**Playbook to Heal the Undercurrent of Mental or Physical Abuse**

*Unhealed Wound Seed*

**A Message from the Movie “Matilda”**

**Who:** John, foster mom and foster dad

**What:**

* John and his foster parents will watch the film Matilda (DVD loaned to the family by the therapist) before coming to the next family therapy session
* John and his foster parents will each individually write their answers to the following questions and bring their answers in to the next family therapy session:
	+ Which character did you most identify with?
	+ In what ways was that character similar to or different from you?
	+ What attributes would you like to take from that character? What aspects of that character would you avoid?
	+ Are there other characters in the film who present positive or negative attributes? Are they similar to people in your own life?
	+ Did the protagonist succeed in overcoming challenges in the film? What strategies were used to overcome the challenges?
	+ How can you use similar strategies or perhaps other strategies to overcome your own challenges?

**When:**

* John and his foster parents will watch the film “Matilda” together next Wednesday night
* John and his foster parents will share their answers to the above questions next Thursday during their next family therapy session

**Where:**

* Watch the film at home
* Discuss the questions and answers in the therapist’s office

**How:**

* The family will watch the film the day before their next family therapy session and bring in their answers to questions above for discussion to their family therapy session
* Help John and his foster parents turn any insight they gained from the film into a written action plan to inject the healthy undercurrent of support and forgiveness

**Therapist’s Guide for this Playbook**

Overview of Technique

This technique involves the use of a fictional film about Matilda, a young girl who grows up in an abusive family but ultimately makes her dreams come true through self-reliance. The presupposition behind the use of this technique is that films can act as non-threatening therapeutic metaphors to help the client to revisit old hurts in a gentle way. By using rich images that require a client to supply personal content in order to construct meaning, as well as implying directives for change rather than overtly suggesting them, the client is moved into a more contemplative way of thinking. **The film, Matilda, implicitly provokes the viewer to move from the stance of victim to one of survivor**. This is a crucial part of the healing process. This shift from victim to survivor is due to the fact that viewing the film not only increases cognitive insights, but it also addresses the affective realm which gives the viewer the necessary motivation to follow through on new cognitive insights and subsequent behaviors.

Procedures

Step 1: The first step to this technique involves the therapist providing a clear rationale for using the film in therapy. This rationale will include letting the client know that this directive is not atypical, that other clients have found viewing films to be helpful, and that a follow-up will take place in the next session.

Step 2: The second step will involve the therapist providing thorough instructions to watching the film. Even if the client says that they have already watched the film, the therapist assures the client that this viewing will be different as they are watching with specific instructions in mind. Whereas previous viewings were for entertainment purposes, the therapist will tell the client that this viewing is so that the client can focus on how the film might relate to their own life. Additionally, the therapist will tell the client and family that they are to answer the following questions as they watch the film and bring their answers in to their next therapy session for discussion.

1. Which character did you most identify with?
2. In what ways was that character similar to or different from you?
3. What attributes would you like to take from that character? What aspects of that character would you avoid?
4. Are there other characters in the film who present positive or negative attributes? Are they similar to people in your own life?
5. Did the protagonist succeed in overcoming challenges in the film? What strategies were used to overcome the challenges?
6. How can you use similar strategies or perhaps other strategies to overcome your own challenges?

Clinical Example of a case that might be similar to a case that would benefit from this playbook

John is an 11 year old boy who has come to live with his grandparents after being removed from his biological father’s care 18 months ago due to alleged physical abuse perpetrated by his father. While in his grandparent’s home, John has begun to demonstrate oppositional behaviors and a gross inability to manage his own emotions. He cries frequently as a result of his anger and has recently begun to hit his head against the wall when he is told “no” or not allowed to do what he wants to do. He also has begun to daily verbalize that he simply can’t control his own emotions because of “what was done to him by his father.” This adamantly stated belief is causing John’s grandparents to also wonder if John’s behavior is beyond his control.

After coming to understand John’s history of abuse and current situation, the therapist asked John and his grandparents if they would be interested in watching a specific film before coming to the next session. Before getting their answer, the therapist informed them that he has had other client’s with a similar background and situation to also watch the film with positive responses. The therapist believed that the film, Matilda, about a young girl who overcomes her own abusive background, will help to move John from the pre-contemplative stage to the contemplative readiness stage for change.

The therapist told John and his grandparents that the film he would like for them to watch is about a little girl named Matilda who grows up in an abusive family. The therapist is careful to point out to John that he is not actually comparing John’s experiences with those of Matilda; rather, he wants John to carefully observe Matilda and see if he sees any overall connection between her life and his own. John is also encouraged to write down on paper the characters that he likes and doesn’t like along with why he likes or dislikes them. At the end of the film, John is also asked to write down the main points that he would like to discuss in session.

Both John and his grandparents agreed to watch the film and the therapist told them where they could rent it for a dollar. The therapist also shared with John and his grandparents that they would be discussing the film in the next session and reminded them to bring their notes they wrote down while watching the film.

When John and his grandparents returned for the next session, they each brought in notes that they had taken while watching the film. It was evident that they had already discussed their insights with each other and were eager to share with the therapist.

To begin the discussion, the therapist asked John which character he most identified with. John said that he identified with the girl in the film, Matilda because he had to make his own meals most of the time while living with his dad. He said that his grandparents weren’t like Miss Honey because they never “had it bad like she did” but they did rescue him from his dad like Miss Honey rescued Matilda. Throughout the conversation, the therapist frequently polled John’s grandparents for their insights also but the main focus was on John.

In response to the question of what attributes John admired in Matilda, he said that he admired that she was resourceful and was able to get away from her abusive parents. This was the opening that the therapist was hoping for and he then asked John if he saw any of that resourcefulness in himself. John said that he was smart like Matilda. When asked how he could use his intelligence, John stated that he could study and do his homework in school. He also said that he could learn to control his anger and stop hitting his head against the wall.

At this point, the therapist asked both John and his grandparents which of the two goals that John stated were the most important to focus on right now – doing his homework in school or learning to control his anger. All three agreed that it was most important that John learn to control his own anger first.

At this point, the therapist helped John and his grandparents come up with a written action plan to help John to manage his anger. They decided to call this action plan - John’s “smart” plan to control his anger. The goal of this action plan is to help John to learn how to de-escalate prior to him reaching the point of crying and “banging” his head against the wall.

The first step to developing this action plan was to educate the family on using a “time out” properly by using the memory aid of the Four R’s. The therapist also encouraged John’s grandparents to track John’s progress with a chart that will daily note John’s successful use of the Four R’s and will provide incentives in the way of celebration days during which John and his grandparents will do something fun together.

The following material was reviewed with John and his grandparents.

1. What is a time out?

A time out is a choice you make with your grandparents to leave a situation before you say or do something aggressive, damaging, hurtful or disrespectful.

It is a way of taking responsibility by leaving for a while so that you can get back control of your body and mind.

1. Why take a time out?

You take a time out to protect yourself from hitting your head against the wall and to protect your grandparents from your mouth.

1. When to take a time out?

Take a time out when you start to notice your signs of anger.

John’s Time Out strategy was then personalized and written up as the following action plan. The personalized part of the action plan is noted in italics.

John’s “smart” plan for anger management

**Recognize** = Remember your signs of anger? Recognize when *you are starting to glare, your eyebrows furrow, and you start to snap or tap fingers*. You also start to think that you *“deserve” to get to do something because of your past abuse*. These are important triggers for a time out

**Retreat** = Leave. *Go to your room*. You and your grandparents have already agreed ahead of time for you to take your time out.

**Relax** = Go to your room and do something that helps you relax. *(Your choices are to work on your 1000 piece puzzle, work on your artwork, or watch a portion of the movie Matilda that your grandparents purchased for you)* REMEMBER, the goal is to feel better and to let go of your anger. DON’T keep thinking about what made you angry…let it go.

**Return** = this means to come back. It might be the hardest part. Going back to the scene of the argument with your grandparent means you will have to work things out. REMEMBER; don’t expect the person you got mad at to be in a good mood. Maybe they will, maybe they won’t. But, when you go back, you must be prepared to obey and listen.

Finally, John and his grandparents were helped to identify what fun activities they could do to celebrate John’s successful use of his “smart” plan. They all agreed that for every 7 days that John uses his time out properly they will go to a restaurant of John’s choice to celebrate. If he successfully uses his time out for 14 days, John will get $20 to spend at his favorite store. At the end of 30 successful days, John and his grandpa will go on an overnight camping trip.

These “celebration day” agreements were added to the bottom of John’s action plan and all three signed the plan.