TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION: BOYS

Feelings and emotions

Support boys to compile lists of emotions and feelings making sure they understand what each one is - how it feels in their bodies and the types of thoughts they have in their minds when they feel a certain way. e.g. Joy, Happiness, Hope, Peace, Contentment, Boredom, Frustration, 'Overwhelment', Disappointment, Doubt, Anxiousness, Anger, Rage, Jealousy, Unworthiness, Fear, Sadness.
Where possible, identify synonyms for some of these feelings to help develop boys' emotional vocabulary and their ability to describe their emotions.

Explore feelings that make them uncomfortable and talk about why that might be the case. Discuss what can be done when feelings that make them feel bad arise. Where can they go if they need help addressing a particular feeling or issue that is making them uncomfortable? What is emotional strength? Why is being able to work with our feelings a useful life skill?

Introduce the idea of being an emotional detective: someone who can name a feeling when they feel it, work out why they might be feeling that way[1] and then identify what they can learn from it and any changes or actions they might need to take to resolve it.

Boy's Rights

Reframe, explore and discuss Grayson Perry's manifesto for men as a list of Boys' Rights which are:

The right to be vulnerable
The right to be weak
The right to be wrong
*The right to be intuitive**
The right not to know
The right to be uncertain
The right to be flexible
The right not to be ashamed of any of these.[2]

*For more guidance on how to teach children about intuition see the Empower section of this resource.

Discuss what each right means. What does feeling vulnerable mean? (Worried or scared because we think we might have our feelings hurt if we do something and fail at it.) What sorts of situations make us feel emotionally vulnerable? Is failure final?

If vulnerability, weakeness, not knowing, uncertainty and being wrong sometimes feel uncomfortable why are they described as rights here?

[1] Robert Webb, How Not To Be A Boy, Canongate Books, 2017, p.37

[2] Grayson Perry, The Descent of Man, Penguin Books, 2017, p.145

What strategies can you use when you feel vulnerable/weak/wrong/uncertain? And if you need help dealing with these emotions, who can you go to for help?

Hurt people, hurt people

What does this mean and is it ever ok? Why might this happen?

How could trying to avoid difficult feelings affect someone's behaviour and their relationships with the people they care about? How might it put them at risk and how might it put those close to them at risk?

What could you do in the future when you are feeling hurt?

Anger

Discuss anger and what causes it: 'Anger is a response to a feeling of powerlessness.'[3]

Explore strategies they can use to get their power back when they feel angry such as:

- Stepping away from situations that are making them feel angry or uncomfortable
- Counting to ten before reacting and/ or if they can calm ourselves enough, taking a moment to consult our inner wisdom on what to do next. (For more guidance on how to teach children about inner wisdom see the Empower section of this resource.)
- Getting outside and 'walking out' their frustration
- Going to a trusted friend or safe adult to 'talk out' their feelings
- Writing out their frustrations in a diary or letter – that they can throw away, once they have calmed down, worked through their feelings and decided what to do next.

Can you ever control what other people do and should you even try? What can you control?

How can you learn from your anger? Can you ever use your anger in a positive way?

Be kind to yourself

What does this mean and why is it important?

Discuss the phrase 'You can't be kind to others if you can't be kind to yourself'. What does this mean?

How can you be kind to yourself?

Where can you go for help if you are struggling to be kind to yourself?

[3] Perry, p.75