

Should you, as the teacher, ever force children to share their own stories with each other? We don't think you should – here's why:

These thoughts are not our own. They are lessons we have learned from reading and listening to Brené Brown (www.brenebrown.com). If you haven't read her books or heard her talks – we encourage you to go do so. She explains herself far better than we are able. Here's what we learned from Brené Brown.

Brené Brown explains that:

- The “wholehearted” are those people who live a joyful, meaningful life and feel loved and a sense of belonging.
- But, we all want to live a joyful, meaningful life and feel loved and a sense of belonging – right?
- The thing is, that in order to live this way and to be loved and belong, we need to *believe* that we are worthy of love and belonging.
- The way to cultivate this belief in ourselves – this sense of worthiness - is to practise courage, compassion and connection.
- Courage means to speak one's mind by telling one's whole heart – ordinary courage is about putting our vulnerability on the line – saying who we really are, how we really feel, basically turning up as the authentic you without that mask or bravado we all put on to help us cope in any given situation.
- Compassion means “to suffer with” and compassion becomes real when we recognise our shared humanity.
- Connection means the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard and valued: when they can give and receive without judgment and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.
- The thing that gets in the way of living a joyful, meaningful life and feeling loved and a sense of belonging is shame (that intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging). We can also call this by another name – fear (the fear of not being enough, not being worthy of connection).
- In order to work through shame we have to practise “shame resilience”. We have to embrace vulnerability and own our own stories – shame keeps worthiness away by making us think that if people know our story – know who we are, where we come from; what we believe and just how much we are struggling or on the flipside just how wonderful we are – this will lead people to think less of us.
- The thing is, that the truth is the exact opposite – when we own our story and share who we are, where we come from; what we believe and just how much we are struggling or on the flipside just how wonderful we are – yes, we expose ourselves and yes, we make ourselves feel intensely vulnerable, and this requires immense courage, but ...
- Being courageous in this way is actually the key to unlocking true connection
- And recognising that we are all afraid, recognising that we humans are all flawed and that this is a part of the human condition is the key that unlocks our capacity for compassion
- And practising compassion is in turn the key that unlocks connection
- And so on and so on - like C links in a chain

This programme asks our children to explore what it is to be a human being. The programme invites each of them to think about who they are and who other people are. The programme is all about being vulnerable, exposing themselves and others and trying to foster connection with others and compassion for themselves and others through sharing stories that may resonate with them or get them to want to tell their own stories.

The issue is that while Brené Brown explains that sharing our stories takes courage – and that this courage invites connection and this connection invites compassion - when we have the courage to share our story, this can also invite ridicule, judgment, shame – and thereby disconnection – precisely the opposite of what we want to achieve.

Sharing our stories can only really be done when we feel that it is safe to share. The reason we use metaphor and other people’s stories in this programme is precisely because we want the children to be able to relate to the stories and only share what they feel safe to share and with those that they wish to share. Brené Brown calls these people the people who have earned the right to hear our stories.

So in working through this programme with your class please don’t force anyone to share their stories. That would be completely counterproductive. The idea is to share – but only with those with whom we choose to share and those people are usually a very select few who have earned the right to know.

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