

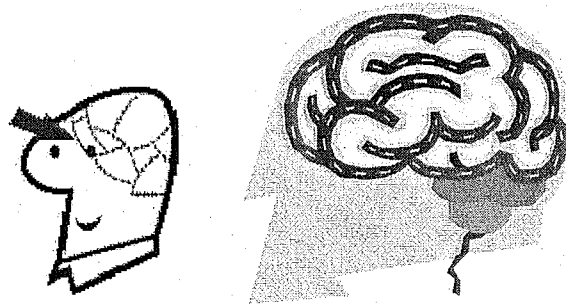
Cognitive Work with Young Children....Yes, it's possible!!!

Fitzgerald 2012

Goal: Help the child to identify thoughts. Learn about any negative, unhelpful thoughts that are distressing the child. Informally assess PTS intrusive trauma-related thoughts.

Activity: "Worry Brain" exercise

1. Draw a rough sketch of a brain with the child.



1. Ask the child if he/she can identify different worries/distressing thoughts. Sometimes it's helpful to start with general questions and situation cards then get more anxiety-specific. Some examples:

"What are you thinking in your brain or in your head?" "What's taking up brain space?" "What does your brain think about?" "What's going on in there?" "What types of things pop into your head and make you scared, worried, sad?"

If they are having difficulty...

"Okay, how much of your brain thinks about school work? How much of your brain thinks about playing with your friends? Homework? Baseball? Fighting with your sister? The fight between your mom and dad? The sexual abuse by your dad?"

Other examples:

"What part of your brain worries about dad hurting you?" "What part of your brain worries about kids at school making fun of you?"

"What part of your brain thinks about messing up at soccer?" "What part of your brain worries that you won't make the baseball team?"

“What part of your brain worries about being taken away from your grandma?”

4. After child identifies a few distressing/negative thoughts, ask him to fill in / color how much of his brain is occupied by that thought. (Note: you may have to go through several versions, given that the child sometimes overestimates or underestimates in the beginning)

Examples: “How much do you worry about _____?” Can you color the brain to show me how much you think/worry about _____?”

“How much of your brain space does that thought take up?” How much of your brain thinks about dad hitting you—a little bit of your brain, some of your brain, or a lot of your brain?”

- ✓ **Note:** It is helpful to ask children not only to fill the brain in with negative and distressing thoughts but other thoughts too, in order to compare how much of their brain is occupied by negative thinking or images related to the traumatic event.
- ✓ For example, a child might fill up most of his brain with thoughts related to the traumatic event and only a little bit of space to other age/developmentally appropriate topics, such as school work, playing with friends, gymnastics, etc.
- ✓ **THIS IS A GREAT INFORMAL ASSESSMENT TOOL**---you can re-administer the “worry brain activity” periodically throughout therapy to see how it changes (do trauma related thoughts take up less brain space, and cause less distress over time?)
- ✓ You can use the information gained from the “Worry Brain” to help identify and restructure negative, unhelpful, distorted beliefs—You can take the thoughts from the brain and gain more detailed information and tie it into the cognitive triangle. Exercises that are fun include creating cartoon strips to help kids identify more thoughts and to connect thoughts, feelings and behaviors related to different scenarios. Also, you can draw a person with empty balloon over their head and you and the child can fill their thoughts.

Note: Using the visual of the worry brain works well simply helping kids identify thoughts and then connecting to how they feel and behave.

Situation cards can get the ball rolling – You show a visual of any common situation and ask child what is he/she thinking in brain/head?



Using the Head Heart Hands/Feet Visuals can also be helpful (Cognitive Triangle)

You can put them on the table or the floor and step or jump from one to another, helping kids identify thoughts, feelings, behaviors with different scenarios to learn about their thinking styles.

