

Workshop Title: Transitional Objects

Workshop facilitators:

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*Schoolbag in hand, she leaves home in the early morning
Waving goodbye with an absent-minded smile
I watch her go with a surge of that well-known sadness
And I have to sit down for a while
The feeling that I'm losing her forever – Slipping Through My Fingers, Abba*

Introductions

Before proceeding further, perhaps this is a good point at which to invite you to quickly say a little about yourself, why you signed up for this workshop and what you hope to get out of it?

Guidelines for group members

Before we finally get down to business, I'd like to establish some agreed ground rules for how we should conduct ourselves today.

I'm sure you don't really need reminding about this but...

1. Personal issues that arise in this workshop are confidential to this workshop.
2. All group members should respect each person's right to choose the level of his or her participation.
3. All group members are responsible for personal issues that may arise as a result of being a participant in the workshop.
4. All group members should respect the safety of people and property.
5. The safe disposal of all work created in this workshop is the responsibility of the person or persons who made it.

Outline of workshop

Throughout life certain objects may acquire powerful symbolic significance. As children we may form a particular attachment to a toy or piece of material, while as adults an item of jewellery or clothing may assume special importance. During periods of transition – such as leaving home or following

bereavement - these objects often assume even greater significance and we may become very attached to them.



Below is an example of Victorian mourning jewellery, worn as a reminder to the living of the inevitability of death and to remember a loved one.



The psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott used the term 'transitional object' to describe the psychological significance such objects in human development (Winnicott, 1980).

Most people on first hearing about the concept of transitional objects immediately recognise the phenomenon in their own and their children's experience.



Failing that, they (you) may be familiar with the character Linus in the Charles Schultz' Peanuts cartoons



For Winnicott, the function of transitional objects - which exist in the 'potential space' between objectivity and subjectivity - is to help children make the transition from dependence to self-reliance.

It was through the use of these objects, Winnicott argued, that the developing infant found his or her way into the worlds of play, creativity, symbolism and culture.

The importance of 'transitional objects' is not, however, restricted to childhood and this workshop will use image making to explore the significant role they may have played in your personal development.

Never underestimate the power of a Teddy Bear, 'dummy' or security blanket. These are powerful symbols of the human need to bridge the gap between the inner world of the mind and the outer world of lived experience.



In the time remaining we are going to explore the personal significance such transitional objects may have for us.

Though our subject matter may be serious, the intention is to make the experience of doing so as playful and unthreatening as possible.

Exercise 1: Lifeline

Using the materials available, draw your life as a line, a journey or a road map.

Include important life events such as significant births, deaths, relationships, time spent at school or college, etc

Include barriers, detours, 'wrong' turnings, etc.

End the lifeline with your arrival at this conference.

Exercise 2: Transitional objects

For the second part of this exercise we would like you to think of no more than three objects (teddy bears, books, photographs, etc) that have accompanied you on your journey through life.

Pick objects that have particular emotional significance for you, particularly during periods of transition in your life such as your first day at school, leaving home, and so on.

Draw or collage these objects onto your lifeline.

Time for reflection

Take a moment to look carefully at the image you have made and then ask yourself the following questions:

- What do I notice first about this image?
- What physical sensations do I feel when I look at it?
- What memories are evoked by this image?
- What is the most significant element in this image for me?
- What is this image saying to me?

Jot down as many of these responses as you feel able to, either on your drawing or on a separate sheet of paper.

Finally, ask yourself, what have I learnt through participating in this workshop that I might use in my work and/or professional role?

Reference

Winnicott, D.W. (1980) *Playing and Reality*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

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