Dealing with Imprisonment

A resource pack to support the invisible child

The purpose of this pack is to allow the student with someone close to them in prison to address their feelings of loss often associated with bereavement. The activities are designed to give the student space to think about the good things, and the not so good things, about their relationship with the person who is in prison, and their home situation.

Feel free to choose the activities you feel are appropriate for the child you are working with. There are some guidelines but feel free to adapt it how you want. The aim is to take about 6 – 8 weeks to cover the materials, but take all the time you wish. There is also a list of art based activities you might want to do as well.

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My grateful thanks to Laura and Alex for all their help in developing these materials.

Eileen Thompson

Please Hear What I'm Not Saying

Don't be fooled by me.
Don't be fooled by the face I wear,
For I wear a mask, a thousand masks,
Masks that I'm afraid to take off,
And none of them is me.

Pretending is an art that's second nature to me,
But don't be fooled,
For God's sake don't be fooled.
I give you the impression that I'm secure,
But confidence is my name and coolness is my game,
That the water's calm and I'm in command,
And that I need no-one.

But don't believe me.

My surface may seem smooth but my surface
Is my mask, ever-varying, and ever-concealing.
Beneath lies no complacence,
Beneath lies confusion and fear and aloneness.
But I hide this, I don't want anyone to know it.

Each time you're kind and gentle and encouraging
Each time you try to understand because you really care
My heart begins to grow wings, very small wings,
Very feeble wings,
But wings!
With your power to touch me into feeling
You can breathe life into me.
I want you to know that.

Jill Zevallos-Solak

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Prisoners' Children

These children may be thought of as invisible – they are a forgotten minority of approximately 150,000 children, which schools may not even be aware of.

Schools, at present, are not routinely informed if a child has a parent, sibling or someone else who is important to them in custody, and the imprisoned person rarely has contact with the school. Research shows that this group of children may suffer long-term effects stemming from their experiences, including psychological damage.

This may not only result from the absence of the parent or other important person, but also from the circumstances which may be in the family home – drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, sexual deviance, involvement with the crime, divorce and emotional and physical deprivation.

When someone special goes to prison, the child may experience:

- **Loss of contact with familiar people and family members, including the imprisoned person**
- **Financial hardship**
- **Stigmatisation from peers and adults**
- **Loss of roots though moving home or going into care**
- **Loss of part of their childhood if they become responsible for looking after younger siblings or being the emotional support for the remaining parent**
- **Emotional upheaval or tension in the home.**
- **Relief and associated guilt for the removal of someone who may have caused extreme distress to the child**

There is a view that when someone close to the child is imprisoned, the child is punished too, and their emotional responses to the grief and loss of losing the adult may result in isolation, low self-esteem, confusion and frustration.

This may manifest itself through

- **Bedwetting**
- **Nightmares**
- **Temper tantrums**
- **Aggressive behaviour**
- **Withdrawal**
- **Refusal to go to school**
- **Community issues**

It is recommended that children should be told the truth about the absent adult, but this responsibility obviously lies with the family. If this is not the case, fears and fantasies grow, based on half-truths and overheard comments. Even if the child is fully informed, they may also feel

- **Anger towards the prisoner and a feeling of betrayal**
- **Confusion and hostility towards authority figures**
- **Anxiety on behalf of the prisoner**
- **Concern for the prisoner's welfare**
- **Frustration at being unable to "fix" things**
- **Sense of degradation from professionals**
- **Concern about regular contact as the prisoner may be a long way from home.**

What do prisoners' children need?

- **Information about the person who is detained, as they may also include those who are on remand.**
- **Help and understanding about what is happening**
- **Remaining in familiar surroundings and routines where possible**
- **Carers who are well supported with practical and/or financial help**
- **Regular and meaningful contact with the person in custody**
- **Their rights and needs to be considered when a custodial sentence is given**
- **Ongoing support pre/post release**
- **Involvement in decision making about their lives**
- **People who respect their confidentiality**
- **Recognition of the loneliness of their situation**
- **Recognition of the grief, loss and separation process with its associated ups and downs**

The role of school in supporting these children

For many children who have someone they care about in prison, school provides a familiar, consistent and safe place where positive behaviour is rewarded in a commonly agreed framework. Schools are in a position to monitor the emotional state of the child and to involve relevant professionals to help meet their needs.

Teaching and support staff may notice:

- **Changes in behaviour such as aggression anger or withdrawal**
- **Changes in personality or mood**
- **Lack of concentration**
- **Being bullied / bullying peers**
- **Antagonism towards authority figures**
- **Physical violence**

This group of children may show many of the characteristics similar to those experiencing a death. How children respond will depend on their chronological and emotional age, their level of cognitive understanding, and the experiences in their lives up to the remand period or custodial sentence.

It is likely that the phases or stages within the period of custody will have profound effects on children, and these stages may be summarised as:

- **Arrest**
- **Discovering or being told about the imprisonment**
- **The court procedure**
- **Visits by the child to the remand centre or prison**
- **Difficulty in maintaining the relationship**
- **The release of the prisoner**

<u>What can schools do?</u>

- **Listen carefully to what children communicate**
- **See the child as an individual with individual needs**
- **Be non-judgemental**
- **Avoid treating the child as a victim or being over protective**
- **Provide a regular listening ear – perhaps a mentor**
- **Acknowledge the child's own preferences**
- **Don't ask directly about the crime, but listen if the child wants to talk about it/assess their awareness of what has happened**
- **Ensure peer relationships do not become an issue**
- **Be aware of the impact of the press**
- **Provide a safe space for the bad days**
- **Ensure learning is appropriately differentiated to reduce self esteem issues**
- **Monitor absence level**

<u>Using the school packs</u>

The packs of activities are not intended to be exhaustive. They are intended to track the child's possible experiences from the time the Police first become involved with the adult prior to arrest, through to arrest, court and imprisonment. Packs for coping with school, home life, life during imprisonment, and release are also included. The aim is to pick and choose materials to meet the needs of the individual child and their personal experiences.

Concerns about deeper or more worrying social or mental health issues can be supported through other professionals.

It would be advisable that any concerns/ issues around child protection/ sexual offences be supported by outside agencies.

QCA Baseline

Before you work with an individual child or group of children, it is valuable to have a record of where they are in terms of their behaviour before you start the intervention.

The QCA Baseline is quick and simple to complete and should be done by someone who knows the child well. It is not necessary to have every subject teacher complete it.

Fill in the personal details at the top then circle the best-fit scores for each statement. Add the totals for each of the three sections and enter them in the table at the top of the page.

The areas the child finds particularly difficult will help you suggest targets for progress, and will help you focus on where the greatest need is.

When you have completed the programme of support, which may take several weeks, complete the QCA Baseline again, preferably by the same person who did the initial one, and you will have a measure of the success of the work, and areas for future development highlighted.

QCA Behaviour Assessment

Child's Name: Date of Birth:

Date..... Year Group ..... Term ..... Age at this date: Yrs Months

School: _____

This assessment completed by: _____
(Please give your name and role, e.g. Class teacher, Year coordinator, SENCO, Parent, etc)

Is this the *first* use of this assessment (*baseline*) for this child?

Yes **No** - QCA assessment has been used before

Baseline was completed: .....200__ Then further assessment(s): .....
.
.....
.....

Part A	LEARNING		30
Part B	CONDUCT		30
Part C	EMOTIONAL		30
	Total		90

Part A LEARNING BEHAVIOUR	not at all	rarely	sometimes	fairly often	often	always
1. Is attentive and has an interest in schoolwork eg is not easily distracted, completes work, keeps on task and concentrates, has good motivation, shows interest, enjoys schoolwork.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Good learning organisation eg works systematically, at a reasonable pace, knows when to move on to the next activity or stage, can make choices, is organised.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Is an effective communicator eg speech is coherent, thinks before answering.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Works efficiently in a group eg takes part in discussions, contributes readily to group tasks, listens well in groups, works collaboratively.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Seeks help where necessary eg can work independently until there is a problem that cannot be solved without the teacher's intervention.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Sometimes it helps to tackle problems through an alternative activity, as the pupil may find it too challenging to talk about their issues directly. The following are some ideas you can use in conjunction with any of the activity packs.

- Making a table lamp- the base can be resourced from bankrupt stock and the electrics can be checked by the Technology Department.
- Solitaire boards – wood and tools from the Technology Department.
- Community projects e.g. make props for the local theatre company or school production
- Make a PowerPoint presentation on a personal interest.
- Prepare, design and paint a chair or other piece of wooden furniture. Use emulsion paint only.
- Cover the top of a small table with stamps, buttons or beads.
- Make cards or pictures from cross-stitch.
- Decorate a Memory Box with shells, stones, beads etc.
- Decorate a photo frame and put a digital photo in it.
- Junk modelling
- If you have access to video equipment, make a film.
- Make a clock – mechanisms are readily available.
- Decorate a plate – acquired from jumble sales, paint with tile primer and clear varnish when finished.
- Clay work
- Cooking
- Make a mosaic with broken tiles.
- Decorate a plant pot with broken tiles.
- Gardening.
- Making puppets
- Glass painting
- Bicycle repair
- Make a dream catcher

Make a dreamcatcher

To Native Americans, dreams were messages sent by sacred spirits. There are two different versions of the legend about how dreamcatchers work. Apparently, different tribes have different interpretations. One version says that the hole in the center of a dream catcher web allows good dreams to reach the sleeper, while the web itself traps the bad dreams until they disappear with the first light of morning. The other version says that the web "catches" the good dreams and allows the bad ones to slip away through the hole. Ask your students which legend they prefer as you follow these steps to create your own dream catchers.

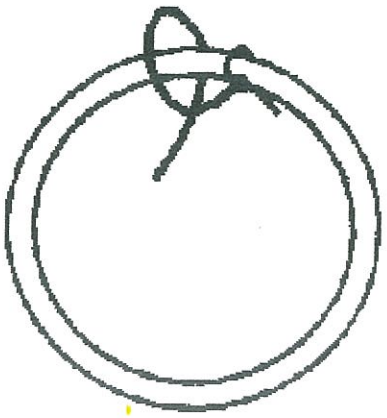
Materials:

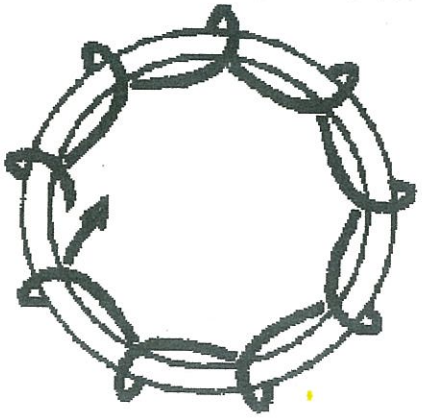
- thin, round, basket-weaving reed - (This can be purchased at an arts and craft store.)
- string or twine
- beads, feathers
- yarn

Directions:

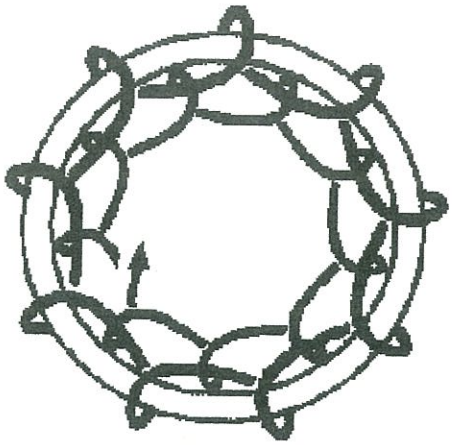
Step 1: Take a length of reed equivalent to approximately 26 inches, form into a circle and secure by overlapping and bending the two loose ends around the edge of the circle. The circle width should be 5 to 5 1/2 inches. To strengthen the circle and prevent it from coming undone, you may tightly wrap the entire circle with a length of colorful yarn.

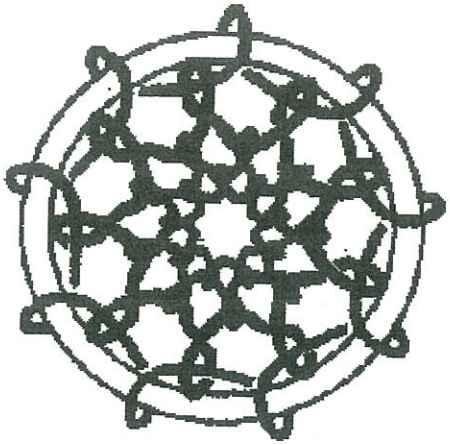
Step 2: To begin making the dream catcher "web," tie one end of the twine or string to the circle you have formed in step one. Tie 9 "hitch knots" around the ring, spacing them approximately 2 inches apart. Keep the string snug when going from one knot to the next being careful not to distort the shape of the circle. See diagram below:





Step 3: To begin the next row of the web, begin tying hitch knots in the middle of the string already attached. Continue tying hitches in the same way until the opening in the center is the desired size. To end the web, tie a double knot in the twine and cut off any excess. See diagram below:





Step 4: To decorate the dream catcher: Each student will need about 2 feet of string for attaching beads and/or feathers. Cut string into 4 equal pieces and thread the beads or tie the feathers to the ends. Tie these decorate strings to the bottom, sides, and center of the dream catcher. Be sure to attach a hanging loop to the top.

Assessing the emotional barometer

As you work with a child on this programme, it is valuable to assess how they are feeing at the beginning of a session. You need not do this every session, but while you are getting to know the young person, it helps you both tune in to how emotions are running.

There are various ways of doing this, and some samples are enclosed.

Weather map

The child can cut out and stick in the windows weathers he feels best represent his mood today. He could also do the same for a particularly good day, and you can then compare the symbols he has chosen. You might use this as a target if the child is very negative, to have one "good weather" symbol on the window next week, which gives him permission to be happy and enjoy life, or may give a clue to a more worrying mental health state if he is constantly negative.

Name Badges

The weather theme can be developed by the child drawing anything he likes around his name to show what he is feeling like today and then discussing his reasons for their inclusion.

How do you feel today?

The child can colour in or cut out faces that feel right for this session. These can link in with discussion about the triggers for these feelings, good and bad. This will open up a discussion about particularly difficult (or positive) areas for the child, and allow you to establish the mood and therefore support the child accordingly.

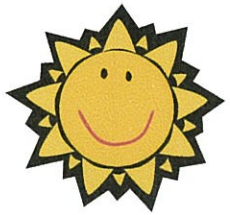
It will also help increase the child's emotional vocabulary, and his ability to explain himself rather than react inappropriately.

Play dough sessions

Children of all ages enjoy this activity and its outcomes can be very revealing, as the child develops the characters and story. Read between the lines with this one.

How's *your* Weather Map Today?

sunny



Mixed day,
Good outlook.

Life
Is
A
Breeze!

Changeable

Gusty winds make
it hard to go ahead

?

Weather has different moods, just like we do.
Here are some to talk about...

These people need some shelter from the
cold and wet.
Sometimes we might *feel* like that

Maybe you feel
like hiding away

A bleak day

Cold and icy

Hurricane force...

**Things are going to
Get rough**

miserable

**Or we may feel worse...as though
we're drowning in a flood.
There's too much to deal with!**

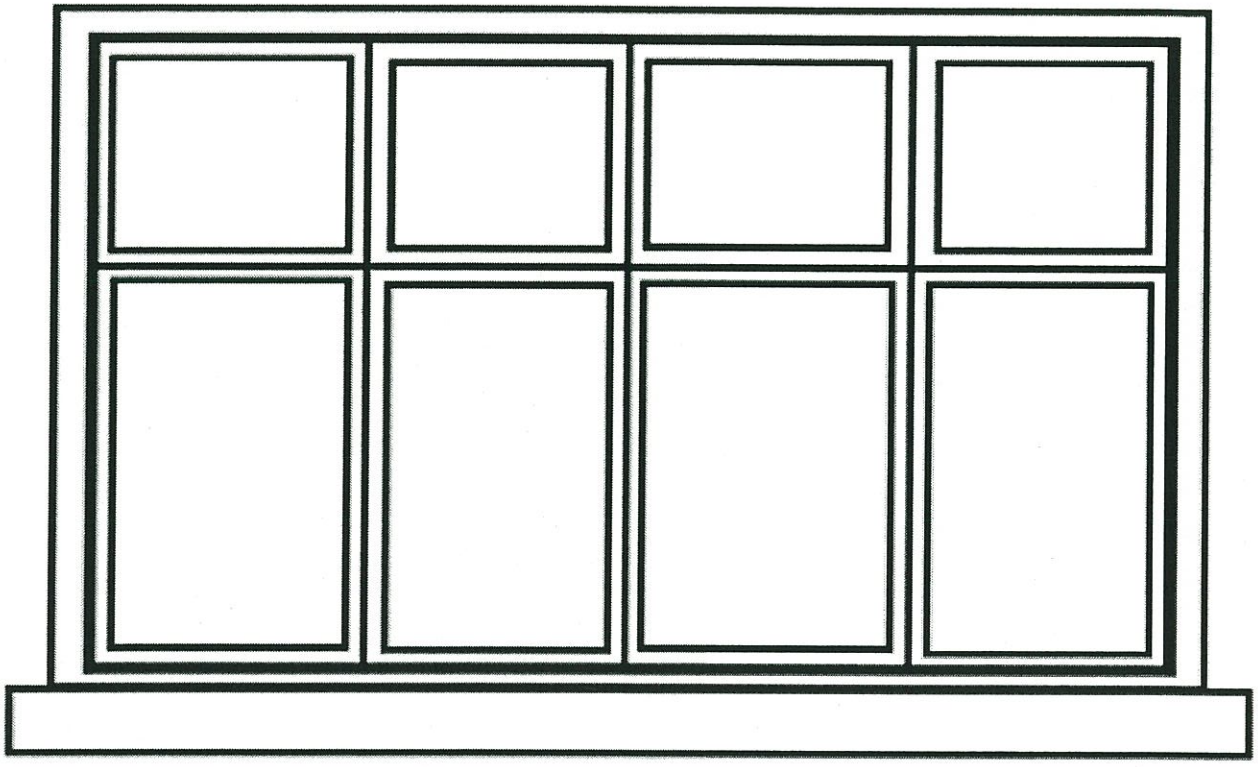
?

**An angry
STORM**

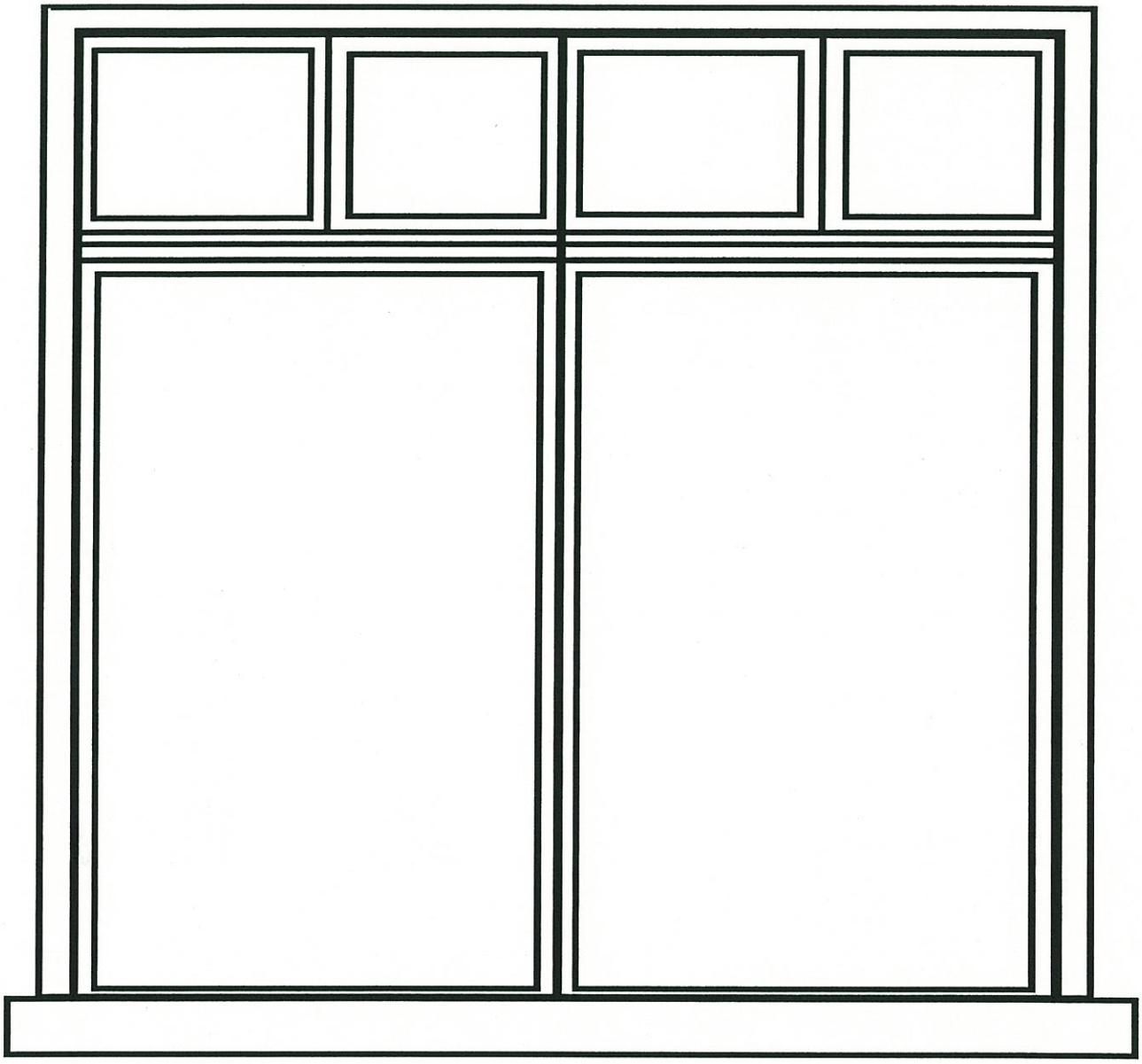
Turn over for some
more weather map
ideas

Try to draw a weather
map of your feelings.
It might be just one sort
of weather….
or a mixture.
The person working witl
you will help
if you need it.

Today is ...mon..tues..wed..thurs..fri.....



Thoughts and things to remember



Weather Map for .....

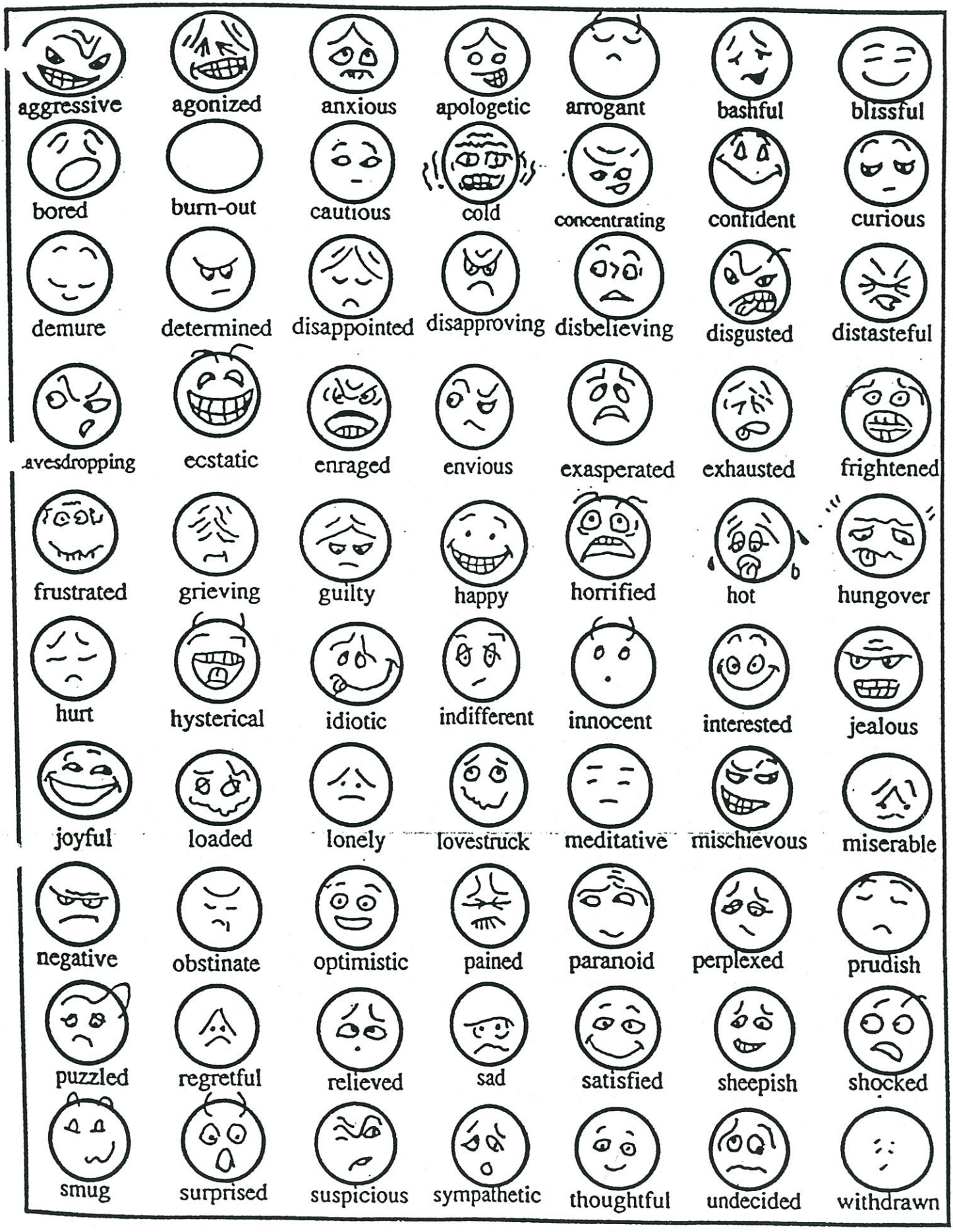

Sarah
©TREND


David
©TREND


Paul
©TREND


Vicky
©TREND

How Do You Feel Today?



Play dough session

Materials needed

- Large sheets of sugar paper
- Large felt tips
- Play dough
- Pens/pencils (optional)
- Pits and bobs

First hand out the play dough.

Keeping eyes closed, pick up play dough – squeeze it, pinch it, twist it, roll it, smooth it…….

Keeping eyes closed, continue to get to know your play dough, change it's shape etc…….

Open your eyes, what does your play dough look like? Carry on shaping it into a character it reminds you of.

On a piece of paper, using thick marker pens, draw a setting for your character.

Place your character in the setting.

Think about what your character is doing.

In note form, write an introduction to a story involving your character, describing what your character is doing.

Give the character a task or goal – this can either be told, or written down as part of the story.

What is the obstacle to the task being achieved?

Who or what might help?

How is the obstacle overcome?

What is the outcome?