Philippa Blackbourn: Reflection in the Keeping Safe module

Introduction: the thinker and why I am using this resource

The young person with cerebral palsy whom I used the talking mat ‘Thoughts and Feelings’ with frequently requests that we broach topics with talking mats, usually at times when she wishes to express her strength of feeling, especially surrounding decision making, her increasing independence and to help her to assimilate her opinion when she has been presented with options.  This young person tends to decide the topic & subtopics of her talking mats, generates some of the symbols/ words to put on post it notes and then we agree a top scale that best represents what she is most keen to express to others or what may effect most change.

The young lady that I work with is currently having some challenges dealing with emotions, labelling how she feels and linking the stress/ frustration/ happiness with the situations that she is encountering, e.g grief, separation, change, spending more time alone etc.  Having never used the lead in phrase ‘this is me, this is not me or this is sometimes me’ with her, I decided to use them when talking about her emotions, as her expressive vocabulary relating to emotions can be limited.

Implementation of the talking mat: (quality/ difficulties/submats required afterwards)

The talking mat gave an effective opener for discussions about her feelings and permission to broach emotions that we cannot usually discuss, because she is placing them on the mat, we are not attributing the feeling directly to her.  The talking mat gave us a platform for her to think and place feelings, but in a distanced way, so that it was safe for her to discuss all emotions, even those normally difficult to address e.g wanting to die/ keeping secrets/ feeling scared or guilty.

Without prompting, the young lady elaborated on whether she felt ‘this is me, sometimes or this is not me’ in relation to several feelings and with others stated that is was hard to explain or that she didn’t want to talk further about that emotion.  The conclusion of the talking mat was that it should be shared with a professional who is due to offer some support around her emotional wellbeing, so that they have a starting point for knowing that at this point in time, the photo of her talking mat, is how she currently feels.  The young lady stated that she liked the topscale and that the mat was useful for her to reflect.  Not having insight into her bad memories, secrets or guilt, (at her discretion), was quite a challenge as my therapeutic instinct is to give support and scaffolding to aid her to communicate about experiences, so that she has closure and can manage her feelings.  I have to be assured that the professional being employed to assist her to explore feelings good or otherwise, will fulfill this need in the near future, or that she will regard it as safe to revisit the topic.