



The Creative Skills Podcast
Bonus Episode: Express Yourself this Children's Mental Health Week
Transcript

Quick Links:

- Creative Skills Online: www.starcatchers.org.uk/creative-skills-online
- Wee Inspirations: www.starcatchers.org.uk/wee-inspirations
- Children's Mental Health Week: www.childrensmentalhealthweek.org.uk
- For more ideas on "creative flow": www.starcatchers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/AHG-Reflective-Practice-Worksheet-1.pdf

All our resources are free to access, and feedback is vital for us to keep doing what we do.

If you have any thoughts, please do fill in our short survey here:
<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/CreativeSkillsOnline>

You can enter each month to be entered into a prize draw where you could win £50 worth of materials for your setting

Get in touch:

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Transcript

Heather Armstrong (00:09):

Welcome to this special bonus episode of Starcatchers Creative Skills Online. I'm Heather Armstrong.

This week is Children's Mental Health Week, and the theme this year is "Express Yourself" – and I was *so* excited when I heard that theme! A lot of the time when we think about children's mental health and the arts, we think about the amazing work done in the fields of art therapy, drama therapy and play therapy, but everyday creative activity can have a massive positive effect on mental health too.

So, how does it actually work?

Today I want to talk about two themes that keep popping up in Creative Skills sessions – self-expression and flow.

Self-expression can sometimes be seen as quite an indulgent, artsy, highfalutin concept – I am an *ARTISTE* and I need to *EXPRESS MYSELF!* But when it comes to good mental health, there are really sensible, practical reasons we should be encouraging wee ones to express themselves. An important part of looking after our own mental health is being able to recognise our feelings, accept them, then let them go.

The wee ones we care for need to be able to do that to but a lot of the time it isn't about sitting down and talking it through in a literal sense – it can be about exploring the idea of different emotions through puppetry and drama. It can also be about finding other ways to express yourself that don't involve words. The expressive arts give wee ones so many other languages to explore, whether that's through movement, or music, or literally making your mark in visual art.

As adults our job is to give wee ones opportunities to explore those languages without trying to control or criticise what they do – sometimes they need to go crazy bashing that drum and sometimes they need to paint their whole arm blue. And yes, it can help to chat about feelings and identify them whether that's through role-play or wondering aloud how someone's feeling but self-expression isn't always about having to read into their art and find out "why" they wanted their arm blue.

If we can give wee ones opportunities to make decisions and we recognise and celebrate their "voices" – in whatever form they come - we're already helping them set down the foundations of good mental health for the future.

The other idea that keeps popping up lately is the concept of "flow". Now flow is that feeling where you're completely absorbed in what you're doing – you lose track of time, you're not thinking about the past or the future, and you're not focussing on any

kind of end product, or what you're trying to achieve. Entering a state of flow is great for productivity and innovative thinking, but it's also brilliant because it *feels* brilliant – it's like a holiday for your brain. Engaging in a state of flow is a kind of active meditation, you get the same mental health benefits, and it's a lot more accessible for wee ones compared to what we might traditionally think of as meditating or mindfulness.

Now here's the important thing about achieving a state of flow – whatever you're doing, it can't be too easy *or* too difficult. A lot of adults achieve a state of flow using those colouring in books that started becoming popular a few years ago. Now, if you're an adult and you've already nailed your fine motor control then yes, they're great. But for wee ones, it's about finding experiences that are age and stage appropriate they can become totally absorbed in.

And that changes all the time. You'll see wee ones completely absorbed in pouring water from one container to another, day after day, and then suddenly they're over it and they need something else to spark that curiosity.

On the Wee Inspirations page on the Starcatchers website, there are over 70 creative ideas you can explore with babies and young children, and every one of them offers those genuine opportunities for wee ones to express themselves in ways that are age and stage appropriate.

And as you read through the ideas, you'll realise that another theme that weaves all the way through is having fun together. One of our Creative Skills artists, Pearl, recently ran some online training for us with some early years practitioners and although we covered loads of different visual art ideas, essentially what we did was doodle together and chat together for a couple of hours. And afterwards I got a message from one of the participants and they said that they'd been wilting recently under the pressure of work, and they made the point of saying how reenergising they felt, just hanging out with us virtually. They also gave us a thank you which is very much appreciated.

That message reminded me so strongly, that part of looking after the mental health of wee ones, is also about looking after the mental health of all the adults who care for them. We need to find time to express ourselves, and have fun, and get lost in a state of flow.

So, in this Children's Mental Health week, let's prioritise finding time for creativity for all of us.

Catherine Wilson (04:58):

Thank you so much for listening to this special bonus episode. There are some links to find out more about Children's Mental Health Week and flow on the transcript of this episode. You can find that at: www.starcatchers.org.uk/bonusepisode1. You'll also find a

link to our Wee Inspirations webpage there too.

Let us know what you think! Head to www.surveymonkey.com/r/creativeskillsonline - to let us know what you think about Creative Skills Online. You could win £50 worth of arts materials. It only takes five minutes and it really helps us out!

Our intro music is "Road Building" composed by Abigail Sinar and performed by the RSNO for "Hup" in 2014.

The Creative Skills Podcast is part of Starcatcher's Creative Skills programme: training for the ELC workforce in Scotland funded by the Scottish Government. To find out more head to www.starcatchers.org.uk and click on "Professional Development for Early Learning and Childcare".