

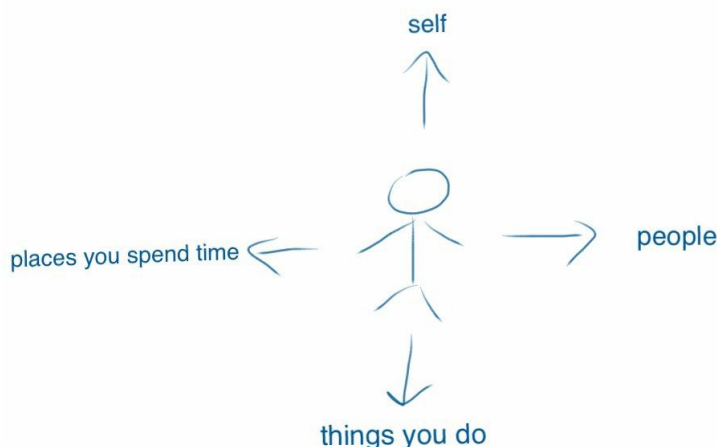
Values work with young people can sometimes be tricky.

This can be for a number of different reasons. Maybe they have not yet reached that point where they have started to think about what kind of person they want to be. Or maybe fitting in with a particular social group seems more important to them than clarifying or acting on their own beliefs. Or this is a new idea to them - that they are free to choose what kind of person they want to be.

These difficulties should not put us off having values based discussions with young people, however. I find it can be such a refreshing change to explore this kind of stuff rather than always talking about whatever problem has brought them to my door (either voluntarily or because the Deputy Principal has made them come!). It can be intriguing and energizing for the young person, too, and shows our interest in them as a whole rather than just what is wrong (as Kelly Wilson would say, treating them like a sunset not a maths problem).

I don't have one approach for exploring values. I don't think there is such a thing as a guaranteed 100% successful technique, so flexibility is good. I also like the idea of layering our discussions on values by coming at them from different angles, at different times. Sandra showcased her great values star concept in our previous newsletter, for example.

My latest approaches has grown out of reading Russ Harris's recently published book "The Reality Slap", and focusses on our relationships with various aspects of our lives. I start by drawing a stick figure representing the young person in the middle of a whiteboard, with four arrows coming out pointing to 'people', 'self', 'things you do' and 'places you spend time', as below.



(You can see why Sandra is in charge of the art department!)

The aim from here is to draw a web of things that the young person has some kind of relationship with. From 'people', for example, we would draw further arrows leading to 'family' and 'friends'. These could then be broken down even further - parents, grandparents, uncles/aunts, siblings, cousins. Closest friends, next closest and so on. And there are many more people the young person has a relationship with: teachers, class mates, team mates, work mates, neighbours, etc. A really important one I add here as an offshoot is pets - the importance of relationships with animals should not be underestimated.

From 'self' comes 'mind', 'body' and 'spirit'. We will go on to talk about the kind of relationship the young person currently has with each of these aspects of self.

From 'things you do' we can branch off into sport, hobbies, work, chores, creative activities etc.

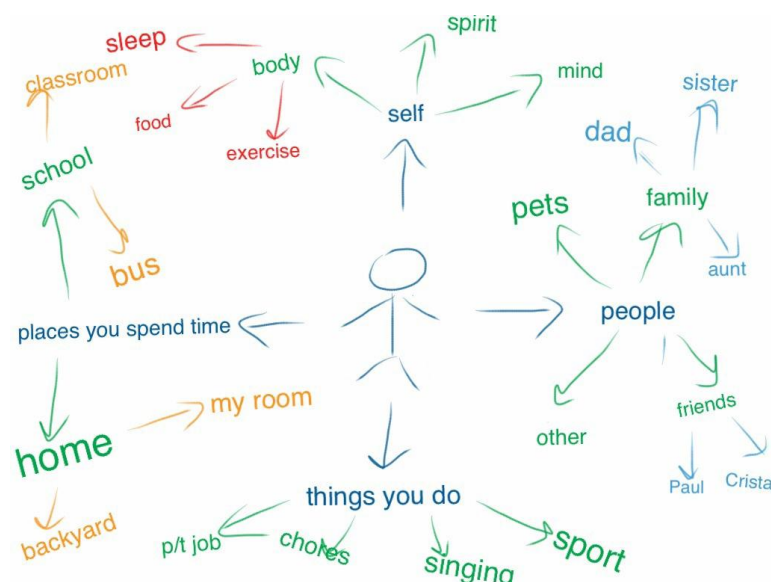
And from 'places' we can expand out to home, your room, school, the environment, the world itself, depending on the young person.

By the end of this drawing phase, we will probably have a huge branching array of people and things that the young person is linked to. This in itself can be a nice task, as they see how interrelated they really are. I certainly had a strong positive reaction from one young person I did this with, as she brought her attention to how connected she was with the world, and how many connections she was grateful for.

We can then use this web in a number of ways. We can ask which relationships are working best, sustaining them the most, giving the most enjoyment at the moment. We can ask which relationships they would most like to see change in some way. Or ask them what their recent actions suggest about the importance of the various relationships (ie it may be that they have not been putting much effort into something which is actually very important to them, or conversely putting a lot of time into an aspect which doesn't really matter to them).

This conversation is all about what is important to them in a tangible sense, and as we have it we can open it up and explore the intangibles behind them. Why are these things important? Why choose that aspect to work on? What kind of relationships do they want to have in that domain?

And this in turn can lead on nicely into some other ACT work - maybe some defusion or acceptance would be useful, or an action and willingness plan, or enhancing the joy of something through a more mindful, present approach.



By the end, as you can see, it can be a bit of a tangled mess (and it could be much bigger than this, as you add more detail). But the key thing is you have created it together, from what they have said. Colour can help it make more sense! And if the young person has a mobile phone with a camera, they can take a photo of it for themselves to keep.