Bibliotherapy for Preschoolers: Using Books to Help
Agenda

- What Is Bibliotherapy?
- Why Bother?
- When Is It Necessary?
- How Do We Do It?
What Is Bibliotherapy?
Definitions

- “The practice of using books to promote mental health, solve personal problems, and become aware of societal concerns.” – Karen Bromley
- “Bibliotherapy is the process of using books to help children think about, understand, and work through social and emotional concerns.” – Darla Ferris Miller
- “Reading books to toddlers with the goal of assisting them in solving life problems, gaining important socioemotional skills, and knowing how to behave with peers.” – Terri Jo Swim
Definitions

- Deliberate use of books to help people
  - A need is identified
  - A book is selected and
  - A book is shared with the person/ people in need
- **Not** psychotherapy (we are **not** therapists)
- **Not** a replacement for everyday life experiences
Why Bother?
Types of Bibliotherapy

- Clinical bibliotherapy
  - Structured setting
  - Counselor, psychologist, etc.
  - Serious emotional/ behavior problems

- Developmental bibliotherapy
  - Less structured
  - Teachers, caregivers, librarians
  - Social/ emotional issues
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

- **Physiological needs**: air, water, food, shelter, sleep, clothing, reproduction
- **Safety needs**: personal security, employment, resources, health, property
- **Love and belonging**: friendship, intimacy, family, sense of connection
- **Esteem**: respect, self-esteem, status, recognition, strength, freedom
- **Self-actualization**: desire to become the most that one can be

Benefits

- Individuals are influenced by what they read
  - Fear reduction
  - Attitude change
  - Self-concept

- Improves
  - Problem solving ability
  - Ability to identify social accepted behaviors
  - Interpersonal relations
Benefits

- Reading aloud from birth stimulates language centers
- Increased common vocabulary = easier communication
  - Encourages children to talk about their problems
  - Strengthens caregiver bond
- Stimulates constructive thinking/ imagination
- Reinforces social/cultural patterns
- Inhibits infantile patterns of behavior
Children Discover

- Others have similar feelings in similar circumstances
- Facing a problem is the first step to solving it
  - There are many possible solutions to a problem
  - They can decide which solution to choose
- It takes time to fix a problem/ work through feelings
Bibliotherapy and Early Literacy

- Early literacy components
  - Vocabulary
  - Print Awareness
  - Letter Knowledge
  - Phonological Awareness
  - Background Knowledge
- Early literacy practices
When Is It Necessary?
When Is It Necessary?

- Big emotions:
  - Identifying and validating feelings
  - Self-esteem/ bullying
  - Friendship/ social skills

- Inappropriate/ negative behaviors

- Family and Social Changes
  - Divorce, separation, step-families, blended families
  - Military families
  - Illness and hospitalization
  - Disabilities and handicaps
How Do We Do It?
Three Stages of Bibliotherapy

- **Identification**
  - Reader relates to or empathizes with the character(s)

- **Catharsis**
  - Reader is able to release pent-up emotions in safe circumstances
  - Reader shares character’s feelings, motivations, or experiences

- **Insight**
  - Reader is presented with solutions
  - Reader can determine what might be used in their situation
Steps for Bibliotherapy

1. Identify the needs of individuals or groups of children
2. Select appropriate literature for child’s age/ maturity level
3. Set the stage; conduct pre-reading activities
4. Share the story with the children
5. Use follow-up activities
1. Identifying Needs

- Observation
- Caregiver conversations
- Art activities
- Ages & stages
2. Selecting Appropriate Books

- Appropriate and clear illustrations
- Reading level at or slightly above reading level
- Content appropriate for level of development
- Credible characters
- Plot not overridden by theme/message
- Doesn’t conflict with caregiver’s religious/moral principles
3. Setting the Stage

- Prepares children by:
  - Creating a positive atmosphere
  - Capturing interest and attention

- Depends on nature of the group and problem in question

- Sample activities:
  - Leaving books to be encountered
  - Displays or bulletin boards
  - Related videos, songs, flannel boards
  - Questions to think about
4. Sharing the Story

- One-on-one with child
- Read aloud at story time
- Dialogic/ interactive reading
Dialogic vs. Interactive Reading

- What is dialogic reading?
  - Encouraging active learning during book reading
  - Providing feedback modeling more sophisticated language
  - Challenging the child’s knowledge and skills
- Done one-on-one
- The PEER sequence
  - Prompt
  - Evaluate
  - Expand
  - Repeat
Dialogic vs. Interactive Reading

- What is interactive reading?
  - Encouraging participation during book reading
  - Develops early literacy skills
  - Makes reading together fun
  - Develops vocabulary and comprehension
  - Shows how books work
  - Extends the story

- Done in a group setting
Reading Prompts

CROWD prompts

- **Completion** – with rhymes and repetitive phrases
- **Recall** – revisiting a concept that you’ve already explored
- **Open-ended** – best with books with rich illustrations
- **Wh- questions** – focus on pictures in the book
- **Distancing** – relating the book to real life experiences
Reading Prompts

- Use prompts to identify:
  - Emotions and facial expressions
  - Compliments and insults
  - Character strengths and weaknesses
  - Problem solving steps
  - Character opinions and story evidence
Tips for Interactive Reading

- Pick books with:
  - Clear, detailed illustrations
  - Relevant storylines
  - Emotional impact
- Pre-read the story
- Write down questions on sticky notes
- Don’t rush!
- Don’t turn it into a quiz!
- Read with expression
FARMER DUCK
Martin Waddell  •  Helen Oxenbury
The farmer got fat through staying in bed, and the poor duck got fed up with working all day.

What does it mean to be “fed up”? 
Soon, the poor duck grew sleepy and weepy and tired.

Have you ever been sleepy and weepy? What did it feel like?
Then the cow and the sheep and the hens came back.

"Quack?" asked the duck.

"Moo!" said the cow.

"Baa!" said the sheep.

"Cluck!" said the hens.

Which told the duck the whole story.

How does the duck look now? What is different?
5. Follow-Up Activities

- Retell the story
  - Act out roles
  - Use puppets/flannel boards
  - Use art materials
- Create
  - A bulletin board about feelings
  - A board game about story emotions
  - A literary treasure hunt
- Provide play opportunities related to the story
Sample Bibliotherapy Plan

**Book:**
*We’ll Paint the Octopus Red* by Stephanie Stuve-Bodeen

**Pre-reading:**
Put the book in the reading corner in advance to allow children to look at it on their own. Put up a bulletin board with pictures of children and adults with Down syndrome.

**Reading:**
Read *We’ll Paint the Octopus Red* aloud to the group, using dialogic reading techniques.

**Follow-up Activities:**
Have the children draw pictures of activities they like to do, including activities with siblings or friends. Have them share their pictures with the group. Discuss what Down syndrome is, using preschool-appropriate language. Discuss how playing with a friend with Down syndrome may be a little like playing with a sibling or friend who is a little younger, stressing how much children with Down syndrome are like other children and like to do the same things. Address questions or concerns.

Sample Bibliotherapy Plan

Book:
Andy and His Yellow Frisbee by Mary Thompson

Pre-reading:
Have the children think of ways people are similar and different and about times they felt like they did not fit in with others.

Reading:
Read Andy and His Yellow Frisbee aloud to the group, using dialogic reading techniques

Follow-up Activities:
Brainstorm with the children about Andy and Sarah’s similarities and differences. What are the children’s individual strengths? Using a whiteboard or large piece of butcher paper, write down their answers. Highlight characteristics that the children have in common. Address questions or concerns.

Rozalki, Michael; Stewart, Angela; Miller, Jason. “Bibliotherapy: Helping Children Cope with Life’s Challenges.” Kappa Delta Pi Record (Fall 2010): 37.
Now You Try!

Books:

*I Used to Be Afraid* by Laura Vaccaro Seeger

or

*Jabari Jumps* by Gaia Cornwall

- What pre-reading activities would you choose?
- What follow-up activities would you choose?
Questions?

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