

THE IDEAS COLUMN

To launch a new column on how to engage and motivate children with SEN, Helen Sanderson and Antonia Kinman look at some practical ways to use person centred thinking at home and school

Recent issues of SEN magazine have featured articles about person centred reviews and one page profiles. Now, we want to take a look at how person centred thinking tools can be used by families and schools to make a difference for children and young people with SEN.

Like and admire sessions

Abbey Hill School and Performing Arts College is a large purpose built special school in Stoke-on-Trent. One of the approaches they have been using is to

"...a simple, fun way for families and friends to start thinking about what makes each of them special."

focus on appreciation and what young people like and admire about each other. The Deputy Head said:

Like and admire has been important in our class. We did lessons where we concentrated on each young person and thought about what we all liked and admired about that person. We did this by putting a photo of the young person on the interactive board and then had a discussion about the young person's positive characteristics and what their positive contributions were to the class.

Another class took a different approach. Each child had a piece of paper taped to their back with their name at the top,



and the teacher asked the children to write comments there about what they like about their class mates. The teacher and teaching assistants also took part and used the opportunity to coach the children in how to phrase what they liked about each other, and how to give specific appreciations, moving beyond just "nice" and "cool".

Circle time, or even dinner time at home, can also provide opportunities to help children say positive, affirming things to each other. You simply ask the

children to take it in turns to say one positive thing about the person on their left, who is encouraged to respond with just a "thank you". Simple as they are, these appreciation rounds can really help children to focus on what is positive about each other.

Great things about me stickers

At Norris Bank Primary School, the Inclusion Co-ordinator has been working with teachers to think about how they can give children specific feedback on what they are doing well. In the mixed Year 5/6 class, each child has a "Great Things About" certificate which hangs up in the classroom. Stickers for the charts have been specially made, with space for the teacher to write very specific comments about why a child is being given a sticker.

For example, they might write "good listener". Teachers are, therefore, able to show each child exactly what it is they are appreciating about them, be it a personal characteristic, their behavior or an academic quality. The sticker charts then go home to parents at the end of each year, with the child's report.

Appreciation badges

Appreciation badges can be made at home as well as at school, and they're great for parties. They are a simple, fun way for families and friends to start thinking about what makes each of them special.

Before you start, you will need to collect information from family members and friends about what they like and admire about the person. Where possible, you may want to ask family members to talk to the person about the comments collected, and invite them to add any ideas of their own. The person can then choose their favourite appreciations to go on their badge.

There are hundreds of badge making kits available in stores and online, so look for one that's suitable for everyone to use, or download instructions from the internet on how to make badges from scratch.



Appreciation cushions

If you're feeling really crafty, you could go one step further and make appreciation cushions. Obviously, there is much more room on a cushion than there is on a badge to record information about what others like and admire about a person. You'll need to start with a plain cushion cover and cushion pad, and, by using products such as image transfer film and adhesive webbing (all easily available from a craft store or online), it's possible to decorate the cushion with images that celebrate the child's gifts and qualities. In many cases images may be more meaningful to the child than written words.




Like and admire photo books

A friend of Anna's made a tiny (three by two inches) like and admire photobook for her children Flo, a gorgeous toddler who has Downs Syndrome, and Tom. Anna says:

...we received some beautiful mini books through the post. One is all about Tom and the other about Flo...They are filled with various snaps of them both and things that we love and admire about them individually. We were sent a few copies so we were able to give them to our parents, and I carry mine with me at all times! An example of how brilliant they are was at Flo's person centred

review in June. Our health visitor commented that there had been a lot of effort put in to Flo's meeting and profile and wondered about Tom. My mother in law whipped out Tom's and Flo's books to show her! They are just a lovely snapshot of our children and their personalities! We have also used Flo's mini book and her profile whilst visiting our local primary schools with a view to choosing the right one for them both...

Photo books are easy to make on an Apple Mac computer, and there are lots of sites that can help you produce them on line as well. You simply take the top six to eight things that you like about the child and find photos that reflect these qualities or attributes as closely as possible. You can then place or upload the text and the photos, with one thing that you like about them stated on one page, and the photo on the facing page. Comments written in the first person, such as "I am kind", can be particularly helpful in building self esteem. 

Further Information

Helen Sanderson is the expert advisor on person centred approaches to the Government's Valuing People Support Team and co-author of *Celebrating Families: simple, practical ways to enhance family life*.

Easy to follow instructions on how to make like and admire cushions and felt and no-sew badges can be found on the "appreciations" pages at:

www.celebratingfamilies.co.uk