

A Typical day in Theta room-Reflections from staff

The creation of a Theta family experience underpins our whole day and the regular rhythm of being home and safe and going into class to develop a feeling of belonging. Our room is deliberately designed to engage different learning experiences and made up of various areas which can be used for different activities. It is important to have sufficient choice for the children to explore without the children being overwhelmed with too many options. The essence of free choice in where they like to learn best whether it is sitting on the floor around a low table, at the traditional desks or on the computer shelf, whatever they need to do to make their individual learning experience most effective in both performance and motivation.

1. Nutrition: The long dining table works for the experience of us all having breakfast, breaks and lunches together throughout the day. It is also used for some of our activities and creativity sessions.
2. Creativity: Another area has a superb section of activities which includes: art, painting, knitting, crochet, pom poms, needlework and space for their own creations.
3. Relaxation: is always the same area and not moved around as this part should be consistent safe space for the same activity underpinning the reduction of anxiety using a variety of techniques dependent on the time of day and the individuals attending the session. There is always enough choice to differentiate for the group and their present mood these techniques include mindfulness, guided visualisation, breathing exercises, tai chi, and brain gym.

These experiences and interventions never interfere with their classroom work, as the Theta group always return to class for their academic work, strictly following their timetable. During the year all the children attending Theta go through a rigorous intervention supporting their Emotional Intelligence which includes: Self esteem, managing feelings, resilience, empathy, communications and self awareness.

The programme is holistic in its nature derived from various theoretical models including defined outcomes from teachers, parents and child thus involving key players in developing and measuring their own outcomes.

1. Physical, includes exercise, good nutrition and involvement in preparing, sharing and tidying food as well as peer massage
2. Emotional needs are met through the staff training and empathy. They nurture the children at all times with kind words and reassurance building wonderful relationships based on values and shared inner resources of trust and honesty.
3. Intellectual development using different kinds of supportive and personalised approaches to teaching and learning as well as pre planning and review of days timetable in class and outside the safe domain of the Theta group.
4. Creativity and spiritual moral and cultural values based programmes expressed through the emotional intelligence curriculum both specific and non specific. The humour and caring shown by these children is heart warming to observe as they grow from strength to strength with the ability to laugh and joke with themselves and each other.
5. Social:
 - Inclusive practice encourages the children to share their learning outside Theta room at home and in their family environment

- External ideas include the 5 ways to well being, to connect, be active, take notice, keep learning and to give.

Daily timetable:

Children meet at Theta at least three times a day as well as being accompanied at unstructured times such as the playground. Our most vulnerable children are settled into class by staff from our intervention team. Continually planning and reviewing for both the children and the staff everyday means that the consistency of practice offers opportunities to discuss and reflect at supervision.

Theta includes a variety of A Quiet Place programmes including Heartmath, Ready Steady Learn, Mindfulness, Peer massage, Sanctuary and relaxation all being part of the daily programme. The delivery of these programmes takes place in a room that offers a multi sensory experience and promotes a sense of calm as the children walk in.

Reflections

When we first were asked to be involved in the Theta class group pilot we felt a little nervous as to exactly how it would work. Very quickly we were reassured and supported at every step as well as being given leeway to develop ideas of our own that fitted into the structure which held the boundaries of the curriculum.

The year proved to be amazing and we felt privileged to be working with the Theta children supporting them both as a group and individually. The children were selected as being those at most risk of failing in class. They were of mixed ages, abilities with varied degrees of emotional needs. It was considered to be very important that they were able to connect with each other as part of the Theta family group. The children were supported at all levels using a variety of techniques from basic nurturing to the latest neuro science software programmes. This enabled them to develop a value based structure to their day with by developing inner resources and self management.

Two children had very limited access to class as they had always belonged to the behaviour resource based that predated the programme. Others who could not stay in class showed great improvements in concentration and motivation with consequent improved academic outcomes. Their confidence and self esteem was greatly boosted as was their resilience to manage in the mainstream.

One girl in Year 6 had been very reluctant to speak and quite quickly found the confidence to open up and engage with the others as part of the group. Another year 6 who had never been in class with a query of ASD quickly learnt about how to manage his emotions and diffuse potentially difficult situations. He began to understand and accept appropriate boundaries and became aware of the consequences of his actions on others. recognising and empathising with others in quite an amazing way. He was able to access most of mainstream classroom activities and surprised everyone by reaching his potential in his Sats.

One of our pupils, a year two girl who couldn't manage to stay in class had a tendency to wander off wanting to do her own thing. Surprisingly quickly because of the nature of the programme she found it possible to listen and follow instructions to keep herself safe within the boundaries of Theta and transferred this habit to her own classroom situation.

Other interventions included Jeanette our body worker who did peer massage during one of our lunchtime sessions enabling awareness of safe touch and relaxation. David, who runs our self-management programme using Heartmath and other bio feedback software with our Theta children

was able to demonstrate improved coherence levels which helps them manage their emotions and rapidly control their anxiety levels.. The realisation that they can easily switch from a negative to a positive emotional state quickly gives them the opportunity to make better choices and take these out of class with them even when difficult circumstances occurred at home.

The improvement in non verbal communication through body language was very successful giving them a greater ability to read other peoples emotional state as well as the inner resources to shift themselves into a more resourceful place to deal with a problem. One boy in particular who could not admit to negative feelings is now become more vocal and working one to one to manage them through the metaphors of the heart, earthquakes and volcanoes on the Richter scale.

Various wonderful comments from the children that we call 'sparkling moments' are come to us all the time, for example they call Theta their second family. They talk about love and caring for others, they ask to go back to class or out to play as if it was the most natural thing in the world. Magic Carpet, a specific focused attachment intervention is delivered in a very general way covering Emotional Intelligence using puppets and role play. One child went home and made her own magic carpet in her bedroom.

Theta provides a therapeutic environment which looks and feels very different from the classroom. The children are referred by class teachers and reviewed by the pastoral team. Theta children undertake the above activities and interventions with a unique outcome for them.

Aims:

In Theta as in all AQP programmes we are looking to help children understand and manage their emotions by improving their self esteem and self confidence. We look to develop self awareness knowing that their choice of action has consequences for themselves and others. Communication skills are vital for successful relationships and it is considered that at an emotional level 80% is non verbal. Verbal communication is vital for listening skills and following instruction as well as appropriate language.

Resilience as far as it can be trained is considered to be crucial and the techniques taught have been shown to be sustainable and hope full for lifelong experiences. Empathy and kindness towards self and others is the basis of the development of spiritual, moral and cultural values. Learning to respect and tolerate difference treating everyone every creature and the environment is surely the ultimate aim for education and the caring considerate society we all want to live in is demonstrated and lived in the Theta group.

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SELF ESTEEM

1. Support difficulty in expressing emotions appropriately, which create barriers to their learning and social interaction.
2. Activities to promote a positive sense of self.
3. Exploring individual identity
4. Strengths-preferences-achievements-aspirations-people-things they value.
5. Activities to creatively explore a personal sense of power.
6. Develop capacity to take responsibility for own actions.
7. Resulting in self worth rather than external praise.
8. Key is to grow-change-make choices and contribute to own well-being.
9. Promote a sense of belonging. Recognise personal strengths to identify admirable person (role model).
10. To think creatively about areas for improvement.
11. Highlight personal events creatively.
12. Promote a sense of personal power.
13. Personal development future wishes and dreams.
14. Focus on preference e.g. Food.
15. To feel nurtured-cared for.
16. Awareness to essentials e.g. We need.
17. Explore family identity.
18. Consider what you value.
19. Awareness of struggling to reach a goal.
20. Qualities of a good friend.
21. Awareness of personal dislikes.
22. Something you would love to aspire-set an achievable goal.
23. Positive participation.
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MANAGING FEELINGS

1. To understand the physical reaction of Anger.
2. Develop strategies for calming down.
3. To explore jealousy.
4. To explore embarrassment.
5. To support all negative emotions.
6. Body language-Physiology.
7. Mirror work for awareness.
8. Cognitive skills.
9. To be aware of when they become angry in the early stages so they have choices about what they do with the feeling.
10. To distinguish between emotions and behaviour.

To find out if they really need to be angry:

- Learn how to take time out and be safe.
- Learn how to handle other peoples anger.
- To learn alternatives to physical and verbal violence and to express themselves positively and assertively.
- Take advantage of anger as a motivator for change.
- Learn how to deal with authority.
- To discover the ways they have learned to express anger and choose new ones.

SELF AWARENESS

1. To recognise different emotions through facial expressions.
2. To consider consequences
3. Aware of feeling pride etc.
4. Explore shyness and confidence.
5. Concept of personal responsibility.
6. Ego strengthening.

RESILIENCE

1. Promote a sense of well-being.
2. Identify feelings of weakness e.g. Fear.
3. To promote positive thinking.
4. To introduce the concept of 'letting go' of negative feelings.
5. Support sadness
6. Support bereavement.
7. Knightly values.
8. Listening skills.
9. Visualisations.

EMPATHY

1. Kindness to Animals-Unicorn Project.
2. Consider other people's feelings-preferences-different perspectives.
3. Specific points of view to focus on e.g. Elderly-babies-alien-animals.
4. Listening skills.
5. Putting someone-animal-thing at the centre of their thinking.
6. Allowing flexibility.
7. Consolidate activity with discussion before and after.
8. Tailor to different ages.
9. Allow imagination and creativity. Identify another person's wants or needs.
10. Explore hidden causes of aggressive behaviour.
11. Create something for a friend.
12. Think from a different perspective
13. Consider the pleasure of giving.
14. Promote listening skills.
15. Explore different ways of providing comfort.

16. Inclusion-Alien.
17. Encourage understanding of adult rules.
18. Identify with someone of the older generation.

COMMUNICATION-VERBAL/NON VERBAL

1. Peer massage.
2. Discover ways of relieving tension.
3. Looking at ways of showing courage.
4. Create scenarios.
5. Metaphor Stories

All these aims are taken from the six E.Q. facilitated sessions using all the strategies, breathing, all forms of quiet place exercise, creativity, conscious and unconscious processes, role-play and story-telling (metaphor) work sheets etc. Extended over the year consistently.