My Feel Better Bag or Box

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Background

With thanks to “The Feel Better Bag”
With thanks to Liana Lowenstein [www.lianalowenstein.com]

• This presentation will discuss the use of this tool to enhance the ability of children (and probably young people and adults) to manage unpleasant feelings, thoughts, beliefs and sensations. It can help with anxiety, pain, sadness and general distress.

• The children who access health and mental health services have a variety personal strengths and difficulties. This is a practical way to equip them with skills and reminders of skills/memories and to offer symbols and reminders of strategies they can use.
Disclaimers and Limitations

• Based on lots of different ideas
• Many of which you already know!
• The presentation seeks to provide ideas for you to evaluate
• Not a replacement for good evidence and clinical knowledge based practice but provides a vehicle and developmentally appropriate component of practice
The limitations

• It must be connected to an understanding of the value of developmentally appropriate communication
• It must be engaging and not overwhelming
• It must make sense to the child and if possible, their parent
• Age? I have used it with 5 year olds and 16 year olds, boys and girls in various versions
• It must be more than fun, but fun helps to de‐arouse distress (for child, family and therapist)
My thoughts about the “Feel Better Bag” concept

• Most effective treatment strategies require:
  – Engagement of child and/or family members
  – Psycho-education about the condition
  – Effective education about the treatment
  – Evaluation of the child’s developmental status
  – Evaluation, recognition and supporting of strengths
  – Enhancing close relationships and promoting safety and comfort
  – Focused strategies; the symptoms, the emotions, the meaning of the event/s, illness, condition etc
  – Ways to record and remind of the need for practice
  – Good memories of therapy and of people
  – Rewards and celebrations
The feel better bag/box

Also:

– Scrap Books
– Happy Bags
– Therapy Sheets
– Fun Fact Sheets
– Colour in fact sheets
– Behaviour Rewards charts
At the beginning - talk with the child and family about its use

- What this activity is about -
  Please note: This depends on your context, your role, your relationship with the client/patient/family

- Who will know about it
- How and why to use it
- Where to keep it
- Revisit this discussion throughout the sessions
Acknowledgements

• Many people do something like this – it is not original!!
• It seeks to emotionally and psychologically support children and perhaps families
• Many versions of it exist in play therapy, various type of counselling
• It seeks to make psychological work age appropriate...developmentally that is!
Tools I learned from Liana at the APSAC conference (www.apsac.org)

My favourites were:
- Marshmallow people
- The chip introduction game (could use tokens)
- The Feel Better Bag!
In all therapy work.. safety first ....
A reminder

• We all have the right to feel safe all the time

• There is nothing so awful we can’t tell someone about it ... not everyone because we all have the right to feel safe all the time

• Persistence ...
• Network identification and
• Shared network
These safety strategies need safety to be evaluated first

- A protective behaviours sheet:
- Importance of ensuring the child is safe enough cannot be underestimated!
- Ensuring there is a support network is essential!
Be sure of your purpose and confidence

• What do you want this resource to do?
• For me it means I have a way of empowering a child to cope with distress
• I can use it to connect..
• Have your own (and the child’s) language .. A show bag, a tool kit, etc
• I can use it to educate and support the therapy work
• I can use it to help the child be reflective
For example the purpose with children who are grieving (from Liana Lowenstein) who writes a letter as well to the child!!

You have probably been feeling sad and upset since your special person died, but there are things you can do to help yourself feel better. Today, you are going to get a special bag. It is called a Feel Better Bag. Each time you come here, you will get something to put in your Feel Better Bag that can help you feel better.

You can take your Feel Better Bag home today, and you can use it when you are feeling upset. Talk with your therapist about where to keep your Feel Better Bag, so you can use it when you need to.

Although your therapist will give you ideas of things to add to your Feel Better Bag, you can always add your own ideas. Remember that this special bag belongs to you, and you can use it in whatever way helps you most!
The theory and treatment models

• Many theoretical approaches support the use of creative activities, tools and reminders for children
• The reminders may be of:
  – Who they are and what their strengths are
  – Special people who are in their life – family, friends etc
  – Strategies for symptom management
  – The Therapist
Theoretical or treatment frameworks

- The following frameworks fit with the use of creative strategies with children
  - Anxiety management
  - Teaching and practising skills
  - Mood management
  - TFCBT [http://tfcbt.musc.edu/](http://tfcbt.musc.edu/)
  - Narrative approaches
  - Pain management strategies
  - Working to promote family and friend
  - Relationships
  - Trigger management
  - Behavioural approaches
  - Bereavement work
Common therapy metaphors – use one that suits you or that you can make work!

- Mountains
- Volcanoes
- Butterflies
- Caterpillars
- Coke or Milk bottles
- Jars
- Animals
- Birds
- Movie characters
The value of the process

• Empowers the child/young person
• Promotes the value of practising at home (I use films on my computer or reference to films or stories of journeys)
• Provides reminders of treatment
• Potentially reduces arousal (when there is fun in the process) (did I say that before) “no-one ever told me that before”.... My theory she was too stressed to hear it before!
Resources – you need to collect!

For example:

• **Stickers:** stars, hearts, dots, smiles, words
• **Cut outs:** dolls, animals, shapes – space, squares etc
• **Pictures:** mountains, volcanoes, worms, butterflies, flowers, cars, boats, planes
• **Bandaids** (all sorts and colours)
• **Charts:** calendars, action reward charts, behaviour reward charts
• **Food or tokens**
• **Movie covers or songs covers**
• **CD cases**
• **Treats**
My sticker box
Step One – Understand, Assess and Evaluate

• Who is the child or young person?
• You can play a game like a chip game or a sentence completion game or use paper dolls for each person in the family to get a genogram
• It must be personalised – listen to the child’s interest for metaphors to use
• Who else is in their world and is there someone available to support the child or parent/ carer
Step Two and following!

- Begin to identify just a few strategies.
- What activities and reminders could go into the box!
- Decorate the box as part two of the session.
- Practice the strategies in a session.
- Discuss when they will be used.
- Make sure parents know the plans.
- Later ... review and encourage.
The importance of personalising

• The resource demonstrates that you are listening
• It also engages the child or family
• Validates the individual’s experience
• Promotes hopefulness of change
• Can be motivating for very stuck situations
Some key issues that can be addressed by a “feel better bag”

- Anxiety management
- Pain management
- Distraction techniques
- Thinking or problem solving techniques
- Exercise strategies
- Mood recognition and management
- Developmental activities
- Alone and with others
- Reminders of people and ideas
EXAMPLES OF FEEL BETTER BAGS AND POTENTIAL ASSOCIATED ACTIVITIES
Bag or Box
it doesn’t matter
The container is its own metaphor!
A work in progress

WHAT IS ON THE OUTSIDE
Moving to the inside

Again .....depends on your goal and your role

If you are starting with assessment ...
Information gathering assessment and measuring tools

- Scores
- Thermometers
- St Luke’s Scaling charts
- Growing well card and tools from: http://www.innovativeresources.org/
- Trees (for worries)
- Metaphors like volcanos
- A copy can go in the bag as long as it includes some feel better validity ...
More St Luke's / Innovative Resources
- stickers are available

Copy the ones that help with strength or good feelings or use matching stickers
Main areas of intervention in the FBB

• Information
• Belief support ...I am ..
• Connection... There are people to help me...
• Goals... I am doing.. I can do..
• Affect or emotion regulation.. If I am sad I can, If I am angry I can.. If I am worried I can...If I am in pain I can...
• Managing grief, trauma related distress or relational distress by a distraction or dissonance activity
EXAMPLES OF RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES FOR THE FEEL BETTER BAG (FBB)
Ideas for relaxation

- Make Bread
- Make silly faces
- Talk to someone
- Find something funny to laugh about
- Large Movements like flying, skipping, and dancing
- Have a bath or shower
- Others …. (from DBT books too!)

Cards are from [www.parentingPress.com](http://www.parentingPress.com)
And also Kids Health
Something for Your Feel Better Bag: A Hug
(Supplies: Hershey's Chocolate Hug)

Dealing with the death of a special person can be difficult but it can help to get a hug from someone you care about, or to give yourself a hug. Put this Chocolate Hug in your Feel Better Bag as a reminder to hug yourself or ask for a hug when you need one.

After you have eaten your chocolate hug, keep the wrapper in your Feel Better Bag as a reminder that hugs can help you feel better.
Emotional Regulation

- Relaxation strategies
- Shoulder Scrunch – or woodchopper (thanks Jodie) - practice in the session several times
- Spaghetti – use a pipe cleaner on a card to symbolise
- Shake out the anger in your hands put in a hand sticker
- Butterflies in my stomach
- Practice with finger puppets or marshmallow puppets or animals – take a picture for the FBB
Butterflies in My Stomach

Everyone has problems and worries, but when someone close to you dies, it can make you feel more worried and scared. This activity will help you talk about your problems and worries. It is called Butterflies in My Stomach because when you are worried or nervous about something, your stomach might feel funny or jittery, as if you have butterflies in your stomach. You don't really have butterflies in your stomach, it just feels like you do. Write your worries on the paper butterflies on the next page. Write bigger worries on the larger butterflies, smaller worries on the smaller ones. After you write your worries on the butterflies, answer the questions below:

When you are feeling scared or worried, what could you do to help yourself feel better?

Who are some people who can help you with your problems and worries? What can they do to help?

If your special person who died were here, what advice would they give you about your problems and worries?
Resources to help with feeling identification and management

- Bear cards
- Cars r Us Kit
- Faces
- Body pictures to map feelings
- CBT and DBT ideas
- Collages
- Pictures – Butterflies
- Worry Tree

- Put a copy of the feeling tool and
- The action plan using a symbol or a card into the FBB
- A set of bottles drawn or real.. How full is the anger one, the sad one, the happy one, the pain one, the worry or anxious one, the confused one etc!
Identifying, managing and tolerating unpleasant feelings

- Drawing paper
- Noughts and Crosses Feelings Game – (make tailor made version)
  - Use token or coloured sweets
  - Talk about a time when you felt this feeling
  - Then Identify the problem feeling and write on a card
  - Identify distraction processes or sources of comfort
  - Put into the FBB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Happy</th>
<th>Angry</th>
<th>Nervous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scared</td>
<td>Loved</td>
<td>Guilty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jealous</td>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>Relieved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is a great game!!
From the sentence completion game

My three wishes are...

When I’m alone...
Before I go to sleep
I think about...

When I’m at home...
Breathing activities

• Write the strategy on a card as a reminder.
• Put in a symbol like bubble blower or a straw.
• Small toy for tummy breathing.
• A big number 4 for 4 breathing.
• A picture of a favourite place for distraction breathing.
• Practice in sessions!
Tummy Breathing

• “One way to help your body learn to relax is with tummy breathing. Lie on the floor and place a small toy on your tummy. Breathe in and out. Make the toy on your tummy rise during inhaling. Slowly count backwards from 5 while breathing in through the nose and backwards from 5 whilst breathing out.

• Practice four times to help your body relax.”
4 Breathing

• Think of the number 4
• Step 1: Breathe in for 4 seconds
• Step 2 Breathe out for 4 seconds
• Wait 4 seconds
• Repeat it 4 times

• Make a big 4 and put it in the FBB as a reminder.
Circle Breathing

1. Get comfortable and close your eyes.

2. Close your mouth, and take two slow breaths. In through your nose, and out through your nose. In through your nose, and out through your nose.

3. As you continue to breathe, imagine your breaths traveling in one nostril and out the other. In real life, you will be breathing in and out through both nostrils, but in your mind imagine the breath going into your right nostril and out your left nostril. Then reverse the pattern, and imagine the next breath coming into your left nostril and out your right nostril.

4. Imagine your breaths going in and out. First in through the right and out through the left. Then in through the left and out through the right.

Other Resources

- Books with activities
- Books to read
- Poems to read
- Drawing resources
- Story books of resilience
- CD cover or make a play list and CD
- I get these from various bookshops or Kids Health 9845 53585

A Terrible Thing Happened: A Story for Children Who Have Witnessed Violence or Trauma
By Margaret M. Holmes
Illustrated by Cary Pillo
Shapes are great for reminders
Write or draw on the body part where you feel bad or not so good and tell someone.
Recognising strengths and resources

- Posters and cards with “I can statements”
- I can stickers
- Strength stickers
The importance of practising

- Symbols of practise
- Movies about practising
- Metaphors about practising
- L, P plates
- Black Licenses
- Merit Certificates
Recognising helpful people in my life

- Supplies:
- Something to map the people onto
- Something to symbolise the evaluation
- Instructions: “write the initials of people in your life. Put smiles, stickers, hearts etc to symbolise those who can help you”
For The FBB - Symbols of people who love you

- Hearts
- Paper doll changes
- Hugs or kiss chocolates
- A Picture or photo
- A picture Frame and a Picture or words or stories inside
- Music or stories
Thoughts and Beliefs

- Sentence completion games
- Thought bubbles
- Notebook and pens
- Beginning of a story
- Cards with ideas
Personal list for the FBB

Things that make me feel better. Use:
• Coloured paper, collage picture
• Music or play list
• Play dough
• Symbols...
• Small toys, stress balls
• A reminder list- things that stay the same, things I can say to myself, things I can say to the people around me
FBB items about coping with sadness

• A hug coupon to tell someone what you need
• A distracting funny cartoon
• A body map to show where you feel sad and some colouring pencils (also a St Lukes resources)
• Fun exercises: jumping jacks, basketball with a paper ball, finger dancing to cool music, walk around the room with a coin on your finger..
• A list of things to do when sad!
FBB items about coping with anger

• Visualise a stop sign
• Count backwards from 20 (make some counting cards with pictures on them)
• Take slow breaths
• Breathe the anger in and blow it out
• Shake it out of your arms
• Tell someone (write a card or a picture with who on the stop sign)
Anger management strategies

• Scribbling pad and string pencils to scribble away tension
• A thermometer chart to check on anger symptoms (St Luke's resource)
• Have a safe spot
• Take a break.....stop the thoughts and think then do something that is okay..
• Sing a song.. If you are angry and you know it tear some paper, stomp your feet etc. As allowed!!
FBB items about coping with worries, fears or anxiety

• Breathing activities
• Relaxation activities – spaghetti and shoulder scrunch
• Worry time... Make a clock and set the time for worrying...
• Butterflies colouring
• Worry tree colouring or making with paper or play dough
Spaghetti technique

• Stand up straight and stiff - tighten your body like uncooked spaghetti, hold for 3 seconds
• Go limp and wiggle your muscles like cooked spaghetti
• Go really soft like wet spaghetti until you feel relaxed
• Put pipe cleaners or spaghetti in a sealed bag in the FBB
Loneliness

• Remind yourself of the people you like to do things with ... Write a story or a poem or find some photos for your reminder book
• Keep a calendar
• Look at the stars in the box with names on them
• Look at the smiley face stickers .. Who are they and what can you do to contact them?
• Make a paper doll or an animal that reminds you of that person and think about what they might say to you, know or what ideas they may have for how to solve your loneliness or sadness.
Conclusion

- Remember safety – always include tell someone – attachment and comfort is essential
- Ensure adults know about the strategies planned
- Always practice at least once or twice in a session
- With young people look at DBT resources like Callaghan which also include recording and reviewing processes
Thank you!

• Know what is in your feel better bag .... ...
• Music?
• Cooking?
• Movies
• Reading
• Mindfulness or relaxation?