Allow for silence for those children with low language skills, shyness, discomfort, etc.
- Encourage peer support for these children
- The teacher should accommodate the child
- If a child has low English skills, consider asking for a translator or a peer to help the child express in words
- Create a chance for verbal expression in any language

NOTE: As the teacher, you might think of more questions to ask the children. Be sure your questions are “open-ended,” which means they cannot be answered by simply a “Yes” or “No”. Open-ended questions serve to facilitate verbal discussion.

Talking Method Activities

- Child tells a story (allow metaphors)
- Puppets “tell” or “live” a story
- Have an open discussion - using previous questions, ask for volunteers to begin with, talk general to specific
- Use photos, drawings, etc. to facilitate discussions
- Create a skit, play or do role-playing, related to the critical incident (provide “dress-up” clothes if available, including uniforms if possible to represent emergency workers seen during the disaster, etc.)
- Do “show and tell” related to the event
- Inform/educate the children about the event to make it less threatening to talk/act about
- When people understand their feelings and experiences are normal and can be predicted (even if they are scary feelings) they begin to regain control

Note: Remember to keep yourself in a facilitative/guiding role, not in a role of “control” of the discussions/stories etc. This will be most helpful to the children. Reassure the children by verbally acknowledging and “normalizing” their experiences.

For some children, the talking method is not helpful:

- In some cultures, talking openly is not comfortable, appropriate (or even “polite”)
- Some children have been raised in families where “talking-out one’s feelings” was not possible or supported
- Some children have been raised in situations where talking openly was not practiced or encouraged
- Some children simply prefer not to discuss their feelings openly due to personality type, privacy concerns or lack of trust in the process
- All these reasons should be respected as valid

Drawing Method

The drawing method is a playful experience to express feelings.

First introduce drawing a:

- Another way of “talking,” but with pictures instead of words
- A means of expression used by many (point out that some people express themselves by talking, some by singing, some by dancing, some by drawing)
- Remember when introducing drawing of any sort to clearly say that the goal is not to draw a “pretty picture” but rather, a picture of expression
- Drawing should be presented to the child as an option for expression, not as a required activity
- **REMEMBER:** Use previous questions to help lead these activities: A question can become a theme for a drawing

Drawing Method Activities:

- Draw/write a book together or make journals with pictures
- Do a collective drawing such as a mural (murals tell a “collective story,” develop/support teamwork, and feel “safer” for some children as opposed to individual art)
- Give the mural a “place of honor” in the classroom
- Make the mural accessible for everyday viewing
- Celebrate the mural: use it to demonstrate getting through something tough, or to facilitate discussions
- Take photos/slides of the mural when completed
- Draw aspects of the event (people, places, activities, etc.)
- Suggest lots of options, not specifics (e.g., rather than saying “draw a fireman, helping someone,” say “draw a person you saw doing something helpful...”)
- Create a collage (a variety of materials) using a leading question such as “Where were you when the disaster happened?”
- The teacher may draw/paste on the central image, then the children add photos, magazine pictures, articles, fabric pieces, etc. around theme, or may draw directly onto it
- Collages are the “safest” form of “drawing” because the child is using others’ symbols. The child may feel he/she is “losing less of himself/herself”
- Collages provide “boundaries” for the child; this can act as a safety net (emotionally) for some
- You may also want to look at other pictures (drawings, paintings) and talk about what they communicate
- Avoid the use of paint in this method as it is too “loose” of a medium for a traumatized child; the child might use it to bring up things not easily handled in a classroom
- Allow a full range of expression: some children draw recognizable “things”, others draw “abstracts”; respect all varieties
- Allow children to discard their artwork
- Emphasize to the children that their work will not be judged, graded or necessarily shown to others
- Only exhibit the artwork if a child desires to share with others

- Reassure them that there is no “right way” to draw
- Allow the use of various mediums (pastels, crayons, pencils, markers, etc.)
- It’s preferable to do the drawing method with more than one adult present
- Exercise as little control as possible over the artwork

Concluding Drawing Activities:

- A key element of the Drawing Method is the follow-up discussion. This discussion can help to bring closure to the experience, an important step in the process of expressing feelings
- Allow those who want to discuss their drawings to do so
- Others will “close” by listening to others
- Use open-ended questions in this process
- Sometimes a child’s artwork may be especially expressive of his/her feelings; a drawing can give “clues” to some deeper problems or feelings within the child
- Try to “read” the picture in the same way you might read words; what might it be telling you?
- Look at it as a piece of communication, not just fantasy

Keep in mind:

- Colors, forms, etc. have different meanings to children of various cultural backgrounds and possibly to different children within each culture
- Regard the artwork as just a part of what’s going on with a child; look at the child with a holistic view
- The best source for what’s going on behind the drawing is the child...ask him/her

If You Have Concerns:

In both methods (Talking and Drawing), you might notice a child exhibiting more serious problems. If you have concerns, refer those children to your **school counselor**.

NOTE: One sign of successful defusing of your students is that they feel better. Another sign of success might be that the defusing process surfaced other problems that will come to your attention. These problems might take on a variety of forms.

- Symptoms might be the same as those for anxiety or depression (physical symptoms, persistent avoidance of being alone, unrealistic worries about harm)
- Child is not able to “let go” of a memory
- The degree of emotionality and the degree of silence are both clues (be sure to talk with the child and simply ask them quietly, confidentiality, how they are feeling and coping)
- Make note of other physical manifestations of stress (as a result of the impact of the event)
- Be aware of different forms of adjustment in each child
- The teacher is not meant to be in the role of “diagnostician”; refer those children you are concerned about to a school counselor, social worker or school psychologist
- Some children may be predisposed to adverse reactions following a critical incident (generally, these are children who have experienced other loss, relocation, death, abuse, crime, etc.)
- An anniversary date of a disaster or death is a predictable time when memories and associated problems may resurface

Refer the student if you are unsure:

- Alert parent/guardians of your concerns
- Contact your school counselor/social worker/school psychologist
- Refer the student to the Student Assistance Team (if applicable)
- Consider a referral to mental health professionals in the community

Through using the methods and techniques in this guide and adding your own unique perspective, expertise and energy, you will help children and perhaps, yourself recover from a traumatic experience.