

Imaginary Friends

An example of a duty call helpline – consultation with a learning support assistant

The situation

A telephone call (as part of our duty call system) was received from Jennifer, who is a Learning Support Assistant, seeking advice about imaginary friends.

What happened...

Jennifer was working closely with a 6-year-old boy, Jacob who had an imaginary friend. She was aware that imaginary friends are quite common among young children and can take many forms, human, animal, plant life and superhuman (*some research has indicated that up to 65% of children between 3 and 9 years old have imaginary friends at some time*).

Jennifer was also aware that imaginary friends are a part of normal development and can help children to manage some of the stresses in their lives.

The Educational Psychologist (EP) reassured Jennifer that she was responding very appropriately to Jacob's creativity and imagination; being aware that the 'friend' was Jacob's creation and allowed him to have ownership and control. Jennifer was careful not to impose her imagination onto the friend but allowed Jacob to be in charge and direct situations.

What happened next...

Jennifer wanted to check out how she could respond to occasions when Jacob blamed his 'friend' for having done something wrong e.g. spilled or broken something that he was clearly responsible for.

After some discussion Jennifer thought that Jacob might feel uncertain about what the reactions and consequences to the incidents might be and he might feel scared about owning up, so had blamed his 'friend'.

The result...

Jennifer felt that she could respect Jacob's explanations and could use the situations to demonstrate to Jacob that incidents are dealt with in a positive and sympathetic way. Jennifer decided to engage Jacob with her in making reparations for the 'friend's' accidents e.g. cleaning up, apologising where appropriate. She suggested to Jacob that he explain to his 'friend' that it was alright to admit to things because people are pleased if you are honest and can help you to sort things out. So his 'friend' need not worry.

Psychology used:

Developmental Psychology
Psychodynamic Psychology

