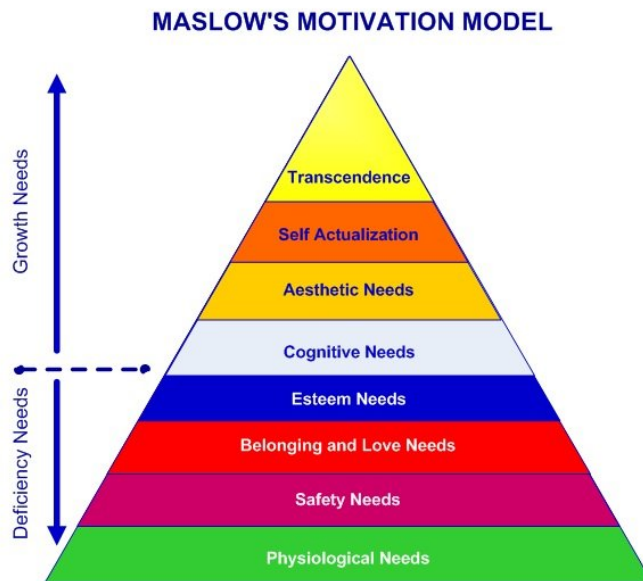


SAFETY FIRST, by Stephanie Coombes

At the start of the recent Covid-19 pandemic, the importance of Maslow's hierarchy of needs in relation to human motivation re-captured my attention. In summary, his theory is that our most basic needs are our **physiological** ones – **warmth, food, water, rest** – and once all these are met, we move on to our **need for safety and security**. Experiencing ourselves as safe from harm, after our basic physiological needs are secured, is fundamental. Maslow's theory suggests this need to feel safe comes before an individual will feel motivated or able to meet the higher needs of love and belonging, self-esteem and self-actualisation.



Source: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>

Safety has long been a relevant theme and a dominant need, in my work as a Dramatherapist, with children and adolescents who have experienced trauma or difficult circumstances / relationships. Dr Karen Treisman writes about its importance succinctly in her book of resources *'A Therapeutic Treasure Box for working with Children and Adolescents with Developmental Trauma'*

...For children to be able to think, learn, and explore, they need to *feel and believe that they are safe and can trust* and not be in a continual and dominant state of physiological and emotional dysregulation, and high arousal and in fear mode. Their nervous systems and arousal states need to be acknowledged, calmed, supported, and regulated first. As well, the child needs to have an embodied and somatic experience of safety so that they can internalise what this feeling of safety means and is like... Without safety, everything else fades into the background and exists on fragile ground.' Pp79

As the experience of feeling safe has been so challenging for many during this current pandemic, safety felt like an important theme to focus on when thinking about resources for Roundabout.

In my practice, dens have always been such an important feature of the work. They are a great way of embodying safety and supporting children to take control of the need to make their environment feel more secure. At the start of lockdown, I did wonder how many children felt drawn to building themselves a den within their home? - their own safe place. See Roundabout's resources for den making, if the children you are supporting need some guidance with this process.

To follow are some other safety resources that may be of interest, when working therapeutically with children - either online or face to face. They have been adapted or inspired from other exercises or ideas (sources cited) to support children to engage with the theme of safety, explore their relationship to it and potentially internalise it.

When working therapeutically with a child who feels unsafe, it is important to establish whether this feeling is because of a past trauma or is due to a current unsafe situation. If you are concerned about a child's current safety / welfare, contact <https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/how-to-help/worried-about-a-child/> for further safeguarding advice or, if working in a school, speak to your Designated Safeguarding Lead.

SAFETY RESOURCES

DRAWING YOUR OWN SAFE SPACE

Invite the child you are working with to draw a circle on a piece of paper - as big or as little as they wish it to be. Let them know that this is their very own SAFE SPACE. How would they like to decorate it? What name would they like to give it? How does their SAFE SPACE make them feel?

This exercise can be done as an assessment tool at the start of a piece of work. A child's safe space can be added to or adapted as the work goes on and their understanding of safety develops. It could be used as an opportunity to think alongside the child about some specific times when a safe space might be helpful and why.

This exercise is an edited version of an idea within a 'A Therapeutic Treasure Box for working with Children and Adolescents with Developmental Trauma' by Dr Karen Treisman. (Chapter 3 – Working Towards Establishing Multi-Levelled Safety. Pp 73 – 99)

Poster for an alien: SAFETY IS...

EXPLAINING WHAT FEELING SAFE IS, TO SOMEONE FROM ANOTHER PLANET, WHO HAS NO UNDERSTANDING OF THE WAYS OF HUMAN BEINGS.

You need – Paper, blank cards, coloured pencils, scissors, interesting photographs / pictures

Instruction – Create a collage of words and pictures on the theme of SAFETY and what it is to feel safe. The idea is that the collage should explain the theme to someone who is not from planet Earth and does not have a human understanding of such things.

Alternatively – simply use paper and pens to draw your images

Additional – Include all the things that would help the alien to understand what helps you to feel SAFE and why. Remember, you can't get this wrong!

This exercise is inspired by and adapted from the exercise Letter to an Alien from Using Drama with Children on the Autism Spectrum by Carmel Conn.

A SAFE PLACE for an item / object

The invitation is to make / design or decorate a safe place for an animal / item or object. The child can then be supported to choose a name for this place and item.

This exercise can facilitate a lot of conversations around what safety is, what safety looks like, what safety feels like emotionally and physically and how safety can be achieved.

This exercise gives the child the opportunity to experience some mastery over keeping something / someone else safe and possibly acting out and expressing some of the ways in which they would have liked or like to be kept safe themselves.

Some children might like to tell a story, make a comic strip or use puppets to show their creature being in trouble or scared and then coming out the other end and feeling safe.

Have conversations with the child you are working with about who or who will look after the item during and in between sessions and how they will do that.

This exercise is taken from 'A Therapeutic Treasure Box for working with Children and Adolescents with Developmental Trauma' by Dr Karen Treisman: Page 86. It is for use within an established, therapeutic, relationship.

The Safety Switch

1. Remember a time you felt safe and cosy.
2. Now imagine you are back in that place. Focus in on what you saw and heard and how safe you felt.
3. As you think about your memory, try and make the colours in your memory brighter and the sounds louder.
4. Now, squeeze thumb and first finger together on your right hand as you think about your safe and cosy memory.
5. Next time you are feeling overwhelmed, just squeeze your thumb and first finger and remember your cosy memory. This is your safety switch and you can use it whenever you need to relax or feel calmer.

This is a simple, relaxation technique for regaining control and calming down when in a stressful situation. It is inspired by an exercise from relax kids, entitled 'the happiness switch'. It has been adapted to include the theme of safety. <https://www.relaxkids.com/>

FEELING GOOD IN COVID

- Invite the children you are working with to draw a picture of a time when they felt good - content, satisfied, happy - recently or before the recent pandemic.
- Invite them to study their artwork, close their eyes, and locate the place in their body where they can feel the goodness. Encourage that feeling to spread and grow.

This exercise is inspired by and adapted from an exercise called Feeling Good from Trauma through a Child's eyes, by Peter Levine and Maggie Kline. Pp 389.

MAINTAINING SAFE BOUNDARIES

If a child is struggling to play safely, invite them to give sensible advice as if they were someone in 'authority', such as a parent, teacher or member of the police force: 'If you were in charge, what would you do to help keep everyone safe?'

From Problem Solving using Stories, Drama and Play, by Joan Moore. Pp 15: Maintaining Safe boundaries

Bibliography

Conn C (2007) *Using Drama with Children on the Autism Spectrum*. Speechmark Publishing, Milton Keynes

Levine, P and Kline, M (2007) *A Trauma Through a Child's eyes*. North Atlantic Books, California

Moore, J (2014) *Emotional Problem-Solving using Stories, Drama and Play*. Hinton House Publishing, Buckingham

Treisman, K (2018 ed) *A Therapeutic Treasure Box for working with Children and Adolescents with Developmental Trauma*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. London

Websites

www.actionforchildren.org.uk

www.relaxkids.com

www.simplypsychology.org