



Creating case studies by rolling the dice: creative workshop methodologies for engaging with young people on sensitive issues

Researchers at the International Centre are carrying out a research project exploring young people's perspectives on how we can support the mental health and wellbeing needs of young people following adolescent sexual abuse. The main strand of the research uses a participatory action research approach to create safe and meaningful mechanisms through which young people who have experienced sexual abuse in adolescence can share their knowledge and views. The researchers will work in partnership with 30-40 young people over a two year period to collaboratively explore concepts of mental health, well-being and resilience after abuse and find out how young people can be best supported. This will be facilitated by a series of small group creative workshops. Please see our summary of the research on our [webpage](#).

The researchers have created a toolkit of data collection methods to engage with young people on the above issues. The toolkit includes a range of activities that rely on whole group discussion, small group work and individual work. The toolkit is also designed to respond to a range of different communication needs and preferences. We include approaches using talking methodologies such as semi-structured verbal conversations, recognising that for some young people, more traditional interview questions may be appropriate and desirable. However, we also employ creative or visual methodologies that can support young people to express themselves verbally, especially around sensitive subject matter and offer a point of reference for both the researcher and participant to refer to and reconsider during discussions. Each workshop is designed to be flexible and accessible and can all be tailored to suit the needs of each group.

Below I outline one of the activities that is included in the toolkit: a dice activity that allows the young people in the workshop create case studies of young people's journeys following sexual abuse.

Creating the activity

The collection method has been adapted from previous research for use in this study. The activity was developed in collaboration with the Young Researchers Advisory Panel (YRAP) associated with the International Centre. The YRAP also piloted the workshops with the research team. Already, we have seen the benefits of involving young people: one group identified that we were missing the role of peers in a young person's journey and we therefore added a new die following this discussion.

The Dice Activity

In order to minimise the intrusiveness of the research, and the potential distress for participants, the topics in the workshops are approached through a ‘third person’ lens. There are two facilitators at each workshop. Workshop discussion will either be recorded through detailed notes or audio, depending on the agreement of the young people at each workshop. Both facilitators will also complete detailed fieldwork notes after each workshop. These will allow us to highlight any significant findings and emerging themes.

The research questions that the dice activity aims to answer are:

- what affects does adolescent sexual abuse have on a young person’s wellbeing and mental health?
- what is the initial response from informal support structures such as families and peers and how do these support or hinder the young person’s mental health and wellbeing needs?
- How do more formal support structures respond to these needs?
- What increases access to support and what creates barriers to support?
- What does good and bad support for young people’s mental health and wellbeing needs look like?

Within this activity, participants are asked to draw on their experiences to consider how a fictional child or young person might experience support for mental health and emotional well-being needs following sexual abuse. Creating an initial medium for engagement that is removed from their personal experiences, it offers a gentler route in for participants to engage in personal reflection about these sensitive and potentially traumatic issues should they wish to do so.

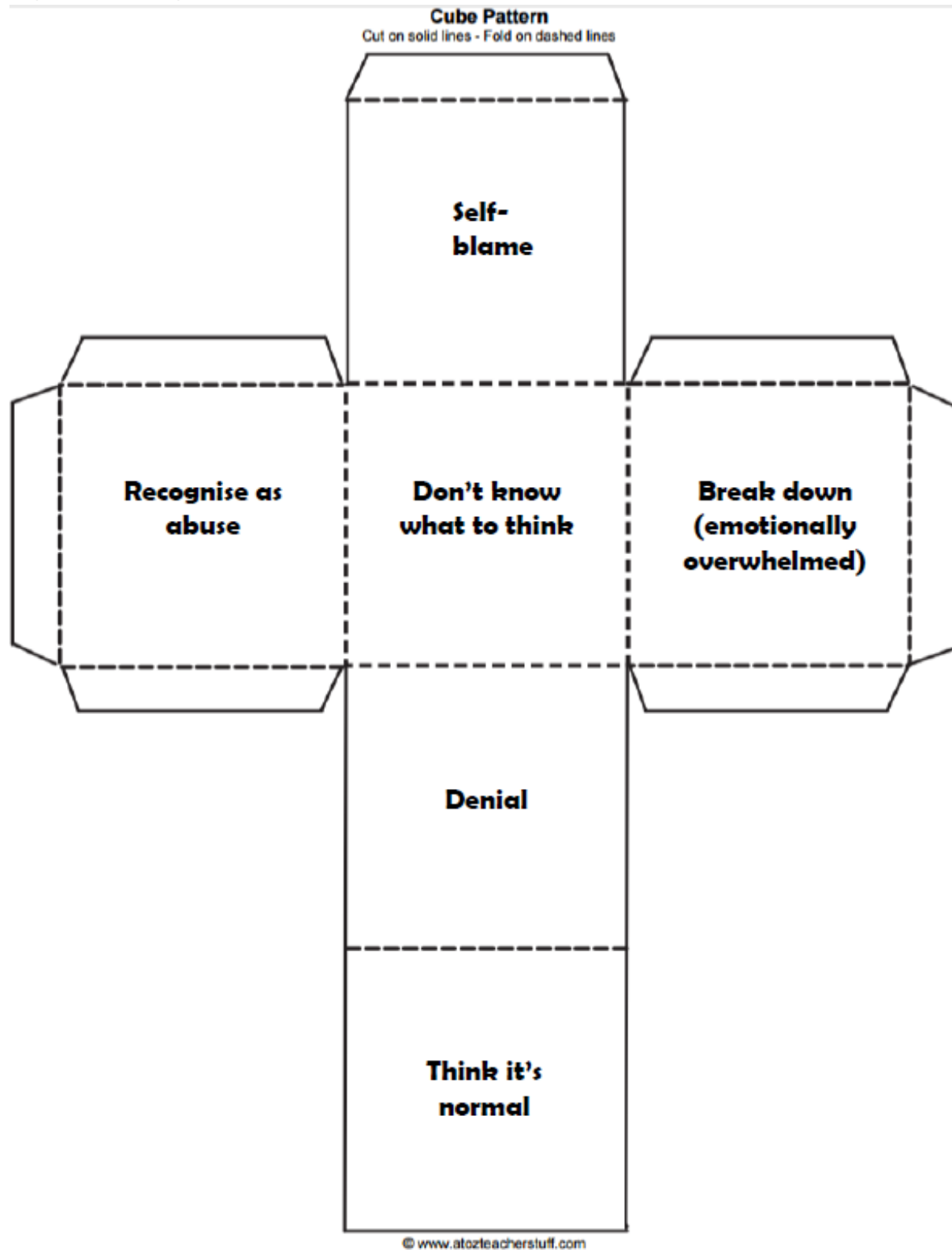
Materials

The materials required for the activity include:

- A selection of vignettes describing characters relating to the research topic. The vignettes outline brief information relating to the character’s biographical information and family situation, and may include brief details about friendship group, education engagement and interests. The vignette also includes a brief description of a hypothetical scenario of sexual abuse that the fictional young person has experienced.
- A set of dice representing nine possible stages of a young person’s journey following sexual abuse. These include:
 1. young people’s initial response
 2. first disclosure
 3. response to disclosure
 4. response in the home environment
 5. professional response
 6. places of learning response
 7. police response
 8. specialist learning response
 9. response from peers.

Each dice includes six possible outcomes (one per side) for each stage. **Figure 1** illustrates the young person’s initial response dice.

Figure 1: Young people's initial response dice



Method

- The researchers share the selection of vignettes with the young people and ask them to choose one for the activity.
- Once the young people have selected the vignette the researchers give the dice to the young people and ask them to take it in turns to roll the dice.
- After each dice roll the researchers will ask preliminary or follow up questions and support the young people to think about how each roll of the dice will affect the fictional young person's character, considering any emotional wellbeing and mental health needs and internal and external factors that may support or exacerbate these.
- After the first dice related to the young person's initial response, the young people can decide which order to roll the dice in depending on what journey they think the young person's character will follow. They may also decide to not roll a dice if they feel that this stage would not be involved in the young person's journey or relevant to their situation.

Example questions the researchers may ask include:

- Before rolling the disclosure dice: if the young person does disclose, who are they most likely to talk to about this situation?
- Before professional response: does the young person seek professional support i.e. counselling or talk to their GP? Do we roll this dice?

Use in research

The dice activity has worked really well in the young people's workshops so far. The young people involved in the workshops have enjoyed the activity and the activity has enabled us to collect rich data relating to our research questions. The use of the third person lens and the vignettes has been really successful and has allowed young people to explore sensitive issues through a character's story. The case study developed from the activity has also been really useful in other activities in the workshop. The character's story has offered a point of reference for both the researcher and participant to refer to and reconsider during discussions.

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