10th Anniversary Reviews of Healing Spaces

"Healing Spaces is a required text in the first year of the CYC program. Faculty in the program have found it offers the students a clear understanding of the concepts of the milieu, along with promoting reflection and critical thinking about what it will mean to work with young people in a variety of settings."

Jeff Reid, M.Ed., CYC-P. Certified CYC
Faculty, Child and Youth Care Program,
Nova Scotia Community College,
Dartmouth, NS

"Healing Spaces is just one demonstration of Michael Burns’ dedication and commitment to enriching best practices in the field of child and youth care. His conceptualization of a framework magnifying the role of practitioners working with disadvantaged and vulnerable populations in any sector is nothing less than brilliant. It’s no wonder Healing Spaces has been a fundamental resource across many CYC diploma and degree programs across the GTA."

Faculty, Child and Youth Care BA Program,
Ryerson University, Toronto, ON

"Healing Spaces is an integral resource in our program, and since its first publication, it has been a much-utilized text by students and by the instructors in the delivery of our curriculum. Michael Burns’ rich experiences as a Child and Youth Care practitioner is evident in the practical manner in which he conveys methods to develop and create therapeutic activities to support kids on their healing journey."

Susan Claire Johnson, MMFT,
Coordinator, Child and Youth Care Program,
Red River College,
Winnipeg, MB

"Healing Spaces has been used in courses in the CYC program at George Brown College for the past 9 years. Some texts I say to students, ‘Read!’ For other texts like Healing Spaces I say, ‘Read and keep, since this will be a resource when you become a CYC practitioner.’ This book illustrates how to create environments, for children and youth, through planned activities and interventions, that are therapeutic, restorative, and healing."

Rick Kelly, M.Sc., B.A., C.C.W. Certified CYC.
Faculty, Child and Youth Care Program,
George Brown College, Toronto, ON

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Michael Burns
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HEALING SPACES

As the name suggests, this text was written to assist CYCPs in creating spaces where children/youth can heal. Each of the next five chapters explores the five environmental elements in detail and provides you with easily understood definitions and descriptions. The chapters describe the elements of the environment that are critical to creating an effective therapeutic milieu, offer a variety of exercises to assist you in appreciating these elements, and provide a wealth of strategies and suggestions on ways to enhance the treatment milieu. These suggestions and strategies are framed within the context of first creating a safe environment, then one that sends a message of welcome and inclusion to its entire membership, and finally one that affirms the individuals as well as the collective.

The diary of a young child and youth care graduate is woven throughout these five chapters to give you a real-life story of someone who could be you, creating and developing a therapeutic milieu along with the suggestions of each chapter. She and her child and youth care husband plan, create, and implement their dream of a therapeutic foster home that will assist troubled children/youth. Their struggles, successes, and failures reflect each chapter’s contents and strategies on the therapeutic milieu and are a good reflection of residential and foster care environments and their challenges.

Exercises throughout each of the five chapters have been inserted for you to conduct either by yourself or as part of a group exercise in the classroom, as another method of assisting you in understanding and implementing the aids provided. Each series of exercises requires you to reflect on your experiences, past and present, in respect to various elements in the therapeutic milieu. Each chapter includes three series of these student exercises related to safety, inclusiveness, and affirmation—elements necessary for an effective therapeutic milieu. Three environmental checklists are provided in each of the five chapters to assist you to evaluate therapeutic milieus designed for children/youth. *The Healing Spaces Manual* includes a master list of these checklists to allow you to easily conduct assessments while working in the field or on placement.
The text concludes with a chapter that presents three complete environmental assessments of typical therapeutic milieus that employ CYCPs. Each therapeutic milieu, a classroom, a group home, and a children’s mental health centre, is evaluated according to the therapeutic checklists provided in each of the five chapters. The assessments come complete with recommendations for each of the environments to increase their therapeutic treatment potential. You will find this chapter practical and helpful as it offers clear directions on how to implement a successful environmental assessment complete with recommendations.

*Healing Spaces* is accompanied by a manual that contains 90 activities that you can implement in your field placement or internship practicum settings to assist children/youth to understand and implement change in their environments. The activities reflect the three need factors of safety, inclusion, and affirmation and are designed for you to use with individuals 5-25. There are 18 activities per environmental element. Six of these activities are focused on environmental safety, six that will help to create and maintain a welcoming and inclusive milieu, and six activities that promote and enhance the feeling of being valued within the environment.

Each of the 18 exercises lists the following: the purpose of the activity, the age of child and ideal size of the group, the materials needed, instructions or discussion elements to conduct the activity, variations of the activity to allow for maximum versatility, and cautions that can assist in the successful implementation of the activities.

In addition, each activity is fully contained on a single page, one activity per page, so that you can have easy and clear access to the specifics of the activity at a glance. This format for the activities and the ring-binding of the total manual makes for ease of use in your field placement. A complete exercise can be photocopied on one page or, because of the ring-binding, the *Manual* can be easily opened flat to the particular page. The *Manual* also contains 40 games (icebreakers, warm-ups, and cool-downs) that allow you to create entire activity programs centred on the therapeutic milieu.
Professors in the field of child and youth care and related fields will appreciate *Healing Spaces*’ many examples that cross a variety of experiences. Its language is easy to read and understand and its exercises contribute to class discussions. The text also provides suggestions for implementation in the field, with its extensive compilation of practical activities in the *Healing Spaces Manual* for students to implement with children/youth. *Healing Spaces* is a fun, easy-to-read text that makes learning experiences practical and exciting.

I invite you to the challenge of creating environments where abused, neglected, marginalized, unattached, and traumatized children/youth can find safety, peace, and understanding. It is in these types of environments, and only these types of environments, that they will be able to regain their balance and maintain direction to their lives. This challenge requires you to study, reflect, learn, and practice the theory, techniques, and ideas put forward in this text. Read each chapter, complete the exercises, discuss your thoughts with others, and implement the activities in your placement settings. I would wish you luck but luck has nothing to do with this—this act requires hard work and determination, Enjoy.
EXERCISE 1-3

Physical Environments from Childhood

A) Think of the physical environments that you frequented as a child (home, school, neighbourhood, etc.). Select those environments where you felt safe. Try to differentiate between feeling safe as a result of the individuals in the environment and the sense of safety as a result of the physical environment. Try to focus in on the physical environment exclusively and not on the individuals in the environment. Once you have decided on three environments, try listing the aspects of the physical environment(s) that you believe contributed to its sense of safety for you as a child.

Environment #1

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Environment #2

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Environment #3

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Generate a list of qualities, attributes, or dynamics that you found common to each experience and those you found unique.

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

B) Now recall physical environments where you did not feel safe as a child. Concentrating on the physical aspects of the environments, what do you feel contributed to your sense of physical discomfort or danger? Remember to stay with the physical aspects of the environment.

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

C) Share with a partner or write below what safety issues, positive and negative, you uncovered.

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
Creating and Maintaining an Affirming Sensory-Emotional Milieu

As previously pointed out, a sensory-emotional affirmative environment is one in which the child/youth feels that his/her feelings are considered important and significant to the milieu and its inhabitants. An affirmative milieu takes time and a great deal of hard work to achieve. It comes from perseverance, dedication, and knowledge. It occurs when group members have shared experiences and have shared experiences of emotional intensity. This can only happen in an environment that has been developed, over time, to fit with the group’s collective needs, wants, and desires. Throughout this chapter you have been learning about ways to assist children/youth to feel emotionally safe and included. Most of these have been through self-exploration and then experimentation with the group through the use of therapeutic activities from the manual. These activities have been exposing the children/youth to various sensory-emotional experiences and have been slowly assisting them in developing a level of comfort with their emotional lives and those of the others. A sensory-emotional affirmative milieu results after the children/youth have been together for enough time to fully trust one another. This level of trust is essential to the group’s emotional development and is one of the requirements for an affirming sensory-emotional milieu.

Canadian Community Health Survey: Mental Health 2012

Approximately 2.8 million people, or 10.1% of Canadians aged 15 and older, reported symptoms consistent with at least one of six mental or substance use disorders in the past 12 months.

Youth (aged 15 to 24) met the criteria for mood disorders and substance use disorders more than any other age group.

This confirms that youth need the tools and resources to help them manage their mental health issues and that stigma reduction needs to continue being a priority in Canada.

Statistics Canada, 2012
begins to see the value in differences and to become more inclusive in their thinking and behaviour.

Anita, a black female youth, was attending a sexual abuse survivor’s group, and Cassandra, a third-year student, was one of three co-facilitators. Anita was a very timid, withdrawn 16-year old who suffered from severe depression and suicidal ideation. When Anita shared her story in the fourth week of the group of being ridiculed and raped by a group of self-proclaimed Nazis, the whole group was outraged. Cassandra spent more than an hour with her co-facilitators debriefing Anita’s disclosure. This experience had a profound effect on Cassandra, and she returned to her seminar group the following week with an acute awareness of how prejudice and racism can injure and sometimes destroy an individual’s self-esteem. She met with her instructor after the class and requested that he conduct some awareness activities that would help the group learn more about racism. As a result of her experience and her conversation with the class, her instructor brought in a speaker on cultural diversity to discuss stigmatization in Canadian culture.
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ACTIVITY 1-6
Practicing Safety

Purpose: To provide children/youth with opportunities to practice safety measures and procedures within their physical environment.

Participants: ✓ Individual with facilitator  OR ✓ Group up to 10 (group is best)
✓ Age 5+

Materials: Prizes or other incentives

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. After having discussed various safety measures, concerns, and strategies, develop a contest among the children/youth within the environment.

2. Points will be given to the individual or group who discovers a safety issue within their present milieu or another milieu that they frequent.

3. The safety issue, tip, or concern will be presented to the group to decide if it is a valid safety concern or useful safety tip.

4. Give incentives such as prizes, increased privileges, pizza night, etc. to celebrate the group’s commitment to safety.

Variations: After having obtained permission from your field placement supervisor, conduct an impromptu fire drill and time your group. Over the next few weeks conduct further fire drills and give incentives such as prizes, increased privileges, etc. to celebrate the precision of the group in leaving the environment in a safe and orderly fashion. Be sure to check for things like closed doors, children’s behaviour, and group level of responsibility. In addition, you can have the group of children/youth give each other roles and responsibilities to perform during an emergency and then model these roles during a practice fire drill (i.e. door closer, group leader, head counter, etc.).

More Variations: After discussing this activity with your field placement supervisor, organize a walk or car ride through the neighbourhood. This activity can be conducted when you arrive at a campsite, go on a class outing, have a field day at the school, before an activity or athletic event or before or after any time the students go outside of the therapeutic milieu. You may wish the children/youth to act individually or in small groups. Provide the children/youth with a checklist or a blank sheet of paper and ask them to explore the environment and determine its strengths and weaknesses in terms of safety.
ACTIVITY 2-9
Lost in Space

Purpose: To provide the group with problems that will challenge their ability to function as a unit, as a way of increasing group cohesion and inclusiveness.

Participants: ✓ Individual with facilitator   OR ✓ Group up to 12 (group is best)
✓ Age 9+

Materials: • A list of the following materials posted or given to each member:
one hand-held computer game, three-days supply of water, a box of matches, a 6-week old kitten, one-day supply of food, a packet of two flares, a long piece of wire, a large piece of canvas, a global positioning system (GPS), a bottle of vitamins, a disposable camera, a storybook, and a cell phone.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. You may want to start this activity with a relaxation and a guided fantasy (see Appendix H for relaxation activity).

2. Instruct the group to imagine that they are a group of astronauts on a mission to explore strange and new galaxies.

3. Their spacecraft is about to crash, and they have to decide which eight items they will take with them in the escape shuttle.

4. Each member has to agree to the final list before they can depart in the shuttle.

5. The shuttle has capabilities for them to land on the nearest planet, but they must rely on someone finding them in order to return to earth.

Variations: This is an adaptation of Survival (Time In, 2013). There are a number of situations you can dramatize to make this game suit the group, for example: an airliner that they have to bail out of, lost in the jungle, stranded in a big city, or trapped in a tunnel.

▲ Cautions: Some groups may get stuck in a stalemate, or may not have a useful method of problem-solving and may need your help.
APPENDIX E:
Environmental Checklists

PHYSICAL MILIEU – SAFE?

☐ Are there smoke detectors, sprinkling systems, and fire extinguishers adequately placed throughout the milieu?
☐ Are the smoke detectors and other fire safety equipment properly maintained?
☐ Are the children, youth, and adults trained in the use of fire extinguishers?
☐ Are safety routes and emergency exits clearly marked for the children/youth?
☐ Does the facility conduct regular fire drills?
☐ Does the milieu provide an efficient flow of traffic to allow for children/youth to safely enter and exit the environment?
☐ Are there formal discussions facilitated with the children/youth regarding fire safety?
☐ Are matches, lighters, candles, and other fire-hazardous materials locked up and out of reach to children/youth?
☐ Are paint, cleaning materials, aerosol cans, toxic plants, drugs, and medications locked up in areas where the child/youth does not have unsupervised access?
☐ Are all staff trained in the appropriate handling of toxic chemicals like cleaners and aerosols?
☐ Are painting supplies such as markers, felt pens, and paints of the non-toxic, child-safe variety?
☐ Are sharp knives, tools, scissors, machinery, and other devices locked up, and are they used under supervision in order to maintain the safety of the milieu?
☐ Are floor surfaces padded or made safe with non-slip materials?
☐ Do stairs have railings and slip-free treads both indoors and outdoors?
☐ Is the furniture regularly inspected for flaws or sharp edges and repaired when necessary?
☐ Are the windows in the milieu childproofed and do they have appropriate screens?
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