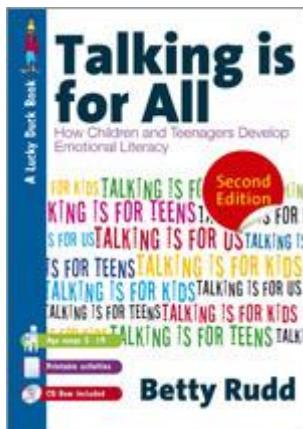


Book Review



Talking is for All: How Children and Teenagers Develop Emotional Literacy (2nd Edition)

By Betty Rudd

London: Sage Publications (2009).

Paperback £29.99 (ISBN: 9781412935340)

Reviewed by **Robert Keatley**

“Talking is for All” is a book that makes the learning and use of emotional literacy easy and enjoyable for children and teenagers. Betty Rudd sets out a practical framework that guides teachers in facilitating the improvement of emotional health in children. This book – the 2nd edition – explains the theory behind emotional literacy, brings research findings together and offers a comprehensive programme that is contained in stories, activities and worksheets that are fun and easy to use.

Rudd explains that emotional development is a lifelong process and that it can never be too late to improve emotional literacy, or too early to facilitate it. With this premise, the book is divided into three main parts for children according to the following age groups: 4-7 year olds; 8-12 year olds; and teenagers, 13-19 years old. Each part contains the following sections: an introduction; record keeping and assessment; stories and activities; plans for using the worksheets; and the worksheets section. The sections feature age-related stories, exercises, activities and worksheets that present different everyday challenging situations that are age appropriate for that particular group. Facilitators and readers should enjoy working through the different exercises as they enhance emotional development. Essentially the programme is set up around five key pillars of emotional literacy. These include: (i) know your emotions; (ii) manage them; (iii) recognize others’ emotions; (iv) motivate yourself; and (v) handle relationships well.

For 4-7 year olds, Rudd provides exercises that focus on relatively immediate goals such as wanting immediate attention. Children should be able to identify their feelings of happiness, sadness and anger and how it is acceptable to have different emotions. In one story, Monique, a 4-year old girl, could not find her kitten at home one day. She was so upset with the thought that the cat could have been lost that she ventured out of the house and into the street. Fortunately her mother saw that the front door had been left open. On venturing out, Monique’s mother found her, standing outside the house, holding the kitten. She was able to safely return Monique and her kitten home. For this story, the facilitator is able to discuss how Monique felt at different moments in the story. Children are then asked to explore different endings to the story. In this way, children can increase awareness of different outcomes in this situation and thereby develop their confidence and understanding.

Fears in children aged 8-12 often involve school, the dark, death, failure, criticism and home. In one story, a friendly and helpful girl called Yoko is being bullied at school by a boy called Abu. One day Abu fell in the school playground and hurt his leg. The other children ignored him in his distress because they did not like him. However, Yoko came to his rescue by calling a teacher to come and help. The result of this action led to the two children becoming friends and Abu’s behaviour changed. The follow up questions and exercises explored Abu’s

feelings. Children are encouraged to share stories of when they helped someone and how they felt about it.

Teenagers feel empowered when they are in charge of what they do, what they say and what they feel. When empowered, they can change their direction and life paths to something more positive or rewarding. In one story, drug abuse is presented. Sue was a girl who always hid her feelings, especially feelings of sadness and anger. By the time Sue was a teenager, she had experimented with tobacco, alcohol, illegal soft drugs and then hard drugs. Sue had told her counsellor that she was not an addict and that she could stop if she wanted. One day, the counsellor was very sad to hear that Sue had died. The exercises focus on exploring loss and feelings associated with loss. The children are encouraged to discuss ways that Sue could have got help with her addiction issues.

Rudd explains that emotional development can be extraordinarily and profoundly positive for the individual, society and the world. By developing children's emotional literacy, their emotional intelligence is raised, thus increasing their emotional quotient. Rudd describes the difference in these concepts. Emotional literacy refers to the amount a person has learnt regarding how she or he deals with her or his emotions. Emotional intelligence refers to the intelligent use of emotions, that is, emotional acumen. Emotional Quotient refers to the amount of emotional intelligence within an individual. The key point being that emotional literacy will foster positive behaviour. Developing emotional literacy can help children and young people gain a sense of understanding and control. Essentially, the way we learn how to cope with emotions as a child lays the path for how inept or adept we become in handling emotions as an adult.

Emotional literacy is not only important for emotional health. It also has an impact upon a person's physical health. Some argue that negative emotions are precipitating factors to ill physical health. This book could therefore help improve the wellbeing of individuals and society on a much broader level.

This book is very informative, useful and relevant. It is accessible and easy to use. It is an important resource for anyone – teachers, psychologists and other professionals - who are keen to facilitate emotional literacy in children and young people in their societies. "Talking is for All" contains much creative material that can be used as it is or adapted and changed for specific groups or circumstances for inexperienced and experienced facilitators to make emotional literacy an attainable goal.