

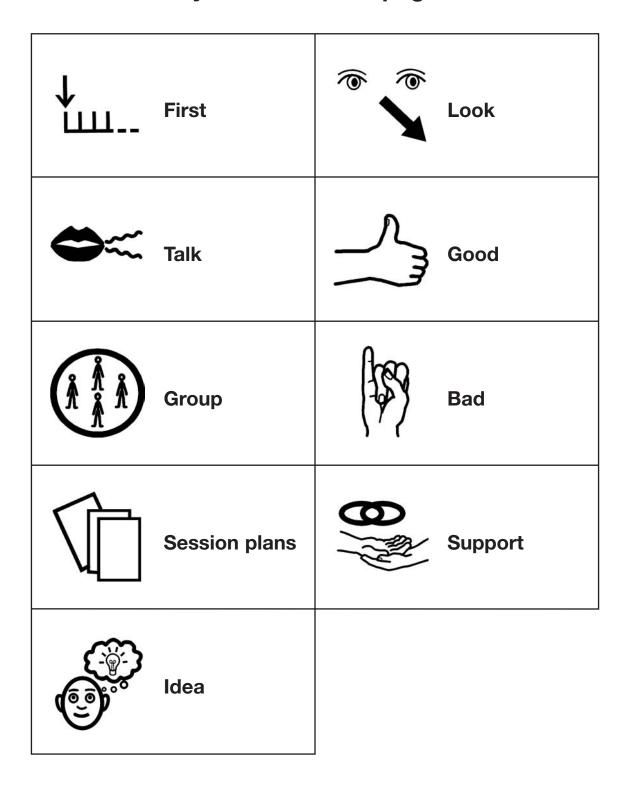
A pack to help young people with learning disabilities support each other

# We Are The Strongest Link



Emily Jefferson, Martyn Irish, Craig Jones, John Liddell and Val Williams

### Guide to the symbols used on pages 2 - 4



### What is in the We Are The Strongest Link pack

#### Part 1 Introduction

6



Find out what the pack is about, who it is for, and how you can use it.

#### Part 2 What young people said

13



This part tells you about the research project called Mind the Gap, and what young people said.

#### Part 3 The story of our group

22



Young people in **The Strongest Link** group tell you about how it got started, and how they set up their course.

### Part 4 Session plans

31



Go straight to this part if you want to get started and see how we ran our course. You will find our session plans. You can use them as they are, or you can change them if you want to. The 5 sessions are:

1.	Friends and social life	34
2.	Feelings	60
3.	Growing up and relationships	73
4.	Getting support	89
5.	Helping yourself	104





Each session has worksheets that you can use and change to suit yourselves.

There is also information about what happened in our sessions. Have a look at what young people said and did in our sessions. This may give you some more ideas for your own group.

### Part 5 How was it for you?

116



Questions that young people asked each other, to find out how they felt about their lives.



In this part you can also read some of the things they said about how they felt after the course.

### Part 6 Notes for supporters

132



The things we learnt about supporting young people to run their own groups.

#### **Thanks**

The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities is very grateful to the Baily Thomas Charitable Fund for funding this piece of work.

The Foundation also wishes to thank Isabel Cooke and Edwina Rowling for editing these guidelines.

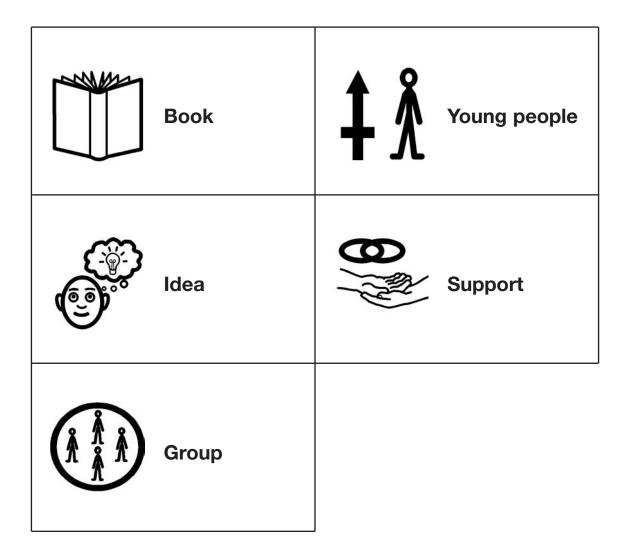
Many thanks to the research team, the young people who took part in the sessions, Jill Davies from the Foundation who encouraged and supported us, those who let us use their photographs in this pack, Connexions Somerset, and other Somerset services and managers who helped this project to happen.

### Part 1

### Introduction



### Guide to the symbols used in Part 1: Introduction



#### Part 1 Introduction

### The aims of the We Are The Strongest Link pack

This pack aims to help young people with learning disabilities become stronger. We hope it will help them to get involved in groups where they can support each other.

The pack provides materials and ideas for groups and group supporters. The group sessions have been tried out by young people in Somerset, and the pack aims to give you:

- a taste of the things we did together in Somerset
- an outline of the things that worked well
- a plan that you can adapt to suit your own needs.

### The symbols used in this pack



This book will give you ideas to run a group of your own.

In this pack we use symbols like the ones above. These are from Somerset Total Communication.

Somerset Total Communication is an approach to communication used by and with people with learning disabilities throughout Somerset. It includes the use of signs and symbols, as well as other ways of helping people to communicate.

We have put a guide to the symbols we use at the beginning of each part. Thank you to Somerset Total Communication for their help.

### For more information on the symbols, you can contact:

Somerset Total Communication Northgate Buildings 41-43 Northgate Bridgewater Somerset TA6 3EV

Tel: 01278 444949

### Who is this pack for?



This pack is for anyone who wants to support young people with learning disabilities to have good emotional support. It is about young people helping other young people, and it aims to give ideas about how to get this going.

It has been written with young people in mind, for them to run the sessions themselves. Of course, they may need the help of a facilitator.

We hope, for instance, that it will be useful for:

- co-ordinators and tutors in colleges
- Connexions advisors
- supporters in self-advocacy groups
- youth workers and others who work with young people.

The pack has been written for young people. If you are a supporter, please read **Part 6** which gives you additional help in setting up a group with young people in your local area.

Above all, the pack is for

Young people themselves!

### Ways to use this pack

In this pack, you will read about the way we ran a course called **We Are The Strongest Link**.

- We worked with a group of young people from a college. They were called 'the research group'.
- With support, they prepared a course about emotional support.
- They invited another group of young people from a residential college to come on the course.
- The course ran for five sessions. The research group were the leaders, and they planned and led the sessions.



The research group



The group who joined in the course

There are lots of other ways you could change these ideas to suit your own needs. For instance:

- you may want to take much longer over the ideas in this pack, and use them for a whole term, or a whole year
- young people could prepare the course on a residential weekend, or run it in this way with young people going away together
- if you have just one group to work with, people could take turns to be responsible for a session.





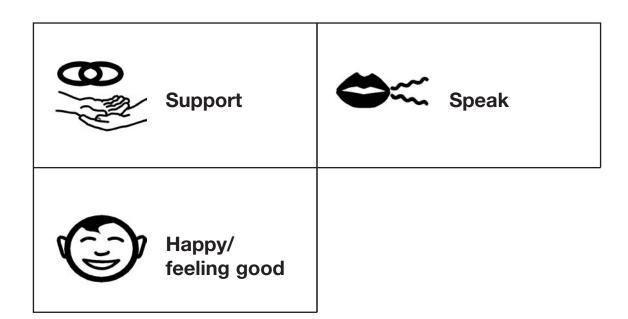
The important thing is to remember that young people with learning disabilities can support each other!

### Part 2

# What young people said



# Guide to the symbols used in Part 2: What young people said



### Part 2 What young people said

### Mind the Gap









### Mind the Gap

We were part of a research project called **Mind the Gap**. It was funded by the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, and it was about mental health and emotional support for young people with learning disabilities. This project took place in Somerset, in the

south west of England. Somerset is an area where there are lots of good things happening for people with learning disabilities.

Young people and their families need lots of advice and information when they are growing up. Connexions is a service that aims to help them. In Somerset, there are Connexions advisors who work specially to help young people with learning disabilities. That is good, and we wanted to work together with them, to find a way of supporting young people.

There are lots of problems when you are growing up, and young people can get stressed. For many young people with learning disabilities (perhaps 1 out of every 4 people), this can be a real problem. That is why **Mind the Gap** wanted to do the following things.



 We wanted to find out what kind of emotional support is useful for young people with learning disabilities, as they are growing up.



- We wanted to find out what services are doing to give emotional support to young people.
- We wanted to make things better for young people with learning disabilities.



### What young people told us

Young people told us what they wanted.

## We want choices, we want respect, and we want people to listen to us

We have the same aims and ambitions as any young person. We want a home. We want independence and choices. And we want to have friends and a good social life. We want fun!



"I am not sure I can call it a dream or an ambition, but I hope that one day I will be living independently."

### We want good clear information about our choices

"Professionals
should tell things to
people... about all the
different options that they
have got and what is out
there for them."



# Young people also told us about the bad things they felt when they are growing up

Some of us get very confused when there are changes in our lives.



We can get very cross, especially if people don't listen to us.



It makes us feel bad if we get bullied. Other young people can bully us, but professionals also bully us. They tell us what to do, and don't give us the choice.

It can be lonely when we leave school, or go to a new college. We may lose our friends.



### So, what kind of support is useful?

The young people from the project told us.

When we get support, we like someone we can trust. We want a person who is always going to be there for us.



We like it especially if we get to know our supporters or other people who are helping us.



Families are important to us, and many of us would turn to our parents if we had a problem.



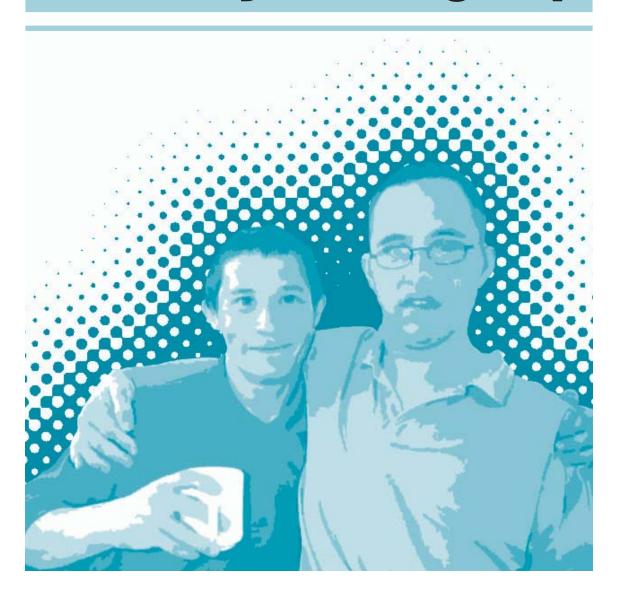
### Part 2: What young people said

But the most important thing of all is to have friends. If you have a secret, you can tell it to your friend! Friends can give you the best support.



### Part 3

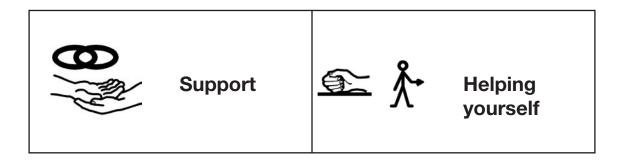
## The story of our group



### Guide to the symbols used in Part 3: The story of our group

Group	Growing up
Book	? Where
Choice/Choose	<b>When</b>
Students	Friends
Feel ok	Person

Part 3: The story of our group



### How did The Strongest Link group start?





We had a research group in our local college. It was called the **Mind the Gap** research group. It was a way to talk about what we wanted to do. We could make our own decisions, take action, and we were listened to!



In our first year, we wrote a book about our lives. We decided to call it **The Strongest Link**, because people sometimes think they are the 'weakest link'. Then they feel bad about themselves. But we say:

We can help each other. We are the strongest link!

### What was the aim of doing the

### We Are The Strongest Link course?

We thought we could help other young people. We decided we could do a good job of running a course to support each other and make new friends. Friends are the most important thing for us. But we know that some people find it hard to make friends. We all need friends. That makes us feel better about ourselves

We had support from Val Williams who worked for **Mind the Gap**. And we also had support from Richard Lees at the Barnardo's Inclusion Project in Somerset. We met at Barnardo's, just down the road from college, in a nice community room.





We decided to invite another group of people in to take part in our course. But first we had to plan the course. We met to prepare each session one week, and then ran the session with the other group the following week.

These were the names of the five sessions we decided on:

- 1. Friends
- 2. Feelings
- 3. Growing up and relationships
- 4. Getting support
- 5. Helping yourself

### Telling other people about your course

It is good to tell other people about your course.

- Make an easy publicity sheet so people can understand about the course.
- Talk to young people in their own groups.
- Make sure young people can choose whether to come or not.



In **The Strongest Link** Emily went to talk with the student council in a local residential college. They decided if they wanted to come to the course or not.



They had the choice.

This is what one of the group said afterwards:

"Mike came back and told us about **The Strongest Link**. I just chose. I might choose not to come any more, I might choose that. I expected to meet other young people like myself - but they were not really like me. That was fine. I've met lots of different people."

This was the publicity sheet we sent out about our course

### We are The Strongest Link!



**Emily and Martyn** 





Want to come to a group with us?



We are students.

We are working on a research project with Val Williams from Norah Fry Research Centre, and Richard Lees from Somerset Inclusion Project.









We will be running a group about feelings and growing up

?

Barnardo's, Somerset Inclusion Project, Wellington Road, Taunton. It is just down the road from the college.

|?

Thursdays: 1.30 - 3.30.

### **Dates**



12th February
Friends and social life



26th February Feelings



18th March Yourself, your body and relationships



29th April Getting support





20th May Helping yourself

### Other things we've done in our group

We are a group of young people. So we want to have fun!

- We don't just sit and talk
- We like to go out
- We like to socialise
- We like to travel

Here are some pictures of us doing things out and about.





### Part 4

# **Session Plans**



### **Running the sessions**

We tried out each session by ourselves, and decided what we wanted to do when we ran the course.

We had around 8-10 people come on each session, but the number is up to you.

- Each session was two hours long but sessions can run for different lengths of time, depending on what the group wants to do.
- You do not need to do all the activities in a session if you don't want to.
- The activities might be very quick, or take longer. That will depend on the people taking part and how much they want to say and do.
- Decide for yourselves which activities will work for you and your group.
- You can take extra breaks, as well as the ones we suggest.

In this pack we have put the plan for each session with the worksheets that we used. There are blank spaces on these plans for you to write in the name of the person running each session.



There are also some other sheets that we did not use but you might find them helpful. You can change these sheets if you want to. We hope they will give you some ideas.

If possible, have someone to take photos at each session. These are used in Session 5.

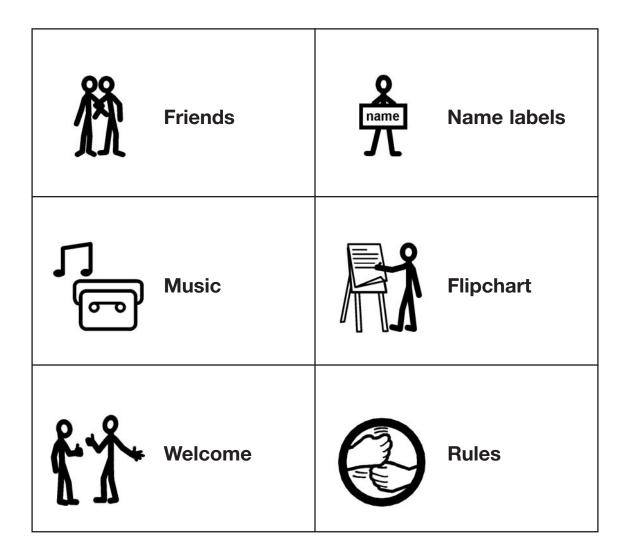
After each session plan, we tell you what happened in our sessions when we ran them.

- We always had a group member to lead each activity.
- All the plans here are just ideas. You can change them to suit yourselves!

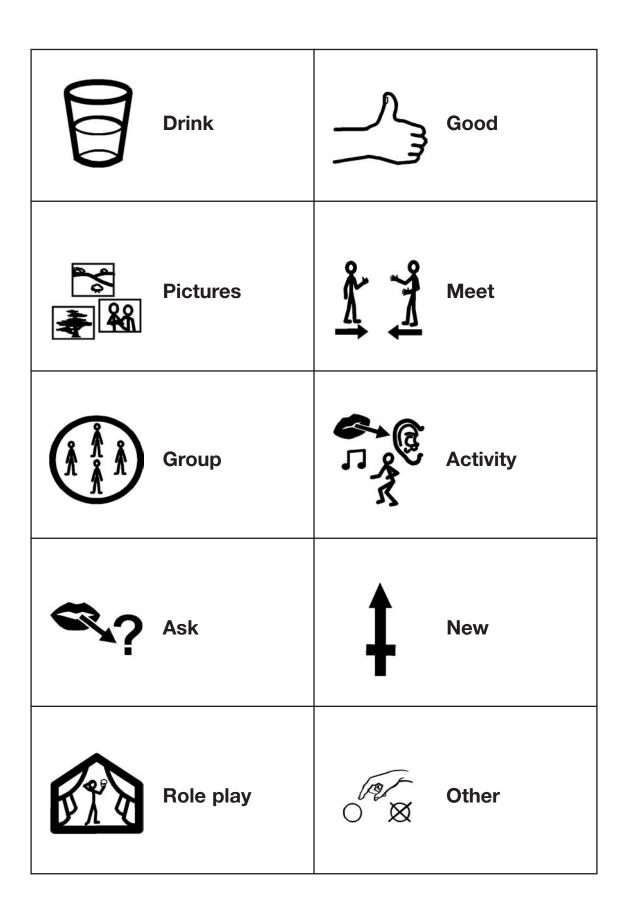


### Session 1: Friends and social life

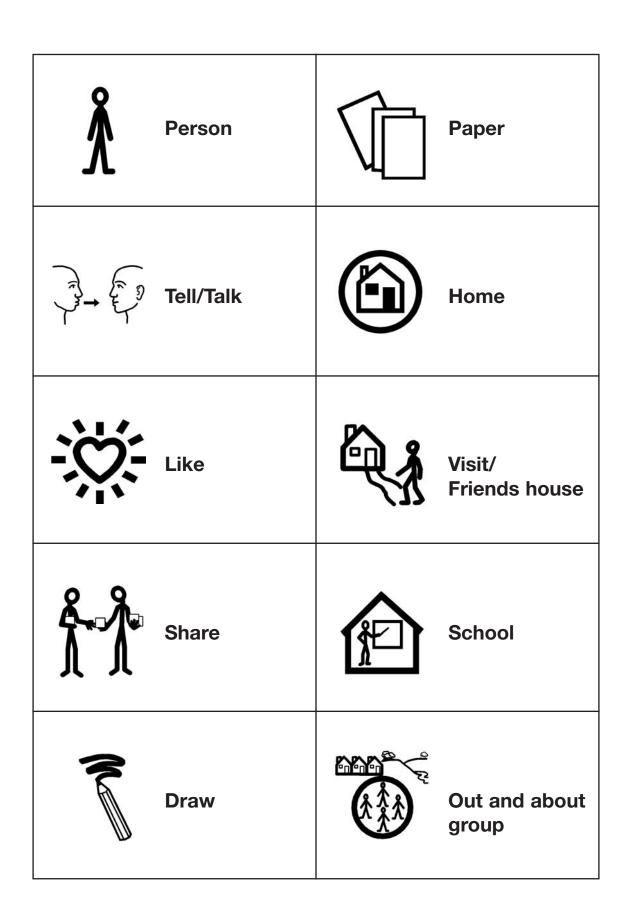
# Guide to the symbols used in Session 1: Friends and social life

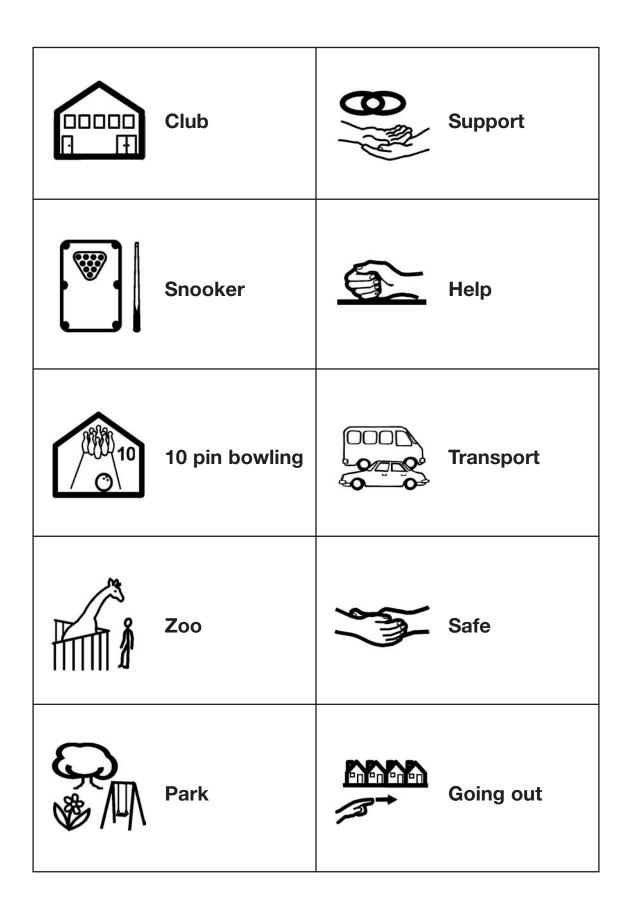


### **Session 1: Friends and social life**

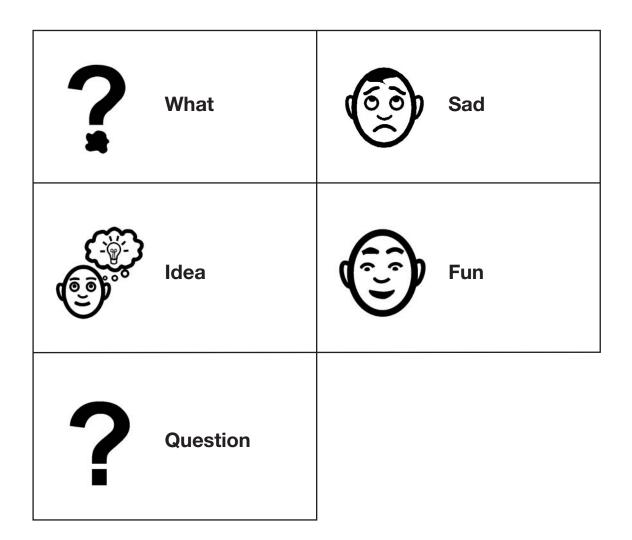


### **Session 1: Friends and social life**





#### **Session 1: Friends and social life**





### Session 1: Friends and social life

Aim: for young people to meet each other in a friendly way and to talk about friendships

Things you will need for this session

- Pictures of places cut from magazines for the 'Where do you like to go?' exercise
- CD player and CD for music
- Video of people bowling
- Labels for names, and cards.
- Friends worksheets 1, 2, 3, 4
- Ground rules worksheet
- A welcome sheet on a flipchart, with the plan for the day. Put pictures of yourselves on the sheet.

#### Welcome

Play music while people are coming in.

welcomes people into
the room, and invites them to sit down.

#### Session 1: Friends and social life



\_\_\_\_\_ asks people to say their names, round the circle. Give name labels to everyone in the group.

#### Ice breaker



\_\_\_\_asks people to write their names on cards. Put all the cards into a box, then everyone changes places. People from the group running the course pick cards, and guess who is who.

### What are we doing today?



goes through our session plan on the flipchart.

#### **Ground rules**



\_\_\_\_\_ leads this, and the whole group gives ideas. See **Friends Worksheet 1** for ideas about ground rules.

### Getting to know each other



gives out **Friends Worksheet 2**. Everyone should find another person in the other group.

\_\_\_\_\_ asks them to talk about what they both like, and what they have in common.



Have music playing quietly during this activity.

Ask each pair of people to tell the whole group about the things they both like.

### What makes a good friend?



Get everyone together in a big group. Ask everyone to give their ideas.

\_\_\_\_\_ writes them in the flipchart.





Break for drinks. Play music.

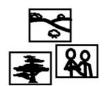
### **Mapping our friends**



\_\_\_\_\_ does a map of their own friends on the flipchart. (See **Friends Worksheet 3**. This is an example.) Give out **Friends Worksheet 3**.

People can take them away with them and do their own map later.

### Where do you like to go?



Have lots of pictures cut out of magazines.
\_\_\_\_\_ asks everyone to take a picture of somewhere they'd like to go.

If you don't have magazine pictures, use **Friends Worksheet 4**. Ask people to think about which picture shows something they like to do.



In the big group, \_\_\_\_\_ asks each person to say something about what they would like to do with a friend.



### Feelings about friends



Do a role play about what it's like to have a friend. Role play is a bit like drama or playacting. People can take on different roles, and pretend to be someone else. It is a good way to help people think about what they might say to each other.

#### This is how our role play went.

Emily sat on her own.

She said: 'I am really lonely'

Then Martyn said: 'Tell me all about it. What's wrong?'

Craig is director, and can say 'cut', to stop the actors when he wants. Then he can ask the whole group things like this:

How did you think she was feeling? What do you think Martyn should do next? And how do you think Emily is feeling now?

At the end,	asks people what they enjoyed
and how they feel now.	

## FRIENDS Worksheet 1

#### **Ground rules**

These are the ground rules that our group came up with. You could ask your group if they want any or all of these ground rules. Perhaps look at each one, and decide whether you want it or not. There may be other rules that your group will want too.

- 1. Turn your mobiles off.
- 2. Listen to each other.
- 3. Don't all speak at the same time.
- 4. The supporter should bring biscuits.
- 5. Keep things private between these four walls.
- 6. Try to get to the group on time.
- 7. Let each other know if we are not able to come.
- 8. No-one has to say anything they do not want to.
- 9. There are times when people may say something which is about abuse or harm. The adult may then have to make sure that someone else knows about the problem.

### FRIENDS Worksheet 2

It is good to have friends!





You are meeting new friends in this group







These are the people in this group

You can put a picture here of the people in your group You can put a picture here of the people in your group You can put a picture here of the people in your group

You can put a picture here of the people in your group You can put a picture here of the people in your group You can put a picture here of the people in your group

# FRIENDS Worksheet 2 (continued)

### **Activity**



You can make new friends





Find another person in this group





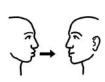


What is their name?



# FRIENDS Worksheet 2 (continued)

Tell your new friend about one thing you like











Ask your new friend what they like









Is there anything you both like?





## FRIENDS Worksheet 3

### **Activity**



Drawing a map of your friends







- 1. Find someone to work with, or to help you.
- 2. Get a big piece of paper.
- 3. Draw a picture of YOU in the middle.
- 4. Then put in the people that you are friends with.

# FRIENDS Worksheet 3 (continued)

### An example of a friends map

Ann - in my class at school



My mum





Me

I do like Mark!



Jackie who goes out for a drink with me

## FRIENDS Worksheet 4

Where do you see your friends?

At home



Go round to their house



At school



# FRIENDS Worksheet 4 (continued)

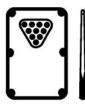
Going out together



At a club



Doing something we like together







Other places





# FRIENDS Worksheet 4 (continued)

### **Activity**



Find a new place you could go with your friends.

Look at all the pictures.

Find something you'd like to do together with a friend.

# FRIENDS Worksheet 4 (continued)

- Look on the One For Us website www.oneforus.com
- Look in the Yellow Pages
- Look in the listings for your town
- Go to the transitions website www.trans-active.org.uk
- Ask someone!

## FRIENDS Worksheet 5

This is an extra worksheet. It is not used in our session plan but you might find it useful.

Getting support to go out with friends







Sometimes it is good to have someone to help you -



With transport



To make sure you are safe



To give you back-up when you are out



# FRIENDS Worksheet 5 (continued)

What sort of support do you like to have?









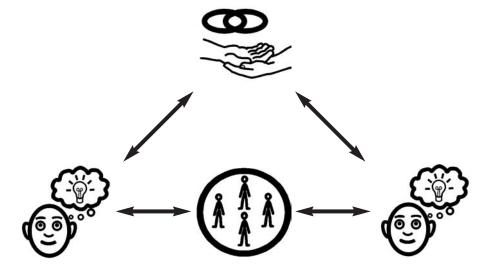
Have you got someone who can help you go out?







In the group, share ideas of where you can go to get support.



## FRIENDS Worksheet 5 (continued)

### **Getting good support**

**Activity** 



Drawing the good things you'd like about a supporter to go out with you.

What things would you like your supporter to do?

What would you not want them to do?

## FRIENDS Worksheet 6

This is an extra worksheet. It is not used in our session plan but you might find it useful.

What is it like to have a good friend?





#### **Feelings:**

I feel lonely



How do you feel if you've got a friend?



I can't talk to anyone



Have you ever talked with a friend?



# FRIENDS Worksheet 6 (continued)

I haven't got anyone to have fun with



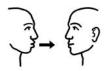
Can you think of a time you've had fun together with a friend?





If you feel down, is there a friend that you would turn to?







### What happened in our session

### 1. Friends and social life

We talked about things we like to do with our friends.



- Going out for a pint
- Partying
- Bowling
- Getting a girlfriend or a boyfriend
- Going out to bowling or music
- Shopping

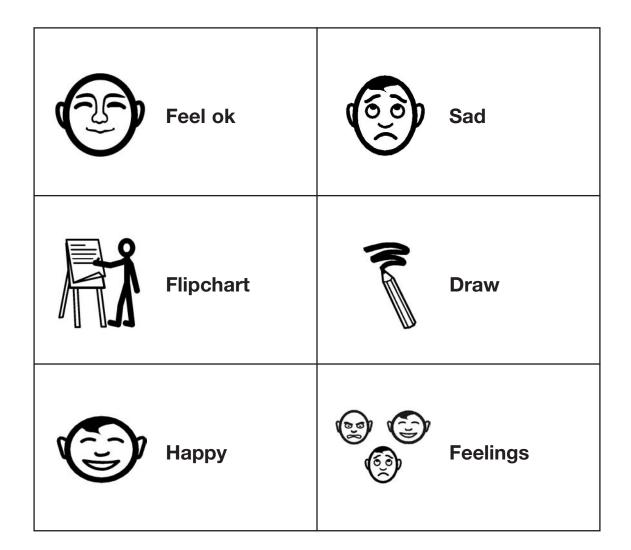


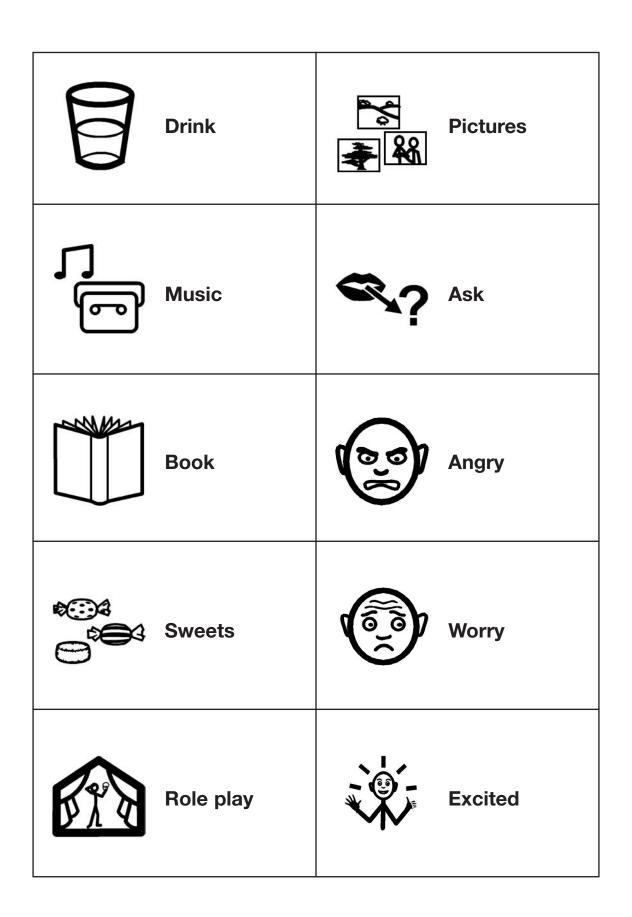




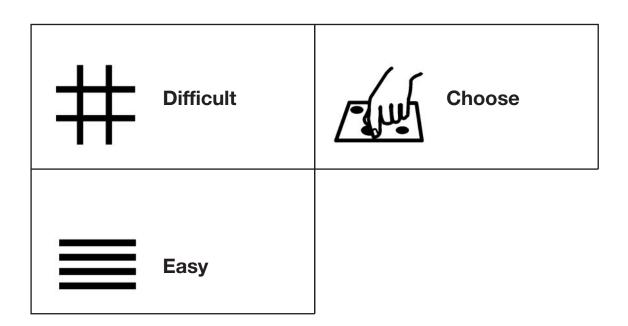
### **Session 2:** Feelings

### Guide to the symbols used in Session 2: Feelings





### **Session 2: Feelings**





### **Session 2:** Feelings

Aim: for young people to talk about their feelings

Things you will need for this session

- CD player and CD for music
- Sweets to share
- All About Feeling Down (booklet see worksheet Helping Yourself 1)
- Feelings worksheets 1, 2
- Large pictures of happy and sad faces
- Pictures cut out of magazines for 'Top tips' exercise: walking, music, bath, relaxation, food, drink, friends...

### What are we doing today?



	goes	through	the	plar
on the flipchart.				

### **Words for feelings**



Put large pictures of happy face/sad face on flipchart.



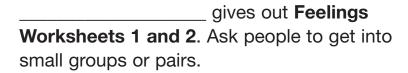
\_\_\_\_\_ asks the whole group:



Then \_\_\_\_\_ asks the whole group:

how do you think this person is feeling?

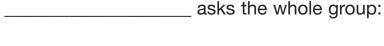
how do you think the other person is feeling?



Ask them to think of words to go with the faces.



Ask them to draw a picture of how they feel now.





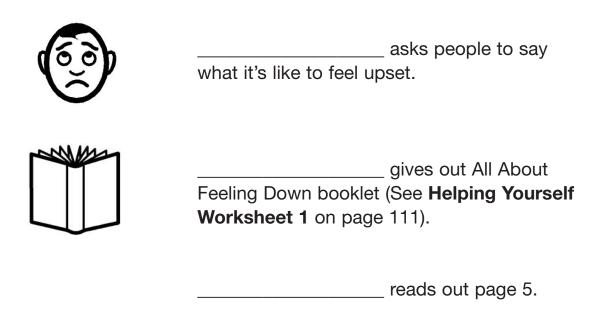
what makes you feel that way?

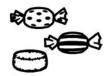
Ask people to show their pictures if they want to.



Break for drinks. Play music.

### **Telling someone about your feelings**





Have sweets to share with everyone.

### Telling a friend about how you feel: role play



Do a role play about telling people about your feelings.

#### This is how our role play went.

John said: 'No one likes me. I feel really upset.'

Craig: (who is director) said to the audience: 'What do you think John is going through? What sort of emotion and pain?'

Emily said: 'We do like you, there are a lot of people who can help you... Tell us about how you are feeling...'

John said: 'I am lonely and upset. Also, I am not sleeping well. Then I can't get up in the morning.'

Emily said: 'Yes, that means you may need help. But right now, let's go out. Do you want to come to the pub with me?'

At the end, <sub>-</sub>	 asks	people	how	they	fee
now.					

### Top tips for helping yourself



Read pages 11-14 in the book **All About Feeling Down**. People can either look at this on their own, or someone can read it out to the group.



\_\_\_\_\_ puts pictures on the table of different things people can do when they feel down, for instance going for a walk, talking to a friend, relaxing in the bath. Ask people to choose one or two things they would do.



Before people go, \_\_\_\_\_asks:

How do you feel now? How did you feel about this session?

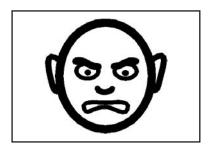
## FEELINGS Worksheet 1

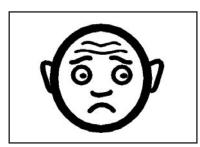
We all have lots of feelings.

Can you think of words to go with these feelings?













This is a box to draw how you feel now

# FEELINGS Worksheet 1 (continued)

Was it difficult or easy?







If you had problems thinking of words, you may like to look at these words, and choose which one goes with each picture.

Excited Sad

Worried Angry

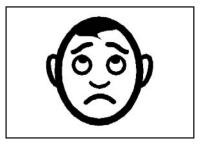
Нарру

## FEELINGS Worksheet 2

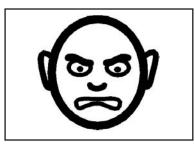
What makes you feel this way?



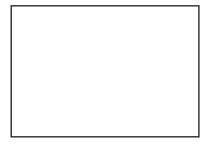
Happy?



Sad?



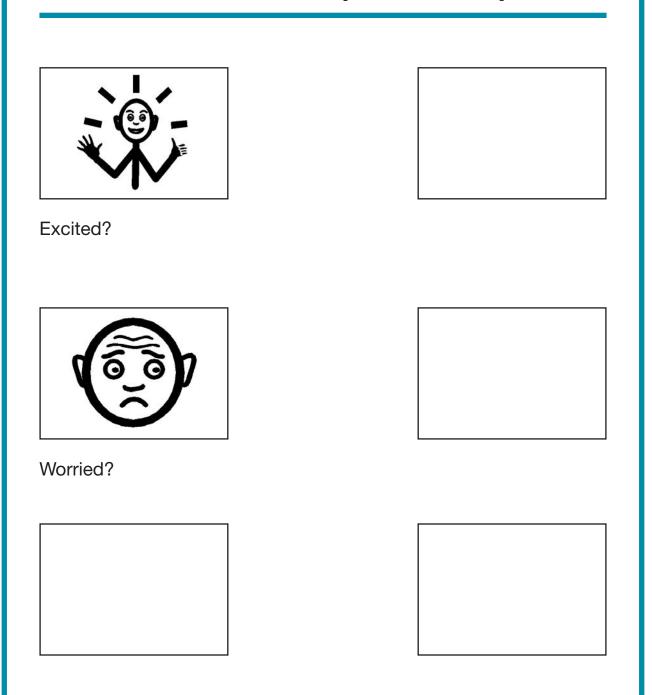
Angry?







# FEELINGS Worksheet 2 (continued)



Anything else you feel?

### What happened in our session

### 2. Feelings

We talked about the way we feel.



#### These were our words for feelings:

- happy
- excited
- stunned
- crazy
- mad
- angry
- out of control

#### We also talked about feeling down

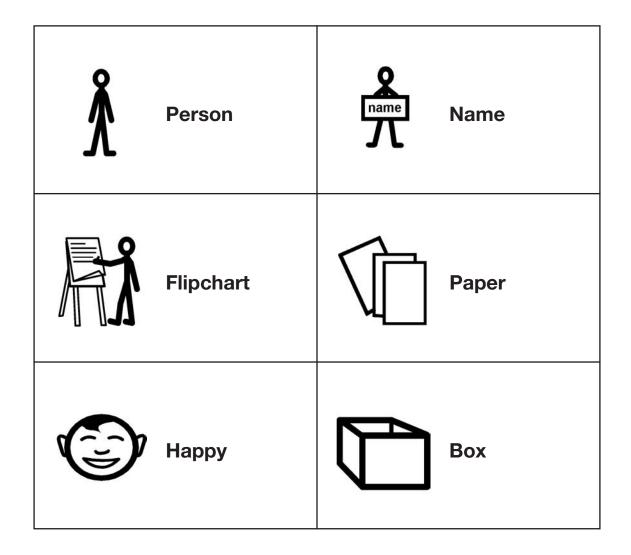
- When you lose trust in someone
- When things don't go your way
- When you get bullied
- When you lose someone who is close to you
- When you get abused
- When people lie to you

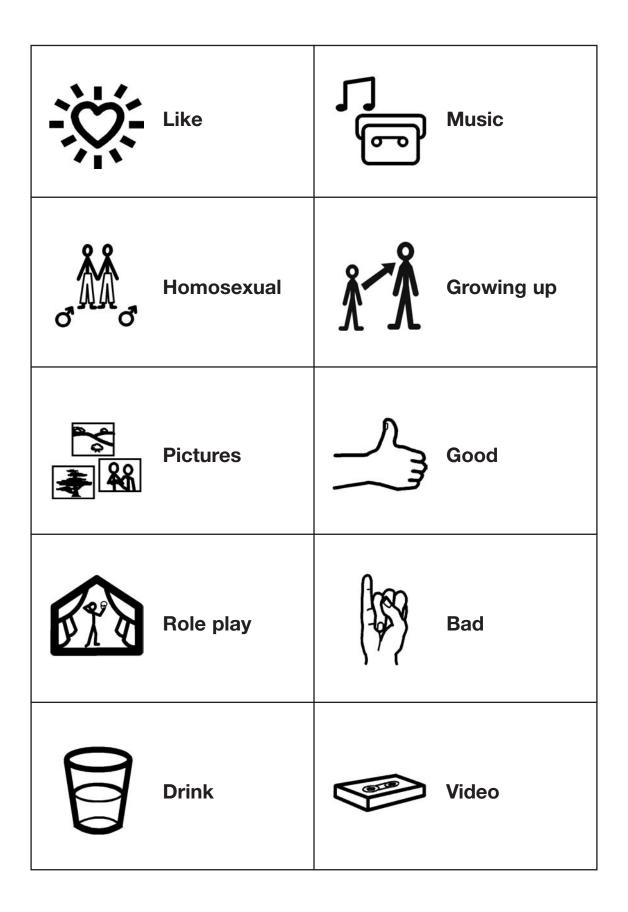


All these things can make us feel down.

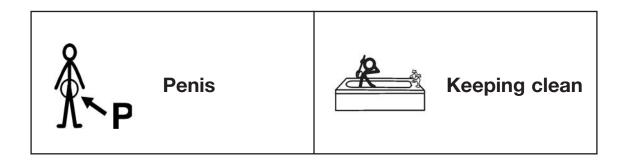


# Guide to the symbols used in Session 3: Growing up and relationships





Girlfriend	Girl
Meet Meet	Breasts
Boyfriend	<b>⇔</b> ≕ Speak
Friends	P Period
? Ask	Воу





Aim: for young people to talk about growing up, and relationships.

Things you will need for this session

- A box, or hat, with pieces of paper
- Pictures of famous people cut out of magazines
- Growing Up Worksheets 1, 2
- Video: My Choice, My Own Choice (available from www.concordvideo.co.uk)
- CD player and CD for music

# What are we doing today?



	_ goes through the
session plan on the f	lipchart.

## Feeling good about yourself





Write each person's name on a piece of paper.



Put them in a box or hat.

Pass the box or hat round. \_\_\_\_asks each person to take a name out of it.

Each person thinks of one nice thing to say about that person.

# Who do you fancy?



asks the whole group:

"What do you think it means to 'fancy' someone?"



Write down all their words on the flipchart.



Remember, it is OK for boys to fancy boys, or girls to fancy girls. It doesn't have to be someone of the opposite sex.



Have a set of pictures of famous people. Split into two groups, with both boys and girls in each group.

\_\_\_\_\_ asks each person to choose a picture of a person they fancy, and to tell the others why they like that person.

Feedback: what do we like most:

- about the way people look?
- about the way people are?

## How to meet someone and get talking.



This scene, or a similar one, could be acted out by people in the group.

Jane is a girl of 18, who is going out to a nightclub for the first time. She is very excited, and just a bit anxious about how things are going to be. But it's OK, she knows some of the people who are going to be there, and will be with her girlfriend.

In the nightclub, things are very hot and noisy. There is a group of boys standing at the bar when Jane and her friend come into the club. One of the boys is called Mark, and Jane knows him from school. She always fancied him, but has never had the chance to tell him that.

First she has a quick drink with her girlfriend, but then Jane gets bold. She wants to really get Mark's attention, so she goes right up to him. He doesn't see her coming, because she is behind him. Jane grins back at her friend, and puts her finger on her lips. She is going to have fun!

Jane creeps up to Mark, and suddenly she pulls his cap down over his eyes, and squeals with laughter. She cries out 'It's me, Jane. Hi Mark, you didn't expect that, did you?' Mark does not react well. He is taken by surprise, and is a bit cross about the whole thing. He did not want to be interrupted. He pulls his cap off, and turns round to look at Jane angrily. 'What are you doing here?' he says. 'You're the last person I wanted to see. Get back to school where you belong, you baby'.

In the group, talk about how this went. What would Jane do next? How could she have done better If you want to meet someone and make friends, what would be good ways to do this? Get together, and list all the ways that you can think of.



What would you do?



Break for drinks. Play music.

## **Growing up - good and bad things**



Split into pairs - one person from each group.





\_\_\_\_\_ asks each pair to think of one good thing, and one bad thing, about growing up.

# Your own feelings about growing up



Now split into two groups, girls in one group, boys in another.

Give **Growing up Worksheet 1** to the girls, and **Growing up Worksheets 2** to the boys.

Us these to talk about what changes you have noticed in your body as you have grown up.

## Meeting up with your boyfriend or girlfriend



Watch the video My Choice, My Own Choice (Tuesday section).

asks the group to talk about how the people feel.



How could you meet up with your boyfriend or girlfriend?

# Having a good relationship



\_\_\_\_\_ leads the whole group. Talk about what makes a good relationship.

Are there any things people can do to make their own relationships better now?



Before people go, \_\_\_\_\_asks:

How do you feel now?

How did you feel about this session?

# **GROWING UP**Worksheet 1

## Girls and women



### Have you thought about these things?

When you are growing up, you may notice changes in:

your face



your breasts



your voice



# **GROWING UP**Worksheet 1 (continued)

Starting your periods



Is there anything else you have noticed?

# GROWING UP Worksheet 2

# Boys and men



### Have you thought about these things?

When you are growing up, you may notice changes in:

your voice



your penis

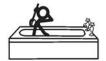


your face



# GROWING UP Worksheet 2 (continued)

Keeping clean and fresh



Is there anything else you have noticed?

# What happened in our session

# 3. Growing up and relationships

We talked about people we fancy.



## Someone with good looks:

- attractive, smart, tidy
- with deodorant.

#### Someone who is romantic:

- smells nice
- good figure
- shape of the cleavage is good.

### We like people with a good personality:

- warm hearted
- big, jolly people
- lovely and gorgeous.

#### We like:

- faithfulness, truthfulness, honesty
- caring and sharing.



In Session 3 we also talked about growing up.



### Good things

- People are kind to you
- I get my own back on my dad
- I can look after my mum
- Having your own responsibility
- Getting more money



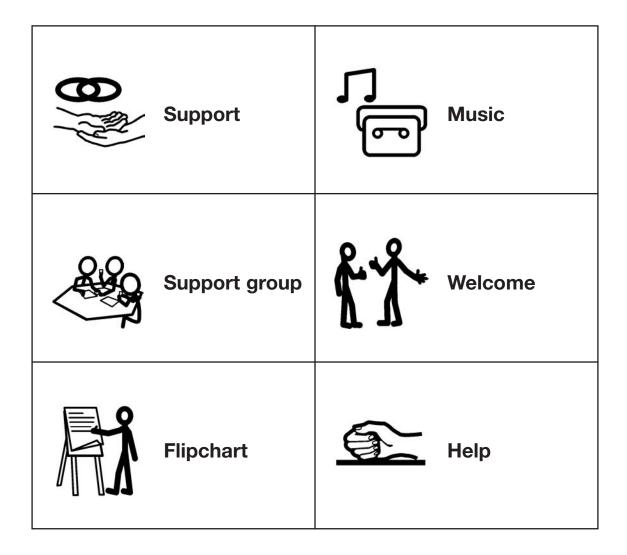
### Bad things

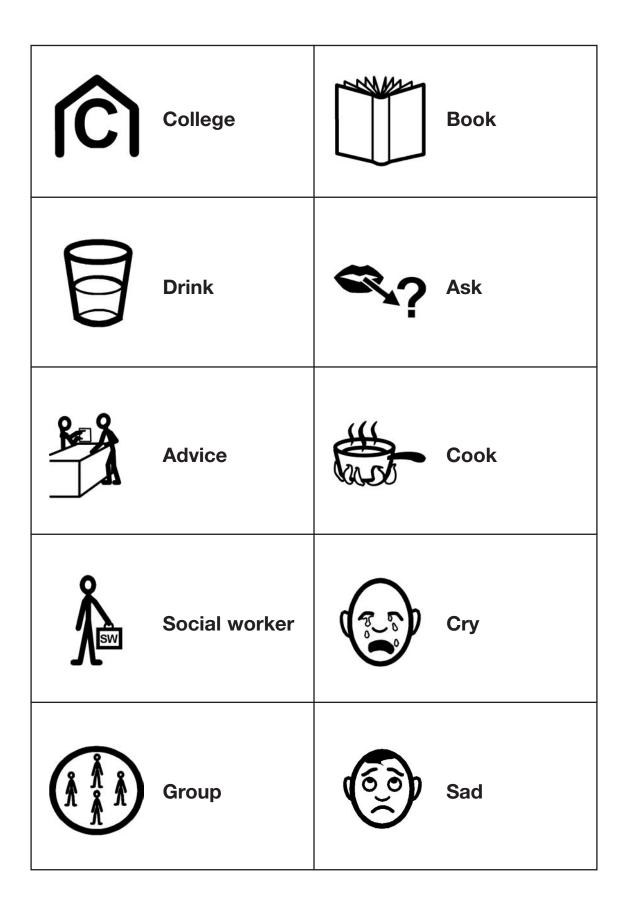
- Being told what to do
- Swearing
- Being scared

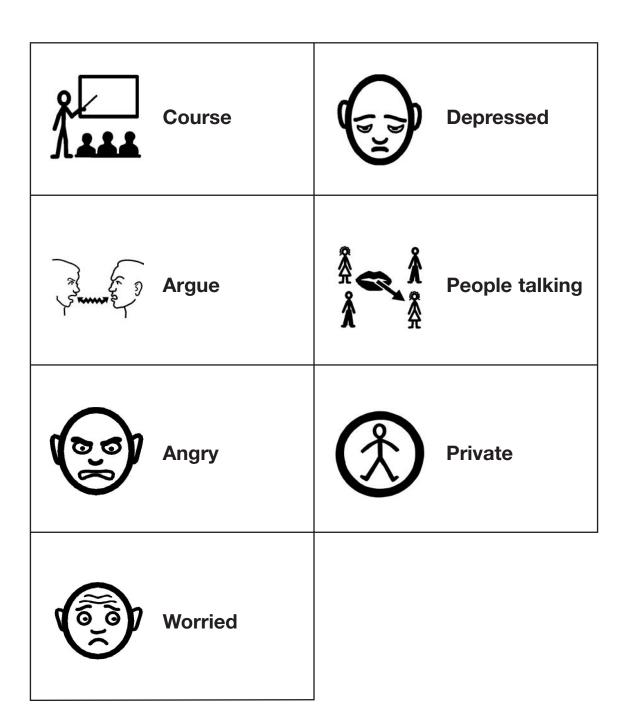




# Guide to the symbols used in Session 4: Getting support









Aim: for young people to know how to get support for themselves.



In this session, young people meet up with the people who can give support. You will need to invite the right people to the group. Your supporter may have to help with this.

Things you will need for this session

- Some willing professionals ideally at least 3 (like a college counsellor, a community nurse, an occupational therapist, a psychologist, a social worker, a Connexions worker [England only])
- Worksheets Getting Support 1, 2, 3, 4
- CD player and CD for music
- All About Feeling Down booklet (see Helping Yourself worksheet 1)

# What are we doing today?



			goes	through	our
session	plan on	the fli	pchart		

### Welcome



Play music while people come in



welcomes the visitors who have come to speak into the room, shakes their hands and invites them to sit down.

## What does it feel like to ask for help?



\_\_\_\_\_ gives an example of how they felt when they went to a counsellor.

\_\_\_\_\_ asks people to get into small groups and talk about what it feels like to get help.

# **College counsellor**



If you have a counsellor at the session, ask them some questions like these:

- what is a college counsellor?
- can we get counselling outside college?
- when may you want to go to a college counsellor?
- what sort of help can we expect?

(You can see what the counsellor who came to our session told us about her job on the 'What happened in our session' sheet at the end)

Talk together about going to a counsellor.



Break for drinks.

# **Connexions personal advisor**



If you have a Connexions advisor at the session, ask them some questions like these:

- what is Connexions?
- what will a personal advisor help us with?
- how can we make sure we get support if we feel stressed?

#### Social worker



If you have a social worker at the session, ask them some questions like these

- what is a social worker?
- why would I need one?
- who should I talk to about my feelings?

## Who can support you?



\_\_\_\_\_ asks everyone to get into 3 groups, and gives out the worksheets

Getting Support 1, 2, 3 and 4.

\_\_\_\_\_ asks one professional to join each group.

Everyone reads through the sheets (with help if you need it)

Talk about who each person in the stories should go to for support.

## Telling people about how you feel



Look at page 10 of the booklet **All About Feeling Down**.

		asks people: 'What is it like for you when you talk to your doctor?				
		asks people to get into pairs, to practise talking to their doctor.				
	Our role play wen	t like this.				
	The doctor said: 'Can you tell me what the problem is?'					
	The young person	The young person said: 'I don't know.' Doctor: 'How are you feeling?'				
	Doctor: 'How are y					
	Young person: 'It is out.'	oung person: 'It is hard to say. I think I am feeling stressed out.'				
What do you think the doctor would ask next?						
	<b>S</b> ?	Before people go,asks:				
	•	How do you feel now?				
		How did you feel about this session?				

Jenny is a young person on an NVQ course. She is doing catering.







She comes into work crying one morning. She really likes one of the boys on the course, but he won't look at her or talk to her.

Yesterday, she tried to talk to him but he was rude to her and told her to shut up.



Jenny has been feeling really bad about herself, and she thinks she has no friends.

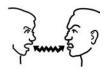
What would you do if you were Jenny?

Who would you talk with?

James is a young student at college. He is doing a work preparation course.







James has some problems at home. He is unhappy, because his parents are always fighting with each other.

But when he comes to college, he is told to leave his home problems behind him.



James is very angry, but he can't tell people how he feels.

Yesterday, he threw a book across the room at his tutor.

What would you do if you were James? Who could help him?

Mary is just finishing her course at college.





She is supposed to leave college and get a job. People are also talking to her about living in a flat on her own.



Mary has been getting very worried about the future.

Right now, she is so worried that she can't think what to do next.

She wakes up in the morning, but won't get out of bed.



Mary used to talk a lot, and to be a happy person. But now, she is very quiet and sad. She won't eat her food at home or at college.

Her mother is very worried and phones the college to ask what she should do with Mary.

What would you do if you were Mary? Who could help her?

This sheet is for you to put in names and numbers for people you may want to go to, if you need support. Fill it in and keep it.

- Social worker
- Connexions
- Doctor or GP
- Psychiatrist
- Community nurse
- Counsellor
- Family
- Advocate
- Self-advocacy group
- Friends

# What happened in our session

# 4. Getting support

We talked about getting support.



- I feel sad, anxious and depressed when I keep things in.
- It comes out when you're not expecting it.
- I was happy when I let my feelings out.



You can speak to your mates, they will understand.

Girls perhaps hear you out better!

#### What is a counsellor?

In Session 4, we also had a college counsellor who came and gave us a talk.



You and the counsellor make an ALLIANCE

A counsellor is:

- someone who gives you respect
- you won't get judged!
- they try to understand things from your point of view.



A counsellor will keep things private.

### Other people who can help you if you feel down.

We also had other visitors in Session 4, who told us these things.

- A social worker: will help you sort out the support you need as you grow up. They may help you with housing too.
- Connexions: will help you plan for the future, and put you in touch with other people. They may also help you get a job or other courses.
- A doctor: if you feel really down, it is a good idea to go to your doctor (GP). They will help you find support.



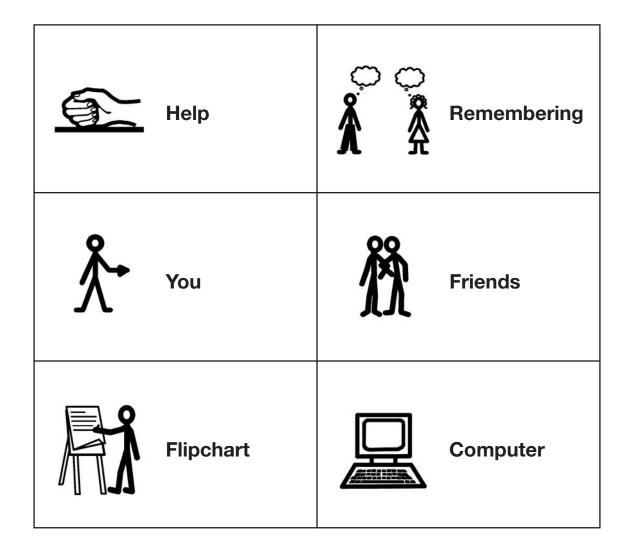
- A psychiatrist, or a community nurse: might be able to help you if you need more support to feel better.
- A counsellor: is there to listen. You can talk privately to a counsellor.
- Family and carers: are always there to talk and help.
- Advocates: These are people who will get to know you, a bit like a friend. They will listen to you, help you to speak up, and sort things out.
- Friends: are the most important thing. We can all help each other! You could meet friends in groups like The Strongest Link. Sometimes these are called 'self-advocacy groups'.





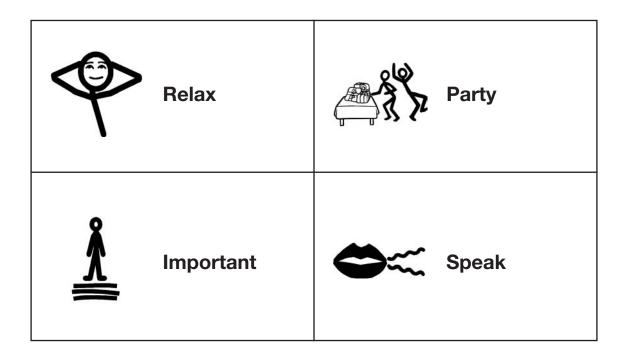
# **Session 5:** Helping yourself

# Guide to the symbols used in Session 5: Helping yourself





# **Session 5: Helping Yourself**



## **Session 5:** Helping yourself

Aim: to look back at what we have done, and work out how to keep up friendships and support for the future.

Things you will need for this session

- Helping Yourself Worksheets 1, 2
- CD player and CD for music
- Photos from previous sessions (if possible)
- The flipchart sheets from previous sessions

## What are we doing today?



goes through the session plan on the flipchart.

### Remembering what we have done



\_\_\_\_\_ shows people the photos from each session. What do people remember best?



Write things people remember on the flipchart.

If you still have them, stick the flipchart sheets from previous weeks up on the wall.

This will help to remind people about the course.

You may want to 're-play' one of the role plays you did in the course. We did, and it gave us a good chance for more people to take part.

## Keeping up friends



\_\_\_\_\_ asks everyone to find someone they like in the group.
\_\_\_\_\_ asks them to talk about how they may be able to keep in touch.
\_\_\_\_\_ then asks: what ways do we have for keeping up with our friends?



These were some of the ones we thought of:

Go round the group and ask for people's

email

ideas.

- texting on our mobiles
- calling each other on our mobiles
- arranging to meet up for a drink





Break for drinks. Play music.

#### Thinking about the future



\_\_\_\_\_ asks people to get into pairs, and to tell each other about their goals for the future. What are they going to do in:



one month's time?



one year's time?

In the whole group, talk about one thing we could do to help ourselves in the future. Go round the group and ask for people's ideas.

We hope you have enjoyed doing the course in your own way. We did!

We did lots of things to find out what it was like for the people who came to **The Strongest Link**. You can find out about that in Section 7 of this pack.

#### **Session 5: Helping Yourself**

This is what one person from the host group said after the course had finished:

'Please keep this group going - we are going to miss each other!'

# HELPING YOURSELF Worksheet 1



Find out more about friends.

Look on the One For Us website:

www.oneforus.com/leisure



Find somewhere new to go with a friend. You can look in the Yellow Pages for your area. Look for the section Out and About: Where To Go And What To Do.



If you want to find a club, you could phone the youth service. Put the number down here. They may have a Disability Inclusion Officer who could help you.

Telephone\_\_\_\_\_



Find your nearest self-advocacy group, by looking at this website.

www.national forum.org.uk

Follow the link that says: Advocacy Groups

# HELPING YOURSELF Worksheet 1 (continued)



You can get a book called **All About Feeling Down** from The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities. Their telephone number is 020 7802 0300. Their email address is **fpld@fpld.org.uk** 



If you are in college, and you want to talk about personal problems, ask if there is a college counsellor you can see.



You can help yourself by learning to relax. Just do something you like – walking, swimming, listening to music or watching TV.

## HELPING YOURSELF Worksheet 2



The most important thing I have learnt on this course is:

These are the things I will do in the next few weeks.
•
•
•
In one year's time, this is what I will be doing:

### What happened in our session

### 5. Helping Yourself



When we leave school or college, we want to stay in touch with some of our friends.

These are the ways we thought we could keep in touch:



- email
- mobile phones
- text messages
- letters
- invite your friend over to see you
- go and see your friends
- go back to reunions at school
- have a party
- go on holiday together.



#### Speaking up for yourself

We talked about our plans for the future. It is important to tell people what you want. Make sure that we get our rights and people don't boss us around.





- We want to be listened to
- We want to have good information about things that we can understand
- We want to have real choices and make our own decisions

These were our 3 top tips for helping yourself

- 1. Keep in touch with your friends and family.
- 2. Do things you enjoy.
- 3. Look after your health.

These are the things we can do to help ourselves if we feel down.

- Phone a friend
- Talk to someone who is nearby, like your support worker
- Listen to music
- Take time off, and have a break
- Go out somewhere nice, like going out for a meal
- Go for a bike ride, swimming, or a long walk
- Do things to relax, like massage



## Part 5

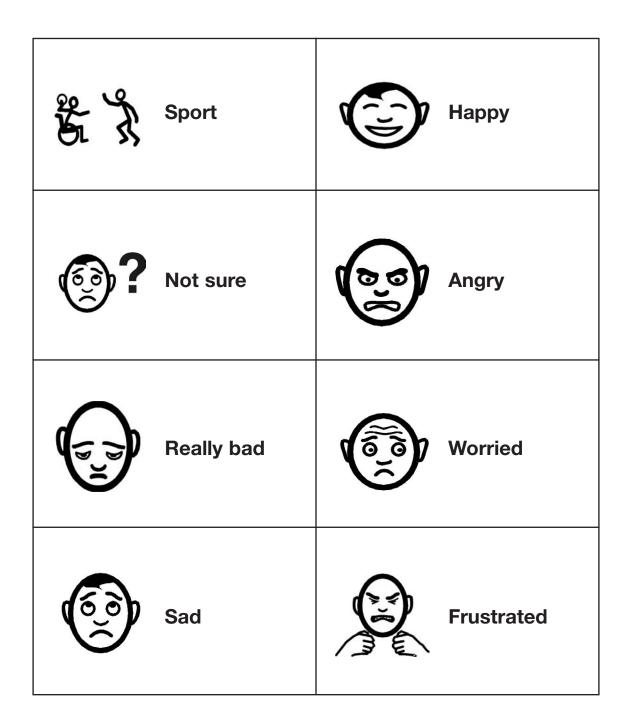
## How was it for you?



# Guide to the symbols used in Part 5: How was it for you?

Good	Support
Bad	Person
Doctor	Pub
Friends	Cinema
Feel ok	Dancing

Part 5: How was it for you?





It is important to evaluate the sessions to find out if they helped people.

**Evaluation** means finding out how things went, and whether the sessions made a difference for people. Each person who comes to the group needs to think about this for themselves. We made up some questions that fit with the sessions, so that people can talk about their own feelings.



Sometimes doctors and other professionals ask us questions to find out if we are ill. That is important to do. They have to ask us personal questions.



But we wanted to ask questions that we felt OK about. We wanted to find things we could ask other young people ourselves.



We tried out some questions with each other. You can see some of the things that people said at the end of our course on the next few pages.

We also came up with the 'How is it for you?' sheets, which are on pages 124-131. You can ask people these questions at the beginning and at the end, if you want to find if anything has changed for them. You can also just use these questions to get people talking about themselves.

#### What people said after our course



This is what some of the young people said about how they felt, after our course.



### Going out with friends



'I like going out with my girlfriend. I like going to the pub of a night. It's very good.'

'I was relaxed and chilled. Me and my girlfriend had a drink. My girlfriend is very nice to me.'



'You can always turn to friends.'

'It comes back to me sometimes. I say "I wouldn't mind being back to school times". I used to think about all my friends that had a good time, we had wonderful meals at lunchtime, and in class sitting together through our lessons.'



#### **Feelings**



'I will be sad to leave my girlfriend.'

'I will be upset and sad sometimes.'

'So I've got a bit nervous, that I'm going to visit some mates that I know from my old school, gives me a bit of nerves.'



#### Talking to people about your feelings



'They've got to have the right qualities. You tell the staff. You can say to the staff, can you help? All the staff are happy to do something.'

'Perhaps you can have company. Or you can have a parrot to talk to. The trouble is though that they're quite noisy, and very rude.'

#### **Helping yourself**

'I can do relaxation. We do it with our support person. Like listening to music, and music and relax. Just relax the body a bit.'

#### How you feel about growing up



'Sometimes I just get a bit fed up, and well I'm not allowed to go out at night, and maybe they're right, but I just ask to go out, and mum says 'no, it's not a good idea' I argue, I want to go out all the time, because I don't get much freedom.'

'I know the staff are trying to help, but I just want to carry on what I'm doing. If I'm hungry I eat, and if I'm not hungry I don't want to eat.'

'I look after my mum, that's growing up.'

#### **Dreams for the future**

'We get together on Saturday nights at the disco, and I always do all my funky moves, and... I'm trying to learn a bit more dancing in me.'

'Dreams are just silly. That's only in fairy stories. I don't believe in that kind of rubbish.'

'I just want life to be better. I could do things on my own, and get more independent.'







### 1. Getting out and doing things you like

What things do you enjoy doing? Any of these things, for instance?

	I do this	I would like to do this	How often?
Pub			
Cinema			
Dancing			
Sports			
Other			





## 2. Friends

who are your best friends?	

- Would you like to make more friends?
- If you had a problem, have you got any friends you could turn to?



How do you feel right now about your life?			
Нарру	ОК	Not sure	Really bad
	(P)	(E)?	





### 3. Feelings

Do you ever feel any of these things?

		Yes	No	Sometimes
Sad	<b>©</b>			
Нарру	<b>©</b>			
Angry	(E)			
Stressed	<b>©</b>			
Frustrated	9			

How long do your feelings last?

Have you ever felt sad for a long time? Can you tell me about that?





### 4. Talking about your feelings

When you feel down, can you tell someone?



Parents	
---------	--

#### How do you feel right now?

Нарру



OK



Not sure



Really bad







### 5. Who gives you most help?

- A. Parents, family
- B. Friends
- C. Psychiatrist
- D. Counsellor
- E. Any other professionals?

How do you feel right now about the people who help you?

Нарру



OK



Not sure



Really bad







### 6. Feelings about growing up

Have you noticed any of these changes?

Changes in your body	
Changes in how you feel for other people	
Changes in how you get on with your parents	
Changes in the things you can do	
Changes in how you feel about yourself	



What do you think is the best thing about growing up?



What do you think is the worst thing about growing up?





#### 7. Helping yourself

How can you get better when you are under stress?



Do you do any of these things?

- Go for a walk?
- Listen to music?
- Talk to someone?
- Have some food?
- Have a rest?
- Go for a holiday?
- Do relaxation exercises?
- Anything else?

How do you feel right now about helping yourself?

Нарру



OK



Not sure



Really bad

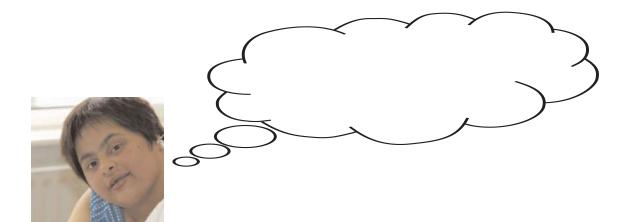






#### 8. Dreams

What is your dream for the future?



Do you have any goals for the next few months?

How do you feel right now about your future?

Нарру



OK



Not sure



Really bad



## Part 6

## **Notes for supporters**



#### Supporting young people to help each other

#### Val Williams

There are many different people who can support young people to run courses like **We AreThe Strongest Link**. These are some of them:

- teachers
- college tutors
- Connexions personal advisors
- youth workers
- social workers
- counsellors.

The main aim of the **We Are The Strongest Link** approach was for young people to support each other. That means that your role, as supporter, is to make sure the young people can become group leaders.

This is what worked well for us.

- Make sure the young people leading the sessions have lots of time to prepare, so they have really decided what they are doing.
- Young people from the research group went to the door to welcome their visitors, and to show them in.
- The supporter should be prepared to step back during the sessions encourage the young people to speak for themselves.

To give some idea of how 'stepping back' worked with us, we have given some examples on the next page. They were all from sessions that were tape recorded, and written up by our supporter.

#### **Examples from the supporter's diary**

Sometimes it is very difficult to know when to step in, and make sure things go 'right', and when to step back and let the young people handle it. In the end, you must judge. There may be some occasions on which you will have to intervene, but the more you can take a back seat, the better. Here are some of the situations we came across, and how I handled them.

#### Feelings about friends

I asked them quite openly: how would you introduce feelings, and what do friends mean to you?

They thought about this quite a lot, and I then suggested they went back to their earlier thought about role plays, and asked them if they could possibly do a role play about feeling lonely and getting a friend. Emily and Martyn agreed to do this, and in fact it was magic!

We got Emily sitting on her own, and saying how lonely she was, then Martyn went and put his arm round her. 'Tell me all about it. What's wrong?' and so on. Their role play went on for a few turns, without any giggling at all. At the first giggle, we pulled through, then got to the next bit, when they dried up. I suggested then that it is OK to 'ask the audience' and to cut the actual role play. Craig then asked if he could be the director and do the 'cutting' and asking the audience what they thought. We tried this out, and it worked really well. These were the questions Craig said that he could ask:

How did you think she was feeling? What do you think Martyn should do next? And how do you think Emily is feeling now?

#### **Prompting**

Instead of leading activities myself, we had usually decided which group member was going to lead, and had this written in our plan. However, people often needed prompting. Instead of simply announcing something to the whole group, I often prompted the relevant group member. For instance, if Emily was going to lead the group and couldn't remember where to start, I would say to her: 'We are going to go on to talk about growing up'.

This prompted Emily to start. She said: 'We are going to talk about going out. Being a child is being told what time to go to bed, by mum. I don't like that, because I am 21, and I don't want to be told what time to go to bed.

#### Handing over a question

Sometimes it was clear to me that we needed to prompt some discussion in the group. Instead of asking a question myself, I usually suggested the question to a group member. While this may seem cumbersome, it did often have the desired effect of stopping my voice becoming too dominant.

For instance when we were doing an exercise with pictures from magazines, the aim was to talk about the sort of things the young people liked in other people. John was leading the session and dried up. I said to him: 'Don't worry, just ask them the kind of things they fancy about people'.

He then continued: What (hesitates) what do you fancy? Sorry about that - what - what things do you most like, do you fancy about people?

#### **Remaining silent**

It often happened that questions were directly addressed to me, either by group members or by visitors or other support staff. If this happened in mid-flow during a session, it would have implied that I was in charge of things if I answered directly. Sometimes, therefore, it was simply necessary to keep my mouth closed, and to pass the question non-verbally to a member of the group. During the first session, James, a member of the visiting group, asked me if people should bring their files the next week. I didn't say anything, but smiled and looked towards John who was leading the session. John then answered the question, saying it would be good for them to do that.

#### Getting a group going

One of the most difficult things in getting **We Are The Strongest Link** going was to find a time and place when young people could come together. If you are already in a school or college, or another place where young people naturally meet, then this stage will not be so difficult. However, you will probably have to think even more carefully about your own role – students will be used to teaching staff being 'in control' of things.

These are some of the things that can stop young people getting together:

- physical barriers (eg school or college premises that they cannot leave unaccompanied)
- gatekeepers (staff or supporters)
- timetables (school, college, work or other activities that effectively eat up all their week).

#### Don't give up!

The young people in the host group can take the lead in inviting people to their own course. This was how it happened with us (see Part 3).

- 1. We made a very easy publicity sheet, with photos of the group, a list of sessions and some basic information.
- 2. The group suggested places where we could send the publicity sheet, and we made a list.
- 3. The supporter then helped the group to send out the publicity and follow it up.
- 4. A local residential college got back to us, and one of our group members visited to talk with their student council. She told them about **We Are The Strongest Link**, and answered their questions.
- 5. Members of the student council then went back to their 'home groups' and gave them the information from the meeting. One home group decided that they would like to come to **We Are The Strongest Link**.

This is how they later described their feelings about going to the group:

'Ben just brought it all back here from the student council, and I just chose.'

'I can choose to come, and I can choose not to come. I might choose not to come no more, I might choose that.'

'When I first heard about it, I expected to go and meet more people like me. But they weren't like me really. That was fine, everyone's different.'

As far as possible, keep the young people involved in every stage of:

- planning
- making decisions
- organising
- advertising.

#### **Trusting each other**

Towards the end of the **We Are The Strongest Link** course, a visiting professional made the following comment:

'I was quite impressed by the degree of trust which people showed to each other, and there was some really good stuff about forming relationships, and helping each other.'

It is important that everyone learns to trust each other. The young people need to trust the adult (s) they are working with, but they also need to trust each other. How can the supporter help this to happen?

#### **Ground rules**

It is good to make ground rules together. This helps group members to 'own' the group. Group members, as well as the supporter, learn to trust each other when they know that the others will stick to their side of the bargain. It is important to show you are trustworthy.

These were the ground rules that the group first thought of:

- 1. Turn your mobiles off.
- 2. Listen to each other.
- 3. Don't all speak at the same time.
- 4. The supporter should bring biscuits.
- 5. Keep things private between these four walls.

A few sessions later on, we added some more rules, which included:

- 6. Try to get to the group on time.
- 7. Let each other know if we are not able to come.

Groups can carry on changing and adding to their ground rules. We also added:

- 8. No-one has to say anything they do not want to.
- 9. There are times when people may say something which is about abuse or harm. The adult may then have to make sure that someone else knows about the problem.

#### Other ways to establish trust

You can establish an atmosphere of trust by quite small things. Make sure you listen to group members' ideas, even if they seem impractical. If someone comes up with a good idea, then follow it through. For instance, Strongest Link members thought it would be good to have music during the sessions. This meant finding a CD player to bring in, and speakers to link to it. It was important to listen to this idea. The supporter remembered to bring in a CD player and some speakers. One of the group members remembered to bring in some CDs.

We all trusted each other to remember things, and it worked!

#### Listening to young people, and showing that

#### you are listening

Listening may sound like an easy thing, but it is most definitely not. For one thing, young people in groups may not sound as if they have anything to say which is worth listening to. For long periods, they may:

- shy away from talking about serious subjects
- flirt with each other
- fool about
- test out any adults present, with behaviour for which they expect to be told off.

All these things make it very hard to listen seriously. What are you listening to?

The Strongest Link group, at the very beginning, was interested only in finding fault with the college in which they were studying. This was unfortunate, as the college was kind enough to host the group and to find us a room. However, the supporter did accept the young people's views, and took them seriously. The group carried out a short survey of college facilities, and they found out that the college was not all bad. In fact, they became quite proud of showing off parts of the college and introducing the supporter to staff they knew.

Later on, the group wanted to meet outside the college, and so we arranged to meet at Connexions, then at the Somerset Inclusion Project at Barnardo's.

When we asked what the group wanted to do, they talked about going out to places and having fun. So:

- we went bowling
- we went to a local pub restaurant

- we went shopping together
- one group member helped the supporter to buy a new mobile phone.

#### Young people listening to each other

Of course, it is not just the supporter who has to listen. The whole goal of running the course in this way is for young people to support each other, and to listen to each other. So often, people complain that young people with learning disabilities will not talk with each other - only directly to an adult. How did we tackle this issue?

#### Pair work

Find activities and exercises where young people talk to each other in pairs (even if they need a supporter to guide each pair). For instance, young people can ask each other about where they go out. Then each person in the pair tells the group about what the *other person* said.

If you are supporting a conversation between two young people, make sure you don't put your own words into it. Your role is just to translate what they are saying, to make sure each person understands the other.

#### Doing ordinary things together

Give young people space to listen to each other. Sometimes this happens at casual moments, for instance in the kitchen making a drink, or clearing up the room.

Go out of the room at times, and just let them get on with it!

#### Feedback time

At the end of a session, give time for the group members to ask the others how it went for them, and how they are feeling.

Give people praise for listening well to each other.

#### What to do if things go pear shaped?

The hardest thing is to know what to do if things go wrong. Young people are young people! Sometimes things seemed to be drifting away from the aims we all had.

For instance, in our second session, a new person came to the group who had never been before. This meant that she was unaware of the basic purpose of the group, and started to upset the balance by playing tricks on another member of the host group. People got quite cross with each other, and amongst all this the visitors felt left out and confused.

What can a supporter do in these circumstances?

- Stop the session and ask people to behave themselves
- Stop the session and ask people to explain for themselves what is happening
- Ask the people who are misbehaving to go out and talk with a supporter
- Ask the group members to look back at their ground rules.

All the above things are possible. But in this case, the supporter actually did nothing! Later on, we discussed exactly what had happened, and what we should (collectively) have done about it.

One member said that this kind of situation should be handled by group members themselves:

'Basically we would tell them to get into the group, and ask them what they felt. Make them feel more accepted.'

#### **Having fun**

Working with young people means that you need to let your hair down, and make sure there is a fun atmosphere!

The young people on our course wanted to go out, and so we did - bowling, for a meal and shopping. A course like this could be built around an Out and About group.

These were some of the other things that helped us keep it light-hearted:

- music during the sessions
- plenty of breaks, with drinks and refreshments
- having a laugh over things together
- giving people plenty of time to get to know each other.

A visitor to the group at the end of session 4 commented:

'They can support each other, but can also tease and have fun with each other, and are still OK.'

#### Reflecting together on what we have done

We were lucky in our group, as we were part of a research project. Young people in the Mind the Gap research group have been able to go to conferences, and talk about their work with **The Strongest Link**. They did a wonderful job, and these were very good opportunities for them:

- to think about the course
- to talk about what they had achieved
- to think about what it all meant.

It is important to find times for all the young people to talk about what they have done together, and what it meant to them. This can also be done:

- at a celebration meal
- by telling other members of staff about their course.

We found that young people felt that they 'owned' the course when they talked about it to others.

Here are some of the things the research group members said when asked how they felt about **We Are The Strongest Link**.

'I felt nervous at the start, but when I got in there and saw everyone - my mind just went whoof, and I managed to talk and I felt confident about myself.'

'I feel more confident. When I started, I was like - oh Christ, I can't do this, I can't do that. I was sort of shy and embarrassed. But I can look into a camera straight now, like I'm looking at you now. I can do a lot more things, and I am more confident about myself. Yes, I feel more confident than I ever have.'

'It's changed quite a lot for me. Since I've been in Mind the Gap, I've met new friends, and got on perfectly about work. It's good to be part of a team. I'm often a bit of a loner.'

'I feel sad, upset and depressed when I keep things in. I've done that for two years. I felt very happy when I let it out, and shared this with someone.'

#### How did the course go?

At the end of the course, we asked people questions about how they were feeling. We also asked them for their ideas about how the course went, and things we could have done better.

These were the people we talked to:

- The Strongest Link members
- the young people who came to The Strongest Link course
- the staff member who supported them
- the staff person from the Somerset Inclusion project.

Here are some of the points people made.

- The course was much too short! We needed a much longer time. 'Each session could have been spread over a term'.
- It was good to have some of the sessions at the Somerset Inclusion Project, and others at the residential college. It was good to visit each other, and to see how the others lived.
- Maybe it would be nice to have a residential weekend at the beginning, so people really get to know each other.
- We can take responsibility. It was good to be trusted.
- Please keep this group going we are going to miss each other.

When asked what advice they would give to other young people who wanted to do something like **The Strongest Link**, this is what group members said:

'Just be confident, and be yourself.'



## The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities

We promote the rights, quality of life and opportunities of people with learning disabilities and their families.

We do this by working with people with learning disabilities, their families and those who support them to:

- do research and develop projects that promote social inclusion and citizenship
- support local communities and services to include people with learning disabilities
- make practical improvements in services for people with learning disabilities
- spread knowledge and information.

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