

Heartfelt Feelings Coloring Cards Strategies

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Theme: Feelings Expression

Recommended Age Range: Six to twelve for the expressive domain; Nine to twelve for the relational domain

Treatment Modalities: Individual, Group, Family

Goals

- Teach feelings and vocabulary for identification and expression
- Increase awareness and expression of heartfelt feelings in relation to the key attachment figures in the child's life
- Explore sensitive issues and heartfelt matters with children in a way that is non-threatening and leads to greater disclosure and gradual exposure to the avoided painful material

Materials

- The Heartfelt Feelings Coloring Card Strategies (HFCCS) Kit that includes a Clinical Manual and 20 *expressive* and 20 *relational* cards. The kit can be ordered from the Coloring Card Company (www.coloringcardcompany.com) or by calling (908) 237-2500. Additional sets of cards can be ordered as needed.
- Crayons, markers, or colored pencils for the child to color the heart, and pencils or pens for the child to write in the card

Description

The Heartfelt Feelings Coloring Card Strategies (HFCCS) Kit is a series of strategies that use the potent symbol of the heart shape in therapeutic activities. The strategies are inviting and natural to children (coloring and writing in greeting cards) and can be used in play therapy, child therapy, family therapy, group therapy, and art therapy to facilitate the expression and sharing of heartfelt emotions (Crenshaw, 2007, 2008).

The greeting cards were developed in collaboration with the Coloring Card Company, which makes greeting cards for children created by child artists. The HFCCS has the unique feature of emphasizing two core domains: the *expressive* and the *relational*. In the *Expressive domain* the child is instructed to pick a feeling from a group of 40 emotions in the Clinical Manual. The feelings are

arranged from simple such as “sad” to more complex such as “perplexed” — the latter would be appropriate for children at the upper limit of the age range. The child is then directed to pick a color to go with the feeling. If the child picks blue for sad, for example, she/he will then be asked to color in the heart on the front of the greeting card with the color blue. When finished, the child is instructed to write about a time when her/his heart was filled with sadness on the inside of the card on the lines provided. This gives the child an opportunity to express the heartfelt feeling in the context that produced the feeling. If the child is too young to write, she/he can dictate the response and the practitioner can write it on the inside of the card.

In the *relational* domain the clinical manual contains specific directives for the child that allows for exploration of their social world, for example, “Draw in the heart on the front of the card a person who once was in your heart but no longer is.” The *relational* component consists of systematic exploration of the heartfelt feelings in connection with key attachment figures and with important persons in the child’s interpersonal world. The *relational* cards have the heart shape on the front of the card but the instructions on the inside of the card are different from the *expressive* cards. Using the example above, the child would be asked on the inside panel of the card to write or dictate a note to the person who was once in their heart but no longer is.

Discussion

Many practitioners have used some variation of the heart shape in child, play, art therapy and other creative arts therapies. The *expressive* domain offers structured therapeutic practice in identifying, labeling, and expressing feelings. These are key skills in affect regulation and for developing social competence. Allan Schore (2003a; 2003b), in his groundbreaking work on affect regulation, has demonstrated that affect dysregulation is central to almost all forms of psychopathology. Therapeutic interventions that address this crucial deficit will have wide application across the psychodiagnostic spectrum.

The *relational* domain emphasizes that our most heartfelt emotions do not develop in a vacuum. They develop in an interpersonal context. The social context is critical. Some children get angry at school but not at home. The main value of this therapeutic activity is that it creates an entry point for the child to further explore her/his heartfelt feelings and the interpersonal context that elicits them.

The Clinical Manual also contains a number of variations of the HFCCS for use in bereavement work, supervision, examining countertransference feelings, and highlighting strengths in the child, group, or family therapy.

References:

Crenshaw, D.A. (2007). *The Heartfelt Feelings Coloring Card Strategies (HFCCS)*. Flemington, NJ: The Coloring Card Company, Inc.

Crenshaw, D.A. (2008). *Therapeutic engagement of children and adolescents: Play, symbol, drawing, and storytelling strategies*. Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson/Rowman and Littlefield.

Schore, A.N. (2003a). *Affect dysregulation and disorders of the self*. New York: Norton.

Schore, A.N. (2003b). *Affect regulation and the repair of the self*. New York: Norton.

About The Author

David A. Crenshaw, Ph.D., ABPP, is a Board Certified Clinical Psychologist by the American Board of Professional Psychology and a Registered Play Therapist Supervisor by the Association for Play Therapy. He is the author of *Therapeutic Engagement of Children and Adolescents: Play, Symbol, Drawing and Storytelling Strategies; Evocative Strategies in Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy*; co-author with John B. Mordock of the *Handbook of Play Therapy with Aggressive Children* and *Understanding the Aggression of Children: Fawns in Gorilla Suits*. He is the editor of a new book: *Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy: Wounded Spirits and Healing Paths*.

What others are saying about the HFCCS:

“Having incorporated Crenshaw's heartfelt feelings activity into my play therapy practice and graduate school training curriculum, I can affirm that my child clients, graduate students and supervised clinicians find it effective as the child is freed to express his/her feelings in nonthreatening ways.”

Eric Green, Ph.D., Johns Hopkins University

“The Heartfelt Feelings Coloring Card Strategies (HFCCS) is a creative and engaging therapeutic tool that has wide applicability with children and youth. Counselors and therapists seeking helpful strategies to engage clients in therapy will find this to be an invaluable tool. This activity, developed by internationally recognized play therapist David Crenshaw, is featured in the book, ‘Assessment and Treatment Activities for Children, Adolescents, and Families: Practitioners Share Their Most Effective Techniques’ edited by Liana Lowenstein and is available at www.lianalowenstein.com”

Liana Lowenstein, MSW, Toronto, Canada, author of *Creative Interventions for Troubled Children & Youth; More Creative Interventions for Troubled Children & Youth; Creative Interventions for Bereaved Children; and Creative Interventions for Children of Divorce*