



Tertiary

Girls Talk

Target population

The Girls' Talk resource is designed for professionals who are supporting girls that engage in harmful sexual behaviours (HSB). No specific age bracket has been specified, however the material could be tailored to suit children in primary school and older.

Delivery organisation

The Girls' Talk resource workbook was developed as part of the Barnardo's Taith Service Girls' Research Project, a three-year research project funded by The Big Lottery. The Barnardo's Taith Service provides assessment, longer term intervention and training services for children and young people who display HSB, their families and professionals.

Mode and context of delivery

The purpose of the research was to develop standardised assessment tools and intervention resources for girls who have engaged in HSB. The Girls' Talk resource is designed to be used by professionals supporting girls who engage in HSB in order to reduce risk and allow them to move towards healthy adult relationships. The exercises would work best in individual sessions (professional and young person) to ensure the focus is individually tailored to them.

Level/Nature of staff expertise required (e.g. professional background)

No prerequisites have been made by Barnardo's regarding staff expertise, however the material would likely be best delivered by someone who has a vast understanding of HSB, experience of working with young people and an existing relationship with any child who engages with the resource.

Barnardo's does recommend that professionals be familiar with concepts of therapeutic techniques in order to fully utilise the activities in the resource when working with traumatised young people.

Intensity/extent of engagement with target group(s)

There is no information regarding how long the resource should take complete, i.e. the number of sessions and length of time per session. This means that the resource can be used flexibly and in a way the professional deems most appropriate for the child that they are working with at that time. It is important for the child to remain engaged with all of the material, therefore it is the responsibility of the professional to ensure they deliver the material and consider the length of each session in the best way possible. There are a number of exercises available in the resource which could be given as between-session work if appropriate.

Description of intervention (max. 600 words)

The Girls' Talk resource draws on a wide range of theoretical perspectives in order to provide a comprehensive approach to the complex issues experienced by girls displaying HSB. The key theories drawn on through this

integrative approach include compassion-focused therapy, mindfulness, cognitive behavioural therapy, and personcentred approaches. The five themes consist of:

1. Setting the scene:

Support the development of a trusting, non-judgemental relationship between practitioner and young person. It firstly focuses on 'problem-free' activities in order to establish a meaningful connection in which both participants are valued and have worth within the relationship. Attunement exercises help reinforce positive attachments within the relationship and once a trusting relationship is established work can commence on addressing the difficulties in a way that is encouraging, supporting and non-blaming.

2. My life experiences:

Provides therapeutic techniques that can be utilised in supporting young females to address the issues that may be present as a result of such experiences. These exercises are not a replacement for therapy or counselling, they are to support the therapeutic work undertaken with professionals when working with young people displaying concerning or harmful sexual behaviours.

3. Positive self:

The purpose of this section is to explore adolescent girls' level of self-concept, to identify factors that impact on their view of themselves, and to encourage positive self-belief. Self-concept has three components:

- The view you have of yourself (Self-image)
- How much value you place on yourself (Self-esteem or self-worth)
- What you wish you were really like (Ideal self) (Carl Rodgers)

4. Healthy Relationships:

This section helps young people to address the difficulties they may experience within relationships with family, peers, and sexual partners. The activities aim to explore pre-existing relationship issues (such as unsatisfactory mother-daughter relationships, and peer bullying) and support the young person in developing healthy non-sexual and sexual relationships.

5. Self-regulation and positive strategies:

This section looks at increasing a young person's emotional vocabulary, supporting them in being able to differentiate between positive and negative emotions, and the ability to express their emotions in a productive manner. It also looks at the physiological effect of emotions in the body, such as anger and stress, to support the young person in identifying the triggers and 'early warning signs' that they may be becoming emotionally distressed. This section also uses pre-existing and new self-soothing exercises to support a young person to identify emotions and be able to calm themselves when experiencing negative feelings and to prevent an escalation of circumstances.

Evaluation

The Barnardo's Taith Service Girls' Research Project demonstrated, alongside other research, that key areas for intervention when working with girls displaying HSB include:

- Impact of own trauma experiences and victimization
- Self-compassion – in particular addressing shame-based difficulties
- Self-concept – developing positive self-esteem, self-image, and ideal-self

- Family dynamics and positive maternal modelling
- Emotional loneliness - access to supportive adults and peers
- Healthy relationship skills – including sexual attitudes and sexual identity
- Sex education
- Risk of sexual exploitation
- Self-destructive behaviour e.g. self-harm, substance misuse
- Self-soothing/self-regulation
- Effective communication skills
- Problem solving skills
- Positive outlook for future - positive goal setting
- Continuing education

References

Taith Service Barnardo's (2016). *Girl's Talk: Supporting Girls to Develop Healthy Sexual Relationships*. Barnardo's: Essex, UK

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