



PRACTICE EXAMPLE

Working with Children and Violence

Summary of presentation by
Shelley Bonnah & Cathy Richardson
Dignity Conference, Perth, WA, 2017

'The Fairies Lifted Me to the Ceiling'

Children as Social Actors
in Response to Violence
and
Professional Practice

by Shelly Bonnah & Cathy Richardson

Children as Actors

They are willful, imaginative, active, resourceful, and dignity-seeking people, who possess a sense of self.

They:
interpret their surroundings, their safety, and the safety of others, & act accordingly.

are capable of using their behaviour to influence others, and to influence their environments.

They:
initiate behaviour, maintain behaviour & end behaviour for specific and often private reasons that are connected to their safety, or the safety of others.

Children can move from one environment to another, and act differently in each.

Behaviours

one way in which children respond to, and resist, the circumstances of their lives
in many ways their most readily available form of expression and resistance to circumstances that are kept secret, silent, and often deeply troubling.

Resistance in children may range from silent withdrawal to aggressive outbursts or self-harming.

Behaviours can be categorized as neurological or behavioural disorders in children, **when viewed independently of their social and situational conditions.**

Children as social actors, rather than passive witnesses to violence.

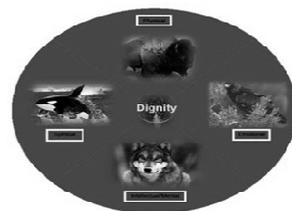
Children are: story-tellers
truth-seekers
justice oriented
communicate with their behaviour

Responses

- The medicine wheel of responses provides examples of how any response that comes from inside the person, such as sadness, despair, longing, hope are “**responses to**” something, not “effects of” or “symptoms of” a de-contextualized event. Much of the developmental literature has been focused on “benign world” understandings and does not explore children’s responses to adversity and violence (Richardson & Wade, 2008)

The Medicine Wheel of Responses

How did you respond? What did you do?



Cathy Richardson 2010

“The fairies lifted me to the ceiling”

Jade: *When I was little, the fairies used to lift me to the ceiling and they held me there safely until it was all over...*

Shelly: *Those sound like some pretty useful fairies.*

Jade: *Really? I always thought I was really fucked up.*

Shelly: *I don't think so. Sounds like you needed outta there...*

“We don't create a fantasy world to escape reality, we create it to be able to stay.”

(Lynda Barry)

Children:

find ways to meet with their siblings, even though forbidden.

try to escape, or create 'safe enough' hiding spots, like closets or under the bed.

run to a neighbour's house

take a phone to dial for help during the assault of their mother.

Hide siblings to protect them from becoming victims or from the sounds of violence in the home.

Older siblings put on music and headphones to protect smaller children.

Reference

Bonnah, Shelly & Richardson, Cathy. *“The Fairies Lifted me to the Ceiling: Children as Social Actors in Response to Violence and Professional Practice.”* Presentation at Dignity Conference, Perth, WA, May 23, 2017.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5541a3e6e4b0d0e27e94aaf2/t/5947769359cc6802572a2802/1497855665004/Perth+Children%27s+ppt.pdf>