

Wall Around the Heart

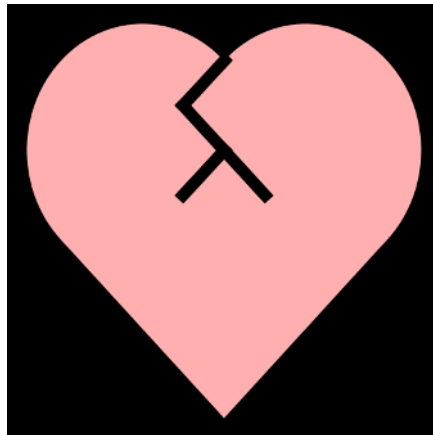
1. Have the child draw a small heart and write under it the child's name and "one-day old." In the example, a therapist is working with 6-year-old, Dan, who was adopted from foster care at age four. He was abandoned by his mother after his father abandoned the family.



Dan, one-day old

The therapist can ask, "Do you know what the heart is for?" and discuss the physical function of the heart with the child. The therapist can also explain that the heart is also for feeling and loving. When the child was born, he was ready to receive love.

2. Now ask the child to draw a bigger heart and put his name next to the heart and how old yohe was when he was abandoned or began to be mistreated. The therapist talks briefly with the child about how painful it is to be neglected or mistreated and it hurts the heart. Instruct the child to draw cracks in the heart.



Dan, age 3

Adapted by Daniel Hughes and described in:

A.A. Drewes. (2014). "Helping foster care children heal from broken attachments," In C.A. Malchiodi & D.A. Crenshaw (Eds.), *Creative arts and play therapy for attachment problems*. New York: Guilford Press.

3. The therapist now asks the child to draw an even bigger heart with his age prior to adoption. They talk about how his pain is so great that he has figured out a way to save his heart from more pain. He asks the child to draw a wall around his heart. The therapist instructs the child to make some arrows of pain with pieces of paper. He throws them at the heart, but they bounce back.



Dan, age 7

4. Finally, the therapist instructs the child to draw a fourth heart and date it after he came to live with his new Mom and Dad. He asks the child to put smaller cracks on this heart and band aids over some of the bigger cracks because they are healing. Then he asks the child to draw a wall around the heart in pencil.



The therapist states, *“You no longer need the wall. And in fact, the wall stops love from reaching your heart. You may not be sure that your adoptive parents really do love you but there is no way to experience the love, because the wall is there. The best solution is for us to find a way to take down the wall. Instead of the wall being a fort that helped to keep pain out, it has now changed into a prison wall. Now it keeps you from getting the love you want.”* (Drewes, p. 204)

Tell the child that his adoptive parents and the therapist are willing to help him take the wall down, and ask for suggestions as to how he thinks all of you can best start doing this.

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