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**The *Felt Feelings* Series:  
A stepping Stone Towards Change**

**Introduction**

Child maltreatment is a critical issue jeopardizing the wellbeing of our children. Despite the fact that child abuse “has been widely condemned, it remains a persistent, non-diminishing threat” and “is considered a worldwide social problem” (Volpe, 2009). We live in an individualist society, one that often fails to see the value in a collectivist point of view. We need to embrace and take responsibility for all children, and realize that child abuse is everyone’s problem. It is imperative that we work together to support families in need, prevent future tragedies and no longer ignore the problem of child maltreatment.

Unfortunately the issue of child maltreatment is so extensive that it is common for individuals to feel overwhelmed and powerless. Although we agree that child maltreatment is a serious problem, many are unclear of how they can make a difference. There are many ways people from all walks of life can get involved in the fight against child abuse. Volunteering, donating money, raising awareness, thoughtful voting and becoming a foster parent are all ways individuals can get involved in both the prevention and intervention of child maltreatment.

As a future teacher I believe that educators in particular, have the ability to create positive change. The *Felt Feelings* books written by Lynne Steffy are a series of therapeutic books that have the potential to make a substantial impact on children’s lives. They are a valuable resource that can be used by parents, therapists and teachers to help

children develop emotional maturity and deal with a variety of difficult issues. The *Felt Feelings* series is an important resource for teachers to connect with individual students, foster empathy within a classroom and increase young students' awareness of child abuse. The series gives teachers a great opportunity to introduce a difficult topic to the class in a safe and supported way. In order to facilitate the use of this series in a classroom environment I have developed lesson plans or "teacher guides," designed to accompany four of the eight books in the series. The plans are designed to support teachers through read alouds, class discussions, and follow up, interactive activities.

### **The *Felt Feelings* Series: About the Author and the Series**

Lynne Steffy is a child therapist and case manager who has training in play and group therapy. From her extensive experience working with and counseling children Lynne realized the value of narrative therapy as a way to reach children dealing with a variety of difficult issues. During the course of her work, Lynne recognized that there was a lack of resources available to therapists, teachers and parents to meet the needs of children experiencing "complex emotional and behavioural issues" (Steffy, 2010). Lynne saw the need for more child-centered literature, and so created a series of eight children's stories, each one dealing with a specific challenge or problem in a child's life. Anger, death of a caregiver, divorce, disability, illness, abuse, family conflict, bullying and the expression of feelings are all topics covered in the *Felt Feelings* series, which was recently published in 2010. Each book has an interesting plot and well-developed characters that are brought to life through beautiful illustrations by Gary Frederick. In addition, a line of beautiful handmade puppets is also available and features a specific

character to accompany each book. The puppets can be purchased and used to further support and enhance the text. The books are designed strictly to be used as read alouds, accompanied by adult support. As a result, they are based on a child's level of comprehension, as opposed to their reading ability. The series can be used with children ages five through twelve, depending on the maturity level of the individual child (Steffy, personal communication, Dec. 12, 2010). I was fortunate enough to meet with the author, Lynne Steffy to discuss her books and learn more about how she sees them being used in a variety of settings.

### **The Best of Both Worlds: A Comparative Review**

Although there are other children's therapeutic books available, many oversimplify difficult issues and underestimate children's ability to understand complex problems. Lynne explained that "a lot of the material that was developed, was developed in a kind of a quick simple way; they basically laid out a problem and then just had a very adult focused short story, with adult language" (Steffy, personal communication, Dec. 12, 2010). Many resources available before the introduction of the *Felt Feelings* series are simplified and over exaggerate the problem and solution at the cost of a compelling plot, or interesting characters. The *Felt Feelings* series combines the topics of therapeutic literature with the style and feel of a beloved children's book. Lynne explained her unique vision, "I decided to put it together in a way to try to lose the child in the story and have the issue be a little bit hidden so that they could identify with the characters and the plot rather than just the problem" (Steffy, personal communication, Dec. 12, 2010).

Although her books contain meaningful themes, they are written in a way that attracts and

maintains children's attention. Each story has its own set of unique characters that navigate their way through their own personal challenges. The detailed development of expressive characters and compelling storytelling accompanied by dynamic illustrations is reminiscent of Robert Munsch's much-loved children's books. The *Felt Feelings* series shares a similar format to Munsch's books, while simultaneously integrating heavier issues into the story. Through repetition, children become very familiar with Robert Munsch's diverse characters and compelling stories. Lynne's stories share many of the same qualities as Munsch's books, specifically the power to captivate young audiences through genuine, high quality storytelling.

The book *Mia's Secret* by Peter Ledwon and Marilyn Mets could be classified as a similar resource, a therapeutic story for children. *Mia's Secret* is a story about a young girl who is sexually abused by an adult and nervous and ashamed to tell her story. Eventually she builds up the strength and uses her Teddy Bear as a third party outlet to tell her Mother about what happened to her. The book *Shelly's Shell* would be a comparable text in Lynne Steffy's series. It is useful to compare both texts in order to really see the advantageous qualities in both the structure and feel of the *Felt Feelings* series.

Perhaps the most evident difference between the two books is the main character, a little girl verses a young turtle. The use of animal characters in many of the *Felt Feelings* books works as a thoughtful buffer and creates a safe atmosphere where children are able to better tackle difficult concepts. An animal character, such as a turtle functions as an important boundary between the child's actual experience and the story, "when you put it a step removed and it's about someone else, they still completely know that it's

about them, but it's safe" (Steffy, personal communication, Dec. 12, 2010). Making sure the child feels safe and comfortable is extremely important, especially when dealing with a difficult and complex issue such as abuse. Shelly's character is well developed in the story; we get to know her personality and learn about her family, friends and what she likes to do for fun. The character and her story are defined by more than simply sexual abuse. This helps to camouflage the sensitive topic by cushioning it with well-developed characters, an interesting plot and beautiful illustrations. In contrast, sexual abuse is at the forefront of *Mia's Secret*, and the book focuses heavily on Mia's painful experience.

*Shelly's Shell*, also does a good job of bringing up the actual act of sexual abuse, describing it only as "touching underneath Shelly's shell." This again creates a comfortable buffer zone, but gets the point across without too much detail. In *Mia's Secret*, the act of sexual abuse is referred to only as the "secret game," which is also vague but the realistic illustrations of a young girl alone with a man in her room may be too jarring.

In addition, *Shelly's Shell* contains a useful "User's Guide" that helps guide adult instructors, and recommends strategies to make the reading as easy as possible on the child. Helpful discussions are also included with each of the *Felt Feelings* books, which can be used by adults to continue to support children after reading the book. *Mia's Secret* also has a page directed at parents, but it functions less as a guide to the story, and more as a general reminder to parents to report any suspicions or occurrences of abuse.

Although both are relevant books that bring up a serious and important topic, *Shelly's Shell* is a more effective resource that truly considers the child's needs and comfort level. Lynne Steffy's books are child-centered and are therefore a gentle and

thoughtful resource that can help support children and their families through difficult situations.

### **A Teacher's Toolkit: Using The *Felt Feelings* Series in the Classroom**

Since its debut, teachers have shown a particular interest in the *Felt Feelings* series. Teachers see and interact with their students on a regular basis and therefore play an important role in their lives. This unique relationship gives teachers the opportunity to get to know their students on an individual basis and allows them to notice any evident changes in their day-to-day behaviour. It is imperative that teachers establish a positive classroom environment that serves as a safe place for all students. A successful classroom community facilitates positive relationships and is conducive to open discussions. Simply being available to talk to students in need is an effective way for teachers to play an active role in supporting children suffering from abuse.

In addition to supporting individual students, teachers are capable of reaching their whole class by using the *Felt Feelings* series to facilitate discussions about abuse and prevention. Although the series is an important resource for therapists and parents alike, I believe that the books are particularly valuable to teachers and can play a major role in the classroom.

It is important to note that not all books in the *Felt Feelings* series are appropriate for a whole class lesson. Some of the books are to be used solely on an individual basis and only with children directly affected by a particular issue. For example, *Shelly's Shell* a book about sexual abuse that is meant to be used on a case-by-case basis, and not with a large group. Other books on the other hand, such as *The Angry Lizard*, and *Elephant in*

*my Room*, stories about dealing with and expressing emotions can be used as valuable lesson with an entire class.

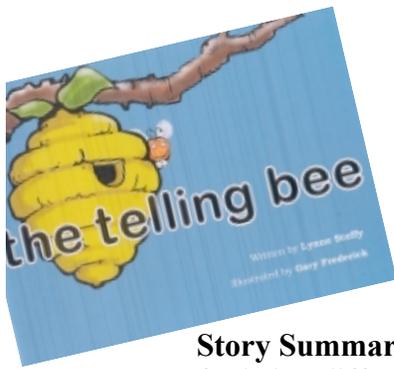
Presenting a book from the series is not only extremely beneficial to a child in need, but simultaneously has an overwhelming impact on whole class. By using the books within the classroom, teachers are able to generate empathy amongst their students and reduce marginalization, “the books not only help the child going through it but if you’re able to use it with the whole class then the other kids learn how to understand better what that child is going through” (Steffy, personal communication, Dec. 12, 2010). For example, if a student in the class recently lost a loved one, perhaps reading *Butterfly Blanket*, a book about loss could be a therapeutic way to address that child’s needs and foster understanding and support amongst the entire group. “Being inclusive with what’s going on in the class” is an important way to support a struggling student, while simultaneously encouraging children to develop a greater understanding of others at an early age (Steffy, personal communication, Dec. 12, 2010).

It is recommended that teachers first seek the permission and support of parents before introducing difficult topics and themes into the curriculum. A simple letter home explaining the intentions and rationale for the lesson is a good way to keep lines of communication open and ensure parental consent (Steffy, personal communication, Dec. 12, 2010).

Even if the majority of a class has not experienced a particular situation first hand, it is beneficial for all students to recognize the possible struggles of others and develop compassion. It is for this reason that the *Felt Feelings* series is a valuable resource that has the potential to impact the lives of an entire student body.

It would be ideal if all schools had access to the *Felt Feelings* series. If each school had a set of books, teachers would be able to not only plan thoughtful lessons in advance, but also they could take advantage of important teachable moments. If a certain issue arises in a class, the teacher is then able to pull the corresponding book and lead a meaningful and supported lesson and discussion. Many school boards are beginning to adopt the series, including the Toronto Catholic District School Board, which has given a set of books to each of their social work departments (Steffy, personal communication, Dec. 12, 2010). The Waterloo District School Board and the Children's Aid society are also considering integrating The *Felt Feelings* series into their programs. In addition, more and more individual teachers have purchased the series and are incorporating the stories into their class curriculums.

Four of the eight books in the series are particularly relevant to preventing, intervening and coping with child maltreatment. The books: *The Telling Bee*, *Elephant in my Room*, *Stretch and Shelly's Shell*, either deal directly with child abuse, or touch on issues that relate to child maltreatment in some way. Of these four books, two are conducive to whole class lessons, and two are more appropriate to be used by the teacher as a resource to recommend to parents and support individual families and children. The following teacher resource guides demonstrate how each of these four books can be incorporated into a teacher's practice.



## *The Telling Bee*

### A Lesson Guide for Teachers

**Story Summary:** *The Telling Bee* is a story about a young bee who is teased and bullied for being different. Despite threats from his tormenter, Carrot is very brave and seeks help. After several failed attempts at sharing his problem, Carrot finally finds an empathetic turtle who takes the time to listen and comfort the young bee and praise him for his bravery.

\* This story deals with the importance of disclosing bullying and abuse and conveys to children the need to tell their story until they are heard, supported and protected by an adult.

**Read Aloud:** Before reading the story aloud to the class, engage students in a “picture walk” of the book, showing them the illustrations and asking them to make predictions in order to activate their schemas. Read the story aloud, pausing to answer any questions and to ensure comprehension. If you have a support staff in the class ask them to act out the main character’s actions using the Carrot puppet (this is particularly effective with primary grades)

**Group Discussion:** Inform students that the classroom is a safe place and it is important for students to listen to each other and participate in a respectful manner.

- Lead students in a group discussion based on the questions located at the end of the book, page 11. Brainstorm and record ideas on chart paper.
- For Junior grades, have children divide into five groups and each take responsibility for one discussion question. Bring the whole class back together to share their thoughts.

**Identifying Emotions:** As a class flip through the book and analyze the illustrations of Carrot throughout the book. Determine what emotions Carrot is feeling at different points throughout the story and brainstorm reasons why he is feeling the way he is.

- Record students’ thoughts using a chart, see example below. Encourage students to think of instances in their own lives when they’ve felt similar emotions to Carrot.

Page #	Picture	Emotion	Reasons	Own Experience
1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sad</li> <li>• upset</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• other bees teased Carrot</li> <li>• feels lonely</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lost my hat</li> <li>• bullied at recess</li> </ul>
2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• scared</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• chased by bigger bee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lost at the mall</li> <li>• dark at night</li> </ul>

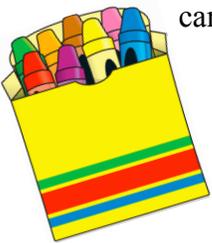
**Role Play:** Divide the class into groups of five and randomly assign each student a role from the story; Carrot, the mean bee, the tree, the cloud and the turtle.

- Have children create a mask or puppet to represent their particular character. Have a variety of supplies available so that children can be creative.
- As a class write out a summary of the story on the board, identifying the beginning, middle and end, including all of the major events.
- Give students time to practice acting out the story in their groups using their puppets/masks and the highlighted timeline of the plot. For primary grades, it may be helpful if the teacher, reads the timeline aloud, while the children act out their roles.
- Each group is then given the opportunity to present their plays. If there is time, have students choose a different role to act out.
- Ask each group to come up with an alternative ending in which the turtle, like the tree and the cloud refuses to listen and believe Carrot. Have each group come up with a different character or person that is able to listen to and help Carrot. Encourage them to think of someone they could seek help from in their own life. Possible examples include: a teacher, parent, police officer or principal.

**Art Therapy:** Have each student draw a picture of their alternate ending to replace the original illustrations in the book.

- Prepare a large diagram of Carrot the bee and pin it on the board. As a group map Carrot's body according to what emotions he is feeling.
- Assign different emotions/ feelings particular colours. For example red=pain, blue=sad.
- As a class determine how to colour in Carrot according to your determined legend. For example, if Carrot is feeling sad after he is teased, perhaps you would decide to colour his heart blue. Likewise, you may decide to colour Carrot's injury from the mean bee red.
- Have children trace each other's body's on large sheets of paper and cut them out.
- Encourage children to put themselves in Carrot's shoes and imagine how they would feel in his situation. Have students map their own bodies according to what feelings they would be feeling where.

\*The above activities do not all have to be done during one lesson, but instead can be spread out over a number of lessons or days.



### ***The Telling Bee: Defining Abuse & Breaking the Silence***

*The Telling Bee* is closely tied to the topic of child maltreatment. The story of Carrot the bee not only deals with bullying, but also physical and psychological abuse. Most importantly, the book's main theme, "telling" is an extremely important concept to share with young children.

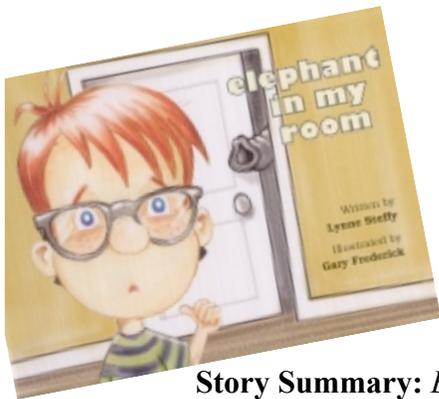
Using the story *The Telling Bee* in the classroom gives teachers the opportunity to introduce the somewhat controversial topic of abuse. The integration of a difficult topic into the child-centered story is an ideal platform to define and discuss child abuse with young children. Teachers can use the discussion questions in the book, particularly the first question, "What did the bigger bee do to hurt Carrot?" to teach children about how they should be treated and what constitutes abusive behaviour. The answer to this first discussion question is actually not written into the story; the reader is not told what the mean bee actually does to hurt Carrot. This lack of clarity in the plot is an ideal way for students, (with teacher support) to think about ways the bee could have hurt Carrot. Together the class can make a list of both physical and psychological things the mean bee could have done do to hurt Carrot such as: hitting, kicking, punching, teasing, yelling and ridiculing. Through class discussion, reflection and teacher guidance this list of can be presented as abusive behaviours. Teachers can explain to their students that these types of behaviours are not tolerated, not even by adults and that no one should be treated this way. This process of defining and identifying abuse is a preventative measure that helps children understand how they should and should not be treated and recognize when they may be faced with an inappropriate or dangerous situation.

In addition to prevention, *The Telling Bee* is also an excellent resource for intervening with child abuse. The moral of the story is to encourage children to disclose bullying and or abuse even if their first attempts fall on deaf ears. Carrot had to tell his story several times before he was heard. It is important for children to understand “that they may need to reach out to more than one adult before they are helped” (Steffy, 2010). Carrot’s story brings this lesson to life and could be the inspiration a suffering child needs to disclose his or her abuse.

The activities presented in *The Telling Bee* lesson plan are designed to reiterate the major themes of the story and extend students’ thinking. Reading the story on several occasions and or doing activities over a number of days is an effective way to ensure that the children understand the ideas being presented, “the more follow up you have, the more the lesson is going to stick” (Steffy, personal communication, Dec. 12, 2010). Activities such as art and drama help to further solidify the concepts presented in the story.

Although most teachers are not trained in dramatic therapy, it is beneficial to use role-play and drama to enrich students’ experience. It is children’s “natural impulse to dramatize” (Weber, 2004, p. xxiv). In formal therapy, “rather than dissociate to cope with traumatic memory, children can be taught to use the creative mediums to represent experiences that are beyond words” (Weber, 2004, p. 70). The benefits of this type of therapy can be extended into the classroom. Using creative arts such as drama and art can help children internalize important concepts and externalize their own thoughts and emotions.

Similarly, teachers can use elements of therapeutic visual art in their classroom to help children deal with difficult issues or personal challenges. Art therapy “is concerned with feelings during the process of making art and how those emerging feelings can help one to reconcile conflicts and foster self-awareness and personal growth” (Dufrene, 1994, p. 6). In the case of *the Telling Bee*, art is a means for children to better absorb the material conveyed in the story and help them identify and externalize emotions experienced both by a fictional character and by themselves.



## *Elephant in my Room* A Lesson Guide for Teachers

**Story Summary:** *Elephant in my Room* is a story about a young boy who has trouble expressing his feelings. Joshua finds an elephant in his room one day and the more he fails to share his emotions and concerns, the more the elephant continues to grow. Eventually the elephant takes up Joshua’s entire room and he becomes fed up. He realizes that each time he stands up for himself and successfully expresses his feelings, the elephant shrinks, until it eventually disappears.

\* This story teaches children about the importance of externalizing and expressing their feelings. It helps develop a child’s emotional maturity and prepare them to better deal with difficult situations.

**Read Aloud:** Before reading the story aloud to the class, engage students in a “picture walk” of the book, showing them the illustrations and asking them to make predictions in order to activate their schemas. Read the story aloud, pausing to answer any questions and to ensure comprehension. If you have a support staff in the class ask them to act out some of the actions using the elephant puppet (this is particularly effective with primary grades).

**Group Discussion:** Inform students that the classroom is a safe place and it is important for students to listen to each other and participate in a respectful manner.

- Lead students in a group discussion based on the questions located at the end of the book, page 11. Brainstorm and record ideas on chart paper.
- For Junior grades, have children divide into four groups and each take responsibility for one discussion question. Bring the whole class back together to share their thoughts.

**Music Therapy:** Have students sit together on the carpet in a large circle and hand out a musical instrument to each child (drums, shakers etc.) If you do not have access to instruments you can make your own using dried pasta/beans and a folded paper plate.

- Lead a discussion with the children about how they can use their instruments to express their emotions and externalize different feelings. What would different emotions sound like? Would they be quiet or loud?
- Teach students the lyrics to the following simple song, sung to the tune of “The Wheels on the Bus”



### This is How I feel!

♪ This is how I feel right now, feel right now, feel right now  
 This is how I feel right now,  
 Shake....shake....shake...shake...shake ♪

- Before singing the song, student volunteers suggest what feeling or emotion the group is going to portray through their music and what that emotion is going to sound like. For example, a student may pick “angry” and decide that everyone will shake or beat the instrument very loudly, or “sad” and have everyone tap they’re instrument quietly.
- While you sing the song, students will keep the beat with their instruments and then express their chosen emotion on the “shake, shake, shake” part of the song.
- Next try tying the story into the music by describing the different things that happen to Joshua throughout the book. Each time he faces an obstacle he gets more and more angry and frustrated.
- Read aloud some of the passages where Joshua fails to stand up for himself and express his emotions. Have the students mimic these emotions using their musical instruments. Each time Joshua refuses to express his feelings he becomes more upset and the elephant in his room grows bigger and bigger, so the music could simultaneously become louder and more powerful.
- Once Joshua learns to express himself, he becomes more at ease and the elephant continues to shrink (the music could accompany this process by gradually getting softer and quieter).



- As an added challenge or activity for Junior classes, have students divide into groups and write their own song accompanied by their musical instruments. Each group will present their song to the class, and their audience of peers can then try to guess which emotion the group was trying to convey.

\*The above activities do not all have to be done during one lesson, but instead can be spread out over a number of lessons or days.

### ***Elephant in my Room: Developing Emotional Maturity & Expressing Emotion***

*Elephant in my Room* “helps kids to externalize their feelings about things like abuse or child maltreatment that may be going on” (Steffy, personal communication, Dec. 12, 2010). The story encourages children to speak their mind and share their feelings and emotions with people they trust in their life. This is a common theme in the *Felt Feelings* series, and is critical to intervening and coping with abuse. We need to give young children the tools they need to successfully express themselves and feel like their voice will be heard.

*Elephant in my Room* helps develop a child’s emotional maturity, “if you teach a child from the beginning to express and externalize then when things are happening they’ll have a much better prognosis for dealing with it, to survive it and get through it” (Steffy, personal communication, Dec. 12, 2010). It is for this reason that *The Elephant in my Room* functions as a coping tool for children that have experienced abuse and or a challenging event in their lives. The lessons conveyed in the story help children to cope with life’s challenges by externalizing their feelings, learning to use their voice and to seek support.

Teachers can use the therapeutic benefits of music to bring the story to life and help give children another outlet to release their emotions. Technically, “Music therapy

is the use of music in the accomplishment of therapeutic aims: the restoration, maintenance and improvement of mental and physical health” (Bunt, 1994, p. 6).

Teachers can capitalize on these gains in the classroom to help improve the emotional wellbeing of their students. Encouraging young children to express themselves through musical instruments is a therapeutic process because the “instrument can be charged with all manner of private feelings by the player yet also used as a means of communication with another person. It can bridge a gap” (Bunt, 1994, p. 97). Feelings or emotions that may be difficult to articulate verbally are often easier to express through music.

The activities in *Elephant in my Room* lesson plan help to teach all children to externalize and deal with their feelings. In addition the story may motivate a child silently suffering from abuse to stand up for him or herself and get help.



## *Stretch* A Resource for Teachers

**Story Summary:** *Stretch* is a story about fictional characters called “Woogles.” Stretch is the prince of Woogleville, and at first glance seems to live a charmed life. However, Stretch’s parents, the King and Queen are constantly fighting, which has an overwhelming impact on the young Woogle. Every time his parents fight, Stretch grows taller and taller. Eventually Stretch grows so tall that his head hits the ceiling of the castle. With the help of a magic potion, Stretch is able to express his feelings and encourage his parents to work through their problems without fighting.

\* This story deals with family conflict and encourages both parents and children to express their feelings and cope with conflict in an effective way.

**Recommendation to Families:** Instead of presenting this text as a whole class lesson, it also functions as a resource that teachers can recommend to individual families who may be coping with conflict. Or with parents’ permission find an opportunity to read the story one-on-one with the child during an appropriate time.

\* The following are some follow up activities and information that may be helpful to pass

along to families.

**Read Aloud:** The read aloud of this story is done one-on-one between a trusted adult and the child. Ensure that the child is comfortable while listening to the story. If necessary, read the book in small sections, or take periodic breaks as to not overwhelm the child.

**Discussion Questions:** Use the discussion questions on page 11 as a way to initiate dialogue with the child.

**Letter Writing:** Ask the child to write a letter to Stretch's parents, the King and Queen of Woogleville. What would they want to tell them? How are they affecting Stretch?

- Take the activity a step further by encouraging the child to write a letter to his or her own parent or parents. What would they want to tell them? How are they being affected?

### ***Stretch: Recognizing & Coping with Conflict***

*Stretch* is a relevant book when it comes to child maltreatment. Although the child in the story, Stretch is not being abused or mistreated directly, the hostile relationship between his parents is extremely damaging. "There's verbal abuse going on in Stretch. Even though its simplified, teaching kids how to cope with family conflict and how to tell about it and talk to their parents about it can prevent further abuse" (Steffy, personal communication, Dec. 12, 2010). The story draws attention to an unhealthy relationship and demonstrates the toxic affects it can have on a child.

A shocking number of children are exposed to violent family conflict, "experts report an estimated 87% of children in homes with family violence witness that abuse" (Weber, 2004, p. 26). Witnessing intimate partner violence is in itself a form of child maltreatment that has significant negative psychological affects on a child (Perrin & Miller-Perrin, 2007, p. 323).

Stretch's story may help children who find themselves in a similar situation. If their family's conflict is not overly severe it may give them the strength they need to

speak out and tell their parents how they're relationship is affecting their well-being.

Teachers should make it clear to students that if the conflict is so great that they do not feel comfortable or safe speaking to their parent, or parents, they can seek help from another trusted adult such as a teacher.



## *Shelly's Shell* A Resource for Teachers

**Story Summary:** *Shelly's Shell* is about a young turtle who is touched underneath her shell and sexually abused. After the abuse, Shelly is ashamed and sad and withdraws from the things she normally loves to do. Shelly's shell grows thicker and thicker the more she shuts down and eventually becomes so thick that she has difficulty moving and growing. Shelly meets a beautiful swan that gives her the strength to share her story and be happy and love herself once again.

\* This story deals with sexual abuse and should only be used on a case-by-case basis with children whose abuse has been confirmed. *Shelly's Shell* helps children cope with their abuse and reclaim their life.

**Recommendation to Families:** This resource is intended to be used with individual children who have experienced a confirmed instance of sexual abuse. For this reason it is not to be used as a class lesson, but instead as a resource teachers can recommend to parents of affected children.

\* The following are some follow up activities and information that may be helpful to pass along to families.

**Read Aloud:** The read aloud of this story is done one-on-one between a trusted adult and the child. Ensure that the child is comfortable while listening to the story. If necessary, read the book in small sections, or take periodic breaks as to not overwhelm the child.

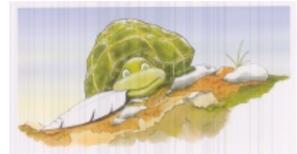
**Discussion Questions:** Use the discussion questions on page 11 as a way to initiate dialogue with the child. Be sure to recognize their bravery for sharing their story and be there to answer any questions and support them during their recovery.

**Role Play:** Use the turtle puppet during the read aloud to enhance the character development of Shelly. As well, the puppet can also help comfort the child and help them to feel safe.

**Follow Up:** Encourage the child to express how Shelly felt after she was touched underneath her shell, through a medium of their choice; drawing a picture, writing a

journal entry, playing an instrument or using some other form of expression. Use whatever materials or activities they feel comfortable with.

- Encourage the child to then express how Shelly felt after she met the Swan and received the magical feather.
- Next ask the child to repeat the processing, but instead of showing Shelly's feelings try to express their own. In addition encourage them to show what they would do and how they would feel if they had a magic feather.



### ***Shelly's Shell: Coping with Sexual Abuse***

*Shelly's Shell* is a treatment specific book that is intended for instances of confirmed abuse. The author also recommends that the story not be read to children younger than seven or eight years old (Steffy, personal communication, Dec. 12, 2010). For these reasons, *Shelly's Shell* is not appropriate for whole class lessons, but instead can be used by teachers as a resource they can recommend to affected families.

Puppets have the potential to play a significant role during the reading of this particular story. For one thing, "repetition with the puppets, leaves so much room for playing out different scenarios at different times" (Steffy, personal communication, Dec. 12, 2010). The softness of the puppets is also comforting and can help make a child feel safe and more at ease. In addition, the turtle puppet that accompanies this particular story furthers the character development of Shelly and helps the child create a stronger connection with character and her story. Most importantly the puppets in the *Felt Feelings* series add fun, and help to lighten heavier content.

*Shelly's Shell* is a valuable resource for children that have experienced sexual abuse. Shelly's story gives hope and encourages victims to reclaim their life and to love themselves unconditionally. The positive messages conveyed through the book can be

enhanced through meaningful dialogue and therapeutic activities suggested in the teacher's guide.

## **Conclusion**

Child maltreatment is a real and significant problem facing our society. The explanation for abuse runs far deeper than holding individual perpetrators responsible. The factors that contribute to abuse are engrained in the fabric of our society, our government, our culture and our economy. This overwhelming view of child maltreatment is disheartening but it is important that we recognize the problem and do our part to create a positive change. We need to recognize that "Child maltreatment is preventable. It is a product not of the human condition but of human attitude" (Kydd, 2003, p. 57).

There are many amazing programs in our communities that support and protect our children and work to create positive change. I believe that the *Felt Feelings* series by Lynne Steffy can become another program to combat and cope with child maltreatment in our society. It is a valuable resource that therapists, parents and teachers can use to support children affected by abuse, and possibly prevent cases of child maltreatment in the future. The series is a particularly powerful resource for educators who have the opportunity to impact children's lives everyday. By incorporating the *Felt Feelings* series into their programs, teachers can engage students in necessary lessons and discussions about complex issues that risk being ignored. Even if only one student in the class is affected by child abuse, or is experiencing family conflict, or is having trouble expressing their feelings, then that is one child that is going to benefit directly from the

narrative therapy of the series. In turn, the rest of the class may learn information or skills that may protect and help them cope better in the future. The *Felt Feelings* series is a stepping-stone towards change.

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