

## The Power of Children's Imagination: Teresa's Healing Toolbox

by **Charlotte Reznick, Ph.D.**

“Your imagination can help you heal.” This simple and elegant statement was the response nine-year-old Teresa gave me when asked what she had learned from our work together as we were wrapping up our counseling relationship.

Teresa is a beautiful, doe-eyed girl who first came to me a year ago because she was a goody-goody who would always be sweet and kind and never express any negative feelings. Imagine what a wonderful daughter she was. Who would want to change that? Her parents. They were concerned because her younger brother was very expressive – actually a terror around the house – and they didn’t want Teresa to get lost, but to be her own person. They wondered if she harbored truer feelings under the surface that were afraid to come out. And she did.

Teresa lived in a home filled with chaos. Although caring, her parents had serious volatile marital issues. There was a new baby at home adding to the attention already taken away from Teresa by her four-year-old brother. Nannies were coming and going, partly because mom was in the midst of starting several new businesses. Teresa never knew who was going to show up at school, take her home, or drag her to some almost forgotten after-school activity.

I share some highlights of Teresa’s story with you not because she’s unusual, but because she’s typical. Her problems are the problems of thousands of kids: jealousy of younger sibs, trouble with friends, parents fighting, struggling with academics, grappling with fears of unworthiness, dealing with headaches and stomachaches – to name a few. In my 25 years as a psychologist working with children from a variety of backgrounds, the most lasting and creative healings have taken place through using the power of a child’s imagination. Many of you may be familiar with some aspects of my Imagery For Kids™ program from AGI’s advanced training modules or previous conferences. My focus is on teaching children to access their inner wisdom; imagery tools offer an easy, fun way to get there.

Teresa’s healing journey began with her trying to please everyone, including me, to expressing herself so wildly and strongly that she got into a lot of trouble, to finally balancing how to communicate her needs, wants, and feelings, while also considering other people. Imagery was the catalyst, fuel, and vehicle during this

process.

During our final sessions, I was delighted that Teresa easily recounted how she incorporated imagery into her life and made the tools her own. Here's her advice (with some commentary from me) on how to use eight of the imagery tools.

#### (1) THE BALLOON BREATH

Teresa explained how slow, calm, deep breathing (about two to three inches below the belly button) is an imagery foundation tool.

"If you take balloon breaths, it can help. If you're mad maybe you are able to center yourself and not hurt someone – like for me, my brother. If he does something that upsets me, I may be able to say something instead of hurting him back."

#### (2) DISCOVERING A SPECIAL PLACE

Teresa learned that a special place is key to creating a safe space for her imagery healing. "My special place is a room that can turn into anything. It starts like a museum and there is a big remote with dots of color that changes the room into different places. Each color dot means something else."

Teresa created a rainbow of special places, depending on what kind of healing space she needed – from dark green for trees and nature, to blue for waters, ponds, oceans and lakes, to orange for magical mountains, to yellow where it's really hot and sunny, to black where "it's magical and night time", Teresa never ran out of places to go.

She had extra support: "There is a person that lets you use the remote. He helps and is kind of like a security guard, but more nice. My special password is my name backwards. And if I want, I can let some of my friends go with me."

### (3) MEETING A WISE ANIMAL FRIEND

“If you need help with a problem, then you could ask one of your animal friends to give you a special present that might help you.”

Teresa’s main animals were an owl and a deer.

“My owl is very wise. Owl gives me invisible ink and a pen so if there’s a problem with someone else I can write it.” Her owl’s advice helped Teresa get in control of her emotions. “If you’re feeling sad, drawing makes you feel better. If you have angry feelings that are bothering you, you can let them out by drawing.” One day her owl showed up with a magical pencil that had a magical eraser. “It’s really colorful and erases my bad thoughts.”

Her ‘deer’ animal friend introduced Teresa to her wizard.

### (4) ENCOUNTERING A PERSONAL WIZARD

“My wizard is very nice and very tall. He has a purple hat, long white beard that has silver in it, and a magic wand. The wand is blue with gold stripes around it like a candy cane. When I first met him, he said: ‘Hello I will be your wizard.’ His name is Wizard E Wax.”

“My wizard’s most special gift for me was kindness so I could be nice to my brother.”

### (5) RECEIVING GIFTS

Teresa’s competition with her brother often resulted in physical fighting. “I am trying to stop. I know I have to stop. But I just can’t. And I yell before I hit him.”

So her wizard came to help and offered the gift of a ‘magic banana’ to help control her yelling and to help her to be able to listen to her heart (another tool). It was a

magic banana because: “when you eat it, you think about other things so you don’t pay attention to worries, like your brother bothering you. It makes it like he’s not even there.”

#### (6) CHECKING IN WITH YOUR HEART AND BELLY

One time Teresa was having particular difficulty with her friends. She felt they didn’t like her at all and so she sat by herself at lunchtime. She knew to check with the wisdom of her heart. Her lesson turned into wise counsel for others.

“Your heart can be open or closed. If it’s closed, it’s probably mad and not in a good mood. And if it’s open you’re happy to receive love.” To open, her heart suggested Teresa breath in color (another tool) – the color of love – pink.

With that awareness, and a little more exploration, Teresa was able to carry on an inner dialogue about how she felt and what she needed, and was then able to shift to an open heart and join her friends the next day.

#### (7) TALKING TO TOES AND OTHER BODY PARTS

Teresa discovered that connecting with feelings that may be living in different parts of her body could also resolve inner conflicts.

“I learned that my feelings are important. Anger is in my head and dark gray, squiggly. Happy is in my arms and is light purple. And love is cherry pink in my heart. If your feelings are bad you can change them with the ‘therm-o-meter’.” This is a special gift that Teresa received that looks like a thermometer but can be used to lower or raise the temperature of certain feelings (like decreasing anger and increasing patience).

Whatever her problem, some part of Teresa’s body had information that could assist

her. One day she was totally distressed and caught up in fear about returning to school. She thought she was 'stupid' until she closed her eyes, turned inward and asked for some guidance.

"Oh – I can wash out my rotting brain with white light and clean it up. My brain rots in summer cause I don't think about school and then right before school starts it makes me think I should have done more math. After I clean it, my brain feels good and makes me feel lighter. My clean brain is like a flower."

### (8) USING COLOR FOR HEALING

We've seen that Teresa has incorporated color for her healing. She was very clear:

"Your feelings have different colors. If you're in a bad mood they may be darker cause they may be gloomier. If you're in a good mood, at least for me, they would be lighter. So if you're thinking about dark red while in a bad mood, then think about a fun color, like gold sparkle, that would remind you to be happy."

"I prefer to be happy. I hope other kids do too."

These bits of Teresa's story are meant to encourage and inspire you to share your own personal imagery toolbox with the children in your life. Kids love to mix and match the tools and find what fits best for their personal circumstances. I look forward to sharing with you many more children's stories, their wonderful and colorful drawings, as well as how I use my 9th tool, "energy for healing" when we meet together in October.

Many blessings, Dr. Charlotte

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