



WORKSHEET

We Are Family

- To create a strong symbol for family unity
- To enable a child to manage separation anxiety and night-time fears
- To use sensory connections to soothe (e.g. scent, touch)



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These activities use soft toys to encourage children to open up about how they are feeling, as well as bringing them comfort and helping them to feel safe and secure. Soft toys can become trusted companions to children and help them to manage fear and separation anxiety, and to feel connected to people they care about.



WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- One large teddy bear or soft toy, and enough smaller soft toys for each child in the family you are supporting. You may already have toys or teddies, but if not, it can be a lovely experience to choose these together with the child. Children often like to choose animals that are reflective of their personality and how they want to be seen.

A SYMBOL OF FAMILY UNITY

Encourage the family to give a name to their larger soft toy and family group, one that represents their family,

'We decided to call our large bear Big Courage and the little ones are called Tiny Courage.'

'We called our bears Kovalenkos – it was our grandfather's name.'

Put the soft toys in a prime location in the home so that they're visible to everyone and visitors to the host's home can see the strength of the family unit – both those that live in this setting and those who live elsewhere.

On a piece of paper or a postcard (available to download on our website), family members could write or draw a message to those who are not with them. This message or picture could be propped up on or close to the toy or teddy for a photo, which could then be sent home digitally, if technology allows. This will help build a sense of connection; the child can also be in these photos if they want. Photos can also be uploaded to the Bear Us In Mind social media platforms so they can see that they are part of a community of children in a similar situation. Please ensure only first names are shared and that the child only participates if they are happy to do so.





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MANAGING SEPARATION ANXIETY AND WORRIES

It may be that the child you are supporting is worried whenever they need to separate from family members, or about family members from whom they're already separated.

'I miss my mummy when I go to school – I want to stay with her.'

'I saw on the news that there are bombs near Odessa where Daddy is fighting.'

'Mum has managed to get a job but I worry about her travelling on a bus in a strange country at night.'

'Our grandfather is returning home to get Grandma – I am worried he will be shot.'

The smaller soft toys mentioned before can be given to each child as a way of keeping them connected to the family unit, reminding them that they are not alone.

With younger children, the little cubs can also be used as a puppet to chat to the larger ones or to each other, encouraging an open dialogue about the child's concerns.



'Little Lemon Cub was telling Big Blue Bear about something that really helped on the days when he was most scared...'

The child can keep their small toy or teddy close to them, clipping it on their rucksack, or taking it to bed. Or if an adult must leave them for a short or longer time frame, the small one can go with the adult to keep them safe, while the big bear stays with the child. Allow the child to be in control and come up with what they think is best. If a soft toy from the family does need to leave, encourage the adult to take a photo of them with the toy and send it back to the child so they can manage their separation anxiety.

Each soft toy could be sprayed or dabbed with a familiar scent, for example, the mother's perfume, or an essential oil. This can be soothing for the child and remind them of their loved one. For some children, more traumatic memories will be connected to the smells of burning explosives and other products of war, so it is helpful to offer an alternative, more positive smell for the brain to focus on.



BEDTIME WORRIES

Encourage the child to speak to their soft toy at bedtime, sharing whatever is on their mind by saying quietly out loud into the ear of a cuddly toy, before cuddling it or tucking it in next to them. This is a gentle way of finding out what is worrying them and can help aid restful sleep when trauma has potentially made bedtimes trickier. Processing trauma at night is very common – so expect nighttime fears (sometimes called ‘night terrors’), nightmares and occasional bedwetting. For a teenager, you could use a more direct ‘face your fears’ approach. For example, you may like to ask them what one worry they would most like to describe and think through, so that it does not interfere with their sleep.

These are just a few ideas that we hope can help with separation and maintaining a sense of connection. Even teenagers – who may consider themselves too grown-up for soft toys – can value these soothing associations, although your approach may need to differ.



If the child doesn't want to engage in these teddy bear activities or doesn't make an attachment, that is okay; it is important that you follow the child's lead in the moment. You can always suggest it again another day. Above all, try not to take it personally if one day they dismissively throw it across the room. Many will be outraged that their sense of family has been so disrupted – they simply want to get back to normal life, their school, their mates, their hobbies, their favourite foods, their home and their country.