Claire Hennings

Resource Topic – Thoughts and Feelings

I completed a Talking Mat with N a 16-year-old young man with Downs Syndrome and learning difficulties, he attends school and lives with his family. He is a quiet young man and can distance himself from others at times.

N had never done a talking Mat before, but we have done other work together in school, so we have a good relationship from the start.

N found the Talking Mat easy to navigate, he chose to wait until he had placed all the chosen symbols before he talked about any of them. Once he had placed the chosen symbols, I asked him if there were any symbols he wanted to talk about. He started with worried, he said that he did worry and that he was alone when he worries because he is strong. We talked about people he could talk to share his worries with and to talk about them was being brave.

N then wanted to talk about the anger symbol. He kept asking me what happens if you hit or kick someone, after talking about this, I felt that this was worrying N. I asked if it was, and he said he felt scared that he might hit or kick someone if he got angry like he did at his old school. He told me the times he gets angry and what he does to stop being angry.

N also told me that he likes to be on his own and does not enjoy ‘having a laugh’ with others because he doesn’t like it when people get too “loud and crazy”.

Anger would have been the last feeling that I thought we would have spoken about at the beginning of the Talking Mat due to the calm, and gentle young man I see around school. If this Talking Mat were not completed then I would not have known about these feelings, a fear of becoming angry, worrying on his own because he believed he is being strong and not wanting to be with people in case they get too loud, I have known N for 4 years and I was not aware of any of this, this is why I am passionate about completing Talking Mats, they are a powerful way for the students I work with to be heard.

From completing the Talking Mat with N I thought that it was important that I shared the information with his teacher. I asked N if it was Ok to share, and he agreed. I wrote up the Talking Mat on the template I use in school and shared it with them. N’s class teacher was surprised by what N had shared, she was not aware of any of these feelings and was going to arrange a time to talk to him. I have suggested that we consider another Talking Mat to investigate these feelings and how we can support N.

I am feeling excited about using the new top scale ‘that’s me, sometimes and not me’ and the new topic sets. A lot of the students I work with have communication difficulties or are nonverbal, and discussing feelings has always been difficult. The new scale and topics will be useful to start a conversation to support these students during school and making choices for their future - giving them the voice they deserve. Thank you!