

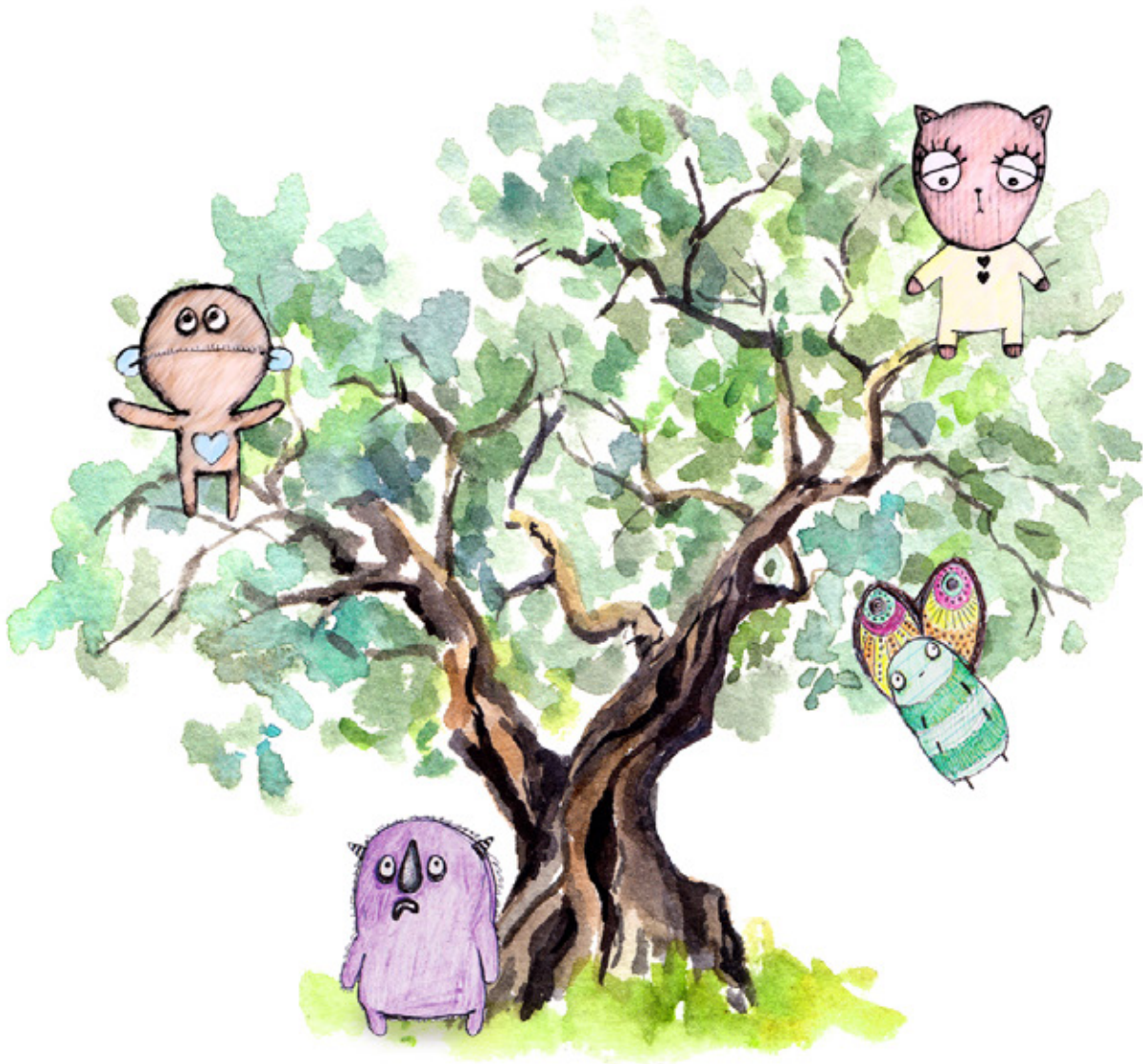


The Big Tree

Therapeutic Dolls Manual

Please be careful...

The Big Tree Therapeutic Dolls are designed to be used for therapeutic purposes only. They are not to be used by children and/or young people who are not under the direct supervision of an adult. The dolls include small parts like buttons. They are not for children under 3 years of age.



Please respect our work....

© 2019, Australian Childhood Foundation

The Big Tree Therapeutic Dolls, associated resources and documentation have been produced by the Australian Childhood Foundation. It cannot be copied, reproduced or transmitted, in part or in full, without the written permission of the CEO of the Australian Childhood Foundation.



Contents

Origins of the Big Tree Therapeutic Dolls.....	4
Children, Trauma and the Big Tree Therapeutic Dolls	5
The Big Tree Therapeutic Dolls at a Glance	7
Morten's Tale from the Big Tree	10
Ollie's Tale from the Big Tree	13
Susan's Tale from the Big Tree.....	16
Ellen's Tale from the Big Tree	19
Therapeutic ideas for working with children and families using the Big Tree Therapeutic Dolls	21
Examples of using the dolls in a therapeutic space.....	24
Activity Ideas for working with the Big Tree dolls	51



Origins of the Big Tree Therapeutic Dolls

In 2012, the Australian Childhood Foundation entered into a partnership with luxury fashion house Gucci Australia with a collaborative view of creating a resource for children who have experienced trauma.

In collaboration with designer and maker Harriet Godden, four colourful, weighted, texturally rich dolls were born as relatable, useful companions for children healing from experiences of trauma. They have grown and developed since then. The Big Tree Therapeutic Dolls are conceived of as children themselves who have experienced their own troubles. These four characters have worked out ways to cope and recover from their tough times and in this way have lots to offer children who could be going through similar struggles.

The extensive research, practice and theoretical frameworks at the Australian Childhood Foundation (ACF) also underpin this venture. These have enhanced our understanding that accessing children's sensory experience through toys and play helps to unlock the trauma held in their bodies and minds. Our interventions are relationally based and informed by multi-disciplinary bodies of work such as sensorimotor psychotherapeutic interventions, the polyvagal theory, and broader learnings from the body of literature around the neurobiology of trauma and attachment.

You can learn more about the therapeutic work at ACF at our website www.professionals.childhood.org.au



Children, Trauma and the Big Tree Therapeutic Dolls

Trauma effects the way children experience their environment - it impacts the way they play and diminishes their orientation towards exploration.


Trauma can become a filter through which the sensory experience of their world is interpreted.

When a child is exposed to trauma, their body reacts in a way to maximise the chance of survival. This involves a number of physical actions that prepare the child's body to endure the threat. After the experience is over, the memory of it can still linger, held in the body, and cause a heightened sense of readiness as the child attempts to be alert to further cues of danger. If the trauma is ongoing, as it is for so many children, the stress response will be chronically activated. As such, a child experiences stress constantly – at times when their memories, dreams and thoughts are awakened with terror and fear. They struggle to feel safe and calm. They become disconnected from an awareness of their body and find it difficult to understand their internal rhythms and sensations.

Play can bring the body of children and their internal processes of safety into more effective alignment.

The Big Tree dolls are tools aimed at helping to modulate a child's traumatised nervous system and to build more flexibility into their trauma response system. The enriched sensory nature of the dolls and their relatable characters confer messages on both physiological, emotional and cognitive levels that could help children to build an increased sense of safety and awareness of themselves in the present moment. With repeated exposure and relational support our children can learn to trust in this growing sense of calm and safety and generalise it from therapeutic spaces into their day to day lives.





In a safe environment, children are encouraged to attend to their thoughts, their feelings and their bodies and are then supported to improve their capacity to regulate stress.

As a shift away from the more traditional cognitive and language based approaches, the Australian Childhood Foundation practitioners have incorporated more body focused interventions which place an emphasis on the experience of the 'whole child'.

The weighted, colourful, tactile nature of the Big Tree dolls complement this approach. The sensory nature of these four characters provide children with tools to better regulate their guarded systems.

The Big Tree dolls are relatable, playful supports to children recovering from trauma and can meet the needs of children progressing through their unique therapeutic journey.

The Big Tree dolls can be used in different ways with children to promote diverse dimensions of therapeutic work. While the dolls function well on a sensory level, they have also been designed to operate and support children metaphorically. Each doll has a story and a set of trauma recovery related themes that make them uniquely placed to aid children healing from trauma.



The Big Tree Therapeutic Dolls at a Glance



Morten Monster

Address: The Big Tree

Description: Morten is a friendly, sensitive monster. He has many feelings he shows through the various facial features he displays on his front. He carries all of his unused facial features with him in a pouch in his back, so they are always there to change around if he starts to feel differently. Morten is a very expressive monster that just wants to be accepted. He has trouble sometimes going for walks or to the shops because he feels like people are scared of him. They don't really know Morten and can sometimes have the wrong idea about monsters like him. He is working on ways to feel better about himself and to feel like he fits in with those around him.

Key Themes: Exploring Identity and Emotional Expression.

Ollie Monkey

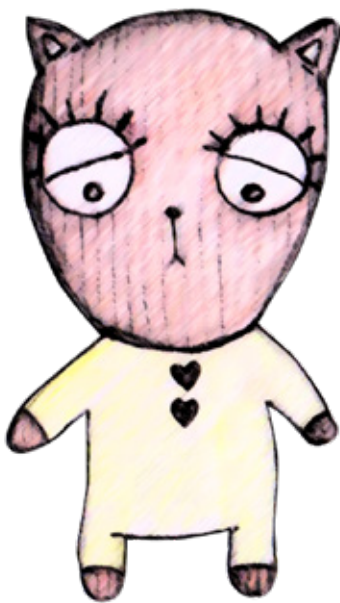
Address: The Big Tree

Description: The first thing most people notice about Ollie is his big mouth. It is often full of the yummiest foods that he loves sharing with those around him. Ollie is a very caring monkey that loves hugs, smiles and being with friends. There is a brightness and richness to Ollie that people like to be around, and his sense of wonder and mischievousness makes him always curious about the world around him.

What a lot of people don't know about Ollie is that he is a brilliant listener with his big blue and white spotty ears. His friends know that he is easy to talk with because of his good listening skills and because the zip on his mouth means he will keep safe any idea that they tell him until they are ready for him to open up and share it. He is a very trustworthy monkey.

Key Themes: Nurture and Nourishment, Being Heard and Finding Voice.





Susan Kitten

Address: The Big Tree

Description: Susan is a soft, lovable kitten with a lot on her mind. Her head is often full of ideas and feelings, many of which worry and scare her. You can see what is going on in Susan's mind by opening a pocket in the top of her head and pulling out the concertinaed book with velcroed images that show you exactly what is going on in there.

Susan struggles with bedtime and sleep. Luckily, she is a very smart kitten who is learning about ways to relax and find calm. Once relaxed and calm Susan is better able to read the hopeful and positive imagery and self-understanding recently written in the book she keeps in her mind. Now, as she shuts her big wide eyes she looks forward to sleep as she can take her book of beautiful imaginings and hopes with her to help weave some lovely dreams.

Key Themes: Practicing Relaxation and Calm. Exploring self narratives.

Ellen Caterpillar

Address: The Big Tree

Description: Ellen is a curious, hopeful caterpillar; with feelers always looking out for useful information. She lives on her own in the Big Tree and can come across as shy when you meet her, mainly because she doesn't talk much about herself. Ellen is trying to work out who and what she wants to be as she grows up. She can't seem to shake the feeling that she doesn't measure up and isn't sure where she belongs. Ellen looks to others to help her. She weaves a cocoon for some time on her own to curl up and knit some ideas together. After a time she emerges transformed. Now she can fly and see the world in a way she never dreamed of, and the beauty that she always held inside becomes written on her wings for everyone to see.

Key Themes: Transformation and Increasing Adaptability.



Morten Monster



- ★ Expressions
- ★ Emotions/Feelings
- ★ Play/Experiment.
- ★ Dress up.
- ★ Identity

- ★ Back pocket to hold changable features.



- ★ Features change to reflect how Morten Monster is feeling

- ★ Eyes, mouths, noses and accessories.



Morten's Tale from the Big Tree

There's a big tree, not too far from here. At its base is a large wooden door that leads to many hollow spaces and secret hiding places.

Inside one of these spaces lives Morten. Morten is a monster who's been hiding away in his hollow for years.

Every move Morten makes is louder than a stampede, and when he speaks his voice roars through the forest like a jumbo jet. This makes everyone think Morten is scary, and often gets him into trouble. To avoid upsetting his neighbours, Morten stays inside. But he often feels lonely.

One day Morten grew tired of hiding away in the darkness. He wanted to let everyone know that although he was big he certainly wasn't scary.

So, Morten decided he would write a letter to his neighbours in the big tree. He had just sat down with some paper and a pen when he began to feel overwhelmed. Morten had so much to say, but he didn't know where to start. As he stared at the blank page the lines began to wriggle like worms. Thoughts spun around his mind as if it were a washing machine and his chest felt heavy, like it was covered in bricks.

Suddenly, something fell onto the paper. A tiny snail had tumbled into Morten's hollow through the open window.


"Are you okay?" asked Morten, startled by the snail's dramatic entrance.

"What do you think this thing's for?" replied the snail, happily knocking on his shell.

Relieved, Morten smiled and let out a chuckle moving everything on the table, including the tiny snail.

As the snail rolled along the lines of the page, he noticed they were blank. "What are you writing?" he asked. "Well, I wanted to write a letter but I'm not sure where to start" sighed Morten. "Have you tried using pictures?" asked the snail. "When I find it hard to express myself in writing, I use images instead."






Morten watched as the tiny snail glided along the page. He moved his body from left to right, slowly painting a beautiful picture that glistened in the light.

“Go on” the snail said.
“Try showing me how you’re feeling.”

As Morten created his picture, the thoughts in his head cleared like the morning fog.



Expressing himself was a little easier, but before long he felt stuck again. Morten decided to go for a walk through the forest to help relax his mind. It had been a long time since Morten last stepped outside. He grew nervous and hoped he wouldn’t run into anyone.

To calm his nerves, Morten focused on taking deep breaths. With every breath in he thought deeply about what he wanted to write in his letter. He would then try to breathe out all the clutter as he exhaled.

Before long, he came across an elephant trumpeting cheerful music with her long trunk. The elephant was surprised to see Morten. “What brought you out of the hollows?” she asked.

Morten explained that he had been trying to write a letter but was having trouble explaining his thoughts. The elephant completely understood. “Letting people know how you feel can be hard sometimes” she said. “My long trunk hides my mouth, so no one can tell if I’m happy or sad.” “So what do you do?” asked Morten.

“I express myself with music!” said the elephant before trumpeting in celebration. “Why don’t you give it a go?”

With every beat, Morten felt another thought being set free. Together with the elephant, he stayed in the forest playing music until sundown.

Along the walk home, Morten noticed the stars sparkling in the sky. As he marvelled at the perfectly clear night, he realised that his mind was clear too.

Morten went to sleep that night, feeling comfortable and in control of his feelings. The following morning, he sat down at the table and again stared at the blank sheet of paper.

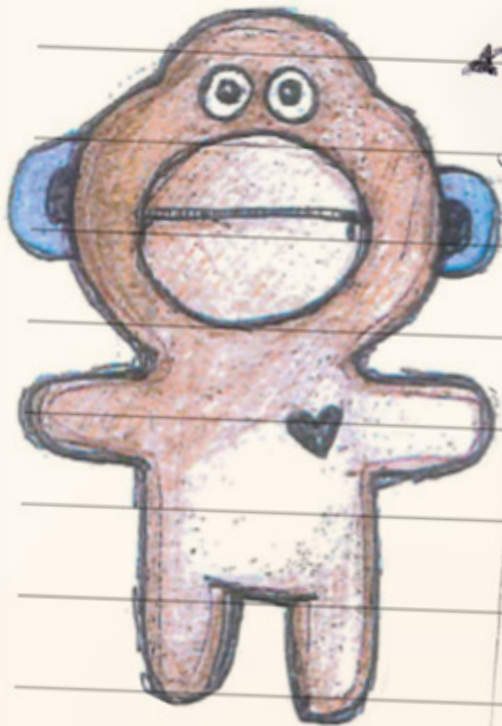
But this time the lines on the page stayed perfectly still, and Morten’s thoughts tumbled through his mind with confidence, not confusion.

As Morten put pen to paper the words fell steadily, soaking the pages like rain drops. Before he knew it, the letter was complete. Morten made enough copies for everyone in the big tree then set off to deliver them.

At first, those in the tree were surprised to see Morten out of his hollow. But after reading his letter they understood how he felt, and realised that he wasn’t big and scary after all. He was simply Morten, the friendly monster.

Heart
detail
on
ALL

Ollie Monkey



← Zippy mouth
food inside.

- ★ Fabric: Brown Bobbly fur - very tactile & soft
- ★ Tastes / Smells / textures comforts
- ★ Nature / safe / fulfilled
- ★ Hungry monkey - nourishment



Ollie's Tale from the Big Tree

Not too far from here is a forest. Overlooking the entire forest grows a big tree. In the middle of the tree lives Ollie the monkey.

Ollie doesn't have any family, so sometimes he feels lonely. He wishes that he could find another monkey to stay by his side. Someone to look after him, love him and help him out when things get hard.

One day, Ollie was playing in the big tree when something bright and colourful caught his eye. Dangling in the tree, high above Ollie, were enormous bunches of fruit.

Ollie took a deep breath in and smelled the flavours of the fruit. There were berries that were sweet like lollies, long yellow bananas, and crisp green apples. As he breathed out, Ollie stretched his long monkey arms towards the fruit, but they were all just out of reach.

Ollie felt small and lonely. "If only I knew another monkey who could help me reach the fruit" he thought.

With that, he decided he would swing from branch to branch in search of someone.

Before long, Ollie came across a family of birds. The mother bird gracefully flew through the forest gathering food for her babies. Ollie watched as she fed her young, and spread her wings around them in a warm, comforting cuddle. He could feel the warmth of the mother bird's love from the other end of the branch.

Seeing the mother bird feed her babies made Ollie think about the bunches of fruit again. He thought about the energy he would feel as the fruit filled his tummy and how great it would be to have someone to share it with.

Ollie continued to swing from branch to branch, in search of another monkey. He swung for hours and as the evening arrived, he realised that he was in fact the only monkey in the big tree.

This made Ollie feel lonelier than ever. Without anyone to help him, the fruit seemed far out of reach. Sad and hungry, Ollie decided to head back to his branch and go to sleep.

With the night sky quickly darkening, Ollie was finding it hard to see. Suddenly, he heard a voice.





“Watch out!” it said “you nearly missed the branch altogether!”

Peering through the darkness, Ollie heard a rustle. Under the light of the moon, he noticed two big round eyes looking right at him.

An old possum had been watching him swing from branch to branch. “What are you doing out so late?” she asked. “Your family must be worried about you.”

“I don’t have a one” replied Ollie sadly.

The possum understood how Ollie felt. “I haven’t had a family for a long time either” she said. “What happened?” asked Ollie. “They simply grew up replied the old possum. “I still speak to them every now and again, but I miss gathering fruit for them, and keeping them warm in my pouch.”

“I wish I had someone to help me gather fruit” said Ollie. “Well I might not be as fast as I used to be, but I’d be more than happy to help” replied the old possum. “Really, oh that would be great” Ollie smiled.

“Now about that fruit. With these little hands I might not be able to get them lose” said the possum. “That’s ok, I think I know someone who can help” Ollie offered.

With the old possum following in tow, Ollie returned to the birds nest. He told the mother bird about the fruit hanging high in the Big tree. “I’m flattered that you thought of me, I’d love to help” crowed the mother bird. With that, Ollie, the old possum and the bird set off into the evening.

As Ollie navigated the possum scurried ahead, guiding the group through the darkness with her big eyes. Soon a sweet smell carried through the forest air. The fruit was so close, they could almost taste it.

They looked up and there in the light of the moon were enormous bunches of brightly coloured fruit hanging on the highest of branches. The mother bird flew to the fruit, pecking at each bunch until they loosened. “Watch out here they come.”

Ollie opened his long arms as wide as he could. As the mother bird returned to the branch, bunch after bunch of yummy fruit landed in Ollie’s arms with a bounce.

Ollie shared the fruit with the mother bird, the possum and himself. Together they sat on the branch and enjoyed the many different flavours and textures. Ollie enjoyed a sweet yellow banana that was soft and warm under his tongue.

The mother bird’s beak was stained from the rich red berries, while the old possum crunched on a crisp green apple, squirting juice on the others with every bite.

As they relaxed together under the moonlight Ollie realised that he didn’t need to find another monkey to feel strong and supported. Thanks to the mother bird and the old possum, he had found a family of his own inside the tree, and now that they had each other, reaching great heights would be easy.

Susan Kitten



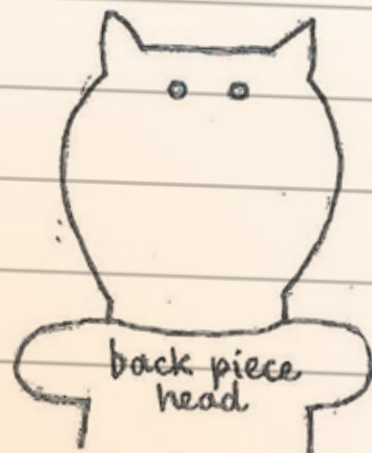
- ★ Dreams / Imagination
- ★ Stories / Narrative
- ★ Symbols / Ideas

eyes that open & close



Container of dreams and images

flap with poppers to keep all the dreams in.



Susan's Tale from the Big Tree

In a forest, not far from here, grows a big tree. At the very top, on the highest branches lives Susan. Susan is always tired because her mind never rests.

All day and all night, her mind is filled with thoughts and worries. This means that while everyone else is the big tree sleeps peacefully, Susan tosses and turns.

One night, Susan had a bad dream. Thoughts and worries exploded through her head like soft drink fizzing out of a bottle.

Susan tossed and turned until suddenly, she fell off her branch. As she was falling, her heart began to race and her body turned hard like concrete.

As the grass below grew closer and closer, Susan braced herself. Seconds later she landed, but it wasn't the hard impact she had expected.

Susan looked down and realised that she hadn't actually hit the ground at all. An army of ants had worked together to break her fall.

"I thought cats always landed on their feet!" joked one of them as they gently placed Susan onto the soft grass below.

"I'm sorry" replied Susan. "I was having a bad dream and fell off my branch."

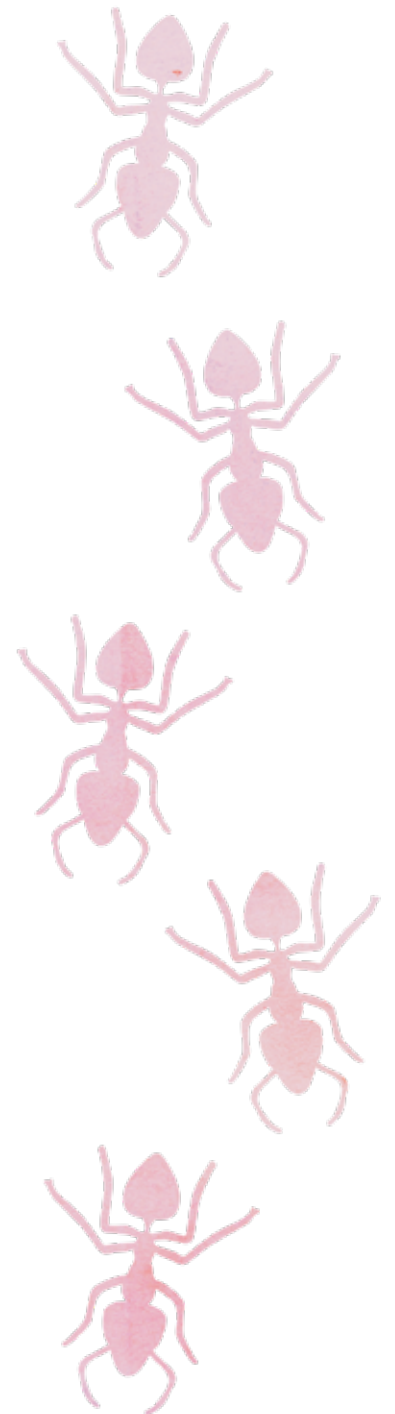
"That's okay! We've got you." replied the ant.



Susan was amazed at their strength. "How did you hold me up?" she asked.

"We don't really feel the weight on our shoulders" replied one of the ants.

"You see, a trouble shared is a trouble halved" he said.


"Or in our case- hundreded!" chimed in the other 99.





"Why don't you share what's on your mind with us?" said the ant. "It might help you feel better."

Sharing her thoughts with the ants made Susan feel a little better. Then together, the ants helped her back to her branch to rest.



But she was still feeling a little rattled. Susan tried to relax by staring into the deep blue night and admiring the way the stars sparkled. As Susan was staring she heard a deep, friendly voice.

"I thought I was the only one awake at this time" said the moon. Susan explained that she had a bad dream and had fallen from her branch. "Now I can't get back to sleep" said Susan.

"Sometimes, I get that way too" said the moon. "But being able to create your own dreams is really something special." "What do you mean?" asked Susan.

"When you're trying to get to sleep, go to a place where your happy dreams are made" the moon explained.

"As you breathe in, focus on your favourite things and how they make you feel" he said. "Then, with every breath out, try to exhale all your worries. Soon, all you'll have in your mind are beautiful dreams full of possibility." "Go on, give it a go" suggested the moon.

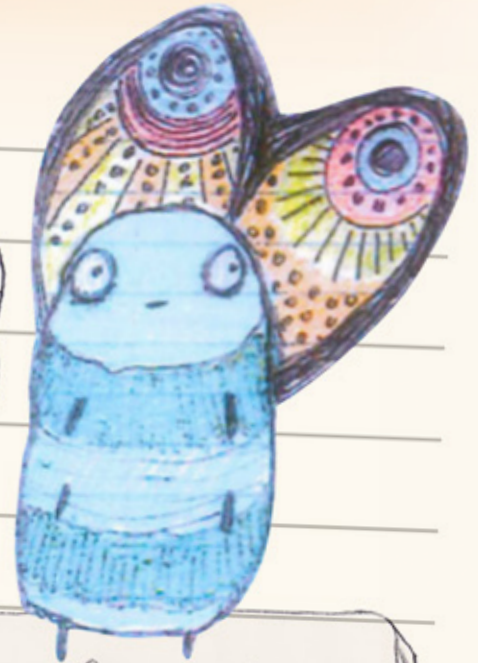
As she breathed in, Susan felt the cool air fill her body and carry her to the place where her dreams lived. With every breath out another worry disappeared into the night sky. Before long, her eyes grew heavy and she relaxed into her branch.

Suddenly, Susan was woken up by a gentle voice. "That looked like quite the dream" she commented.

Susan looked for the moon, but he could not be found. In his place was the morning sun, smiling happily and bathing her in a warm, golden light.

It was then that she realised the moon was right. By focusing on her dreams, Susan was able to free herself of worry and fall into a peaceful slumber surrounded by all the wonderful things that she could make possible in her life.

Ellen Caterpillar



- ★ Transformation
- ★ Multi-coloured, textures, patterns.

For the wings:
A selection of different size/colour buttons, sequins, beads, trims & cord, fur fabric, clear plastic sheet.



Ellen's Tale from the Big Tree

At the edge of town, there grew a great big tree. It was tall like a giraffe, with branches that curved around you like a friendly hug.

Many creatures lived inside the great big tree, each one different from the next, like Ellen the caterpillar.

Every morning she would wake up and listen as the tree came alive. There would be cheerful music and lively games, but Ellen never felt at home.

One day the birds in the tree invited Ellen to sing with them. "Take a big breath in...." tweeted one. "Make your lips round like a circle...." Chattered another. "Then blow out!" they all squawked.

Ellen sang with them, but didn't feel comfortable. She wished that like the birds, she had brightly coloured wings that were as beautiful as the music.

As the day went on, Ellen kept exploring the tree. She followed its branches like a long, winding path.

Soon, she came across a monkey who was playing in the tree. Ellen was amazed as she watched the monkey bound from branch to branch.

The monkey noticed Ellen watching, and decided to teach her some tricks. "Where the mind goes, your body will follow" said the monkey. "Try stretching your arms towards the sky, and picking the banana."


Ellen concentrated with all her might, and sure enough it worked! She shared the banana with the monkey and together, they enjoyed its sweet flavour.

But Ellen kept thinking about how the monkey made his way through the tree. He was so light on his feet, it was like he was flying. As the sun began to set, Ellen made her way back to her branch.

She had a great day but it was a long journey, and she still felt a little sluggish. As Ellen was settling down for the night, a butterfly fluttered by.

The butterfly noticed that Ellen was looking a little sad, and asked if everything was okay? "I know the tree is my home....." Ellen replied, " but it's such a big place, I'm not sure where I fit in."






The butterfly completely understood. "I was just like you" she said. Ellen was surprised, she seemed completely different. "What happened?" she asked.

"Well, after trying to be many different things, one day I realised that the best thing that I can be is me!"

"But how do I know what me is?" Ellen asked.



"All you need to do is breathe in slowly and deeply. Fill up your belly with air and free your mind of thoughts" replied the butterfly before fluttering her wings and flying into the sunset.

Ellen lay in her cocoon that night, thinking about what the butterfly said. She took slow, deep breaths and focused on setting her thoughts free.

She felt the energy of the day rushing through her body like a wild river. With every breath her belly rose, filling with the soothing night air.

The sounds of the tree soon vanished and the wild river of energy stilled. Ellen relaxed into the soft walls of her cocoon and fell into a peaceful slumber.

As she awoke the next morning, the tree was alive with its usual activity. The birds were singing and the monkeys were playing, but something felt different.

Ellen didn't feel sluggish anymore. She felt like her. As she yawned, she outstretched her arms and a new set of wings opened. A big smile took over her face. She had transformed into a beautiful butterfly.

With her true colours proudly on display, Ellen felt a confidence that she hadn't felt before. She believed she could do anything. So she closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and leapt off her branch.

Ellen could fly! As she explored the great big tree, she realised that the butterfly was always inside her. It just took a little while to find it. Now Ellen was herself, the great big tree didn't feel so big. It simply felt great.

Therapeutic ideas for working with children and families using the Big Tree Therapeutic Dolls

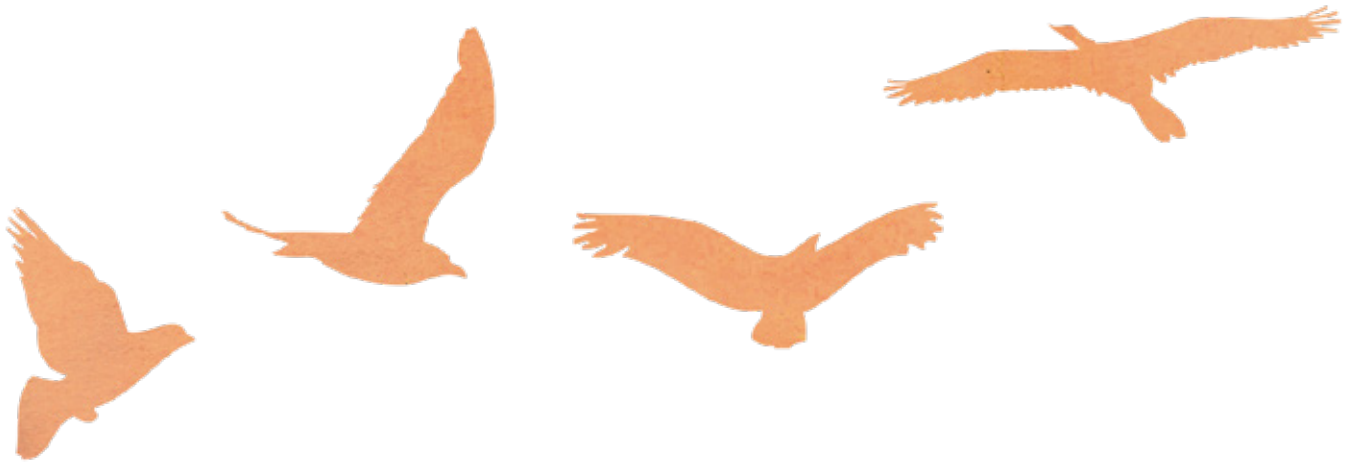
Ways of working with children and the Big Tree Therapeutic Dolls are endless. The dolls can function on many therapeutic levels and present an array of opportunities for intervention. If utilized in an unguided way, the choices around who the doll becomes when in relationship with a child can be revealing about a child's needs (both met and unmet) and telling of their representations of themselves and others in their world. This information can provide direction for intervention and a guide for how a child's sense of self might shift over time.

Key design characteristics of the Big Tree Therapeutic Dolls

A central feature of the dolls is their weighted filling which allows them to conform to whomever they rest on. This offers a sense of tactile containment and security similar to the comfort of warm deep pressure touch, or the comforting, appropriate touch from a parent/carer. The dolls have been used in therapy for children to make gains from this relaxing and calming experience, aimed at providing them a sense of grounding.

The enriched, tactile and visual nature of the dolls encourages children's sensory exploration and is important in providing them with sensory enriched input, and sensory processing experiences. The sensory engagement that these dolls offer is always at play when children connect with a doll. This interactive experience also promotes children staying with the present moment and can act as a useful anchor at times when children's stress responses become activated.

The dolls all share a decorative heart button placed somewhere on their bodies. This has been used in a therapeutic context as a prompt for children to find their own heart beat, and as an opportunity to engage with some regulating breathing related activities. Discovering the dolls hearts is also about children metaphorically finding their own hearts, and having their hearts found and touched by parents/carers who love them.



Working with the individual dolls

This section outlines five organising lenses central to our approach to working with children who have experienced trauma that are offered as guidelines and prompts to help you get the most out of the Big Tree therapeutic dolls.

Explore

The overwhelming and occupying nature of trauma can interrupt a child from engaging in the important developmental process of play. While activated in survival mode a child's capacity to freely explore and grow through play can be undermined. This lens is about noticing the way children spontaneously orientate, approach, and physically interact with their doll. It is about how children position themselves with their doll and how they go about being with their doll in a physical sense.

Evoke new narratives

Each doll has its own story scaffolded around themes. These are stories offering movement from places of insecurity and limitation to more empowered and adaptive ways of being in the world. The dolls and their stories were constructed to have resonance for children who have experienced trauma as many of the struggles encountered throughout their stories resemble aspects of the children's lives. The Dolls know what it is like to make their way out of troubled times and may be helpful companions for children who feel lost or unable to see much light in their present or future story.

Embody

Trauma can limit the way children engage with and inhabit their bodies. It can influence the shape of them in a physical sense and limit their ability to access or make meaning out of the way they move through the world. The Big Tree Therapeutic Dolls offer opportunities for children to embody aspects of the character's stories and self. In this way children can experiment with shifting ways of being in their own body and try on new or unfamiliar ways of moving and posturing. Walking in the shoes of the Big Tree dolls offers children a gentle and safe opportunity to shift and grow in confidence in connecting with their bodies and the world around them.

Emotionally connect

Children who have experienced trauma can live in a very disconnected way from their feelings. They can find it difficult to recognise feelings in others and struggle to reflect on their own emotional states. The Big Tree dolls provide an aid to these processes with the opportunity for learning about feelings through the tools and symbols built into the dolls. The faces of each character is animated and almost cartoon like, conferring amplified emotional content and the encouragement to be playful with their emotional exploration. Each of the character's stories have emotional content to engage with and children can be offered opportunities to relate with the character's emotional struggles and eventual triumphs.

Enhance relationships

Helping children who have experienced trauma to feel safe and connected with those around them, is often an unfamiliar experience for children entering therapeutic spaces. The Big Tree dolls can play an important role in helping children to rebuild trust and connection with important people around them by linking the safe connection they build with their doll into their broader life. Given their capacity to be taken home and easily transported around by children, the dolls can act as a bridge between therapeutic spaces and everyday life, imbued with the positive connections children have made within themselves, with their helpers and with others involved in their recovery.

Examples of using the dolls in a therapeutic space

The following section includes illustrative vignettes from real cases. Aspects have been changed to protect the identity of children and families, and they do not include the real names of children or family members.

Morten Monster

Key Themes: Exploring Identity and Emotional Expression.

Explore:

With purple fur on one side and blue corduroy on the other, Morten is a multi-textured shape shifter. Children can endlessly swap and play with his various felt facial features, sticking and repositioning them on any of the many velcro spots he has on his corduroy side.

We might take note of how children interact with Morten and the way they remodel him.

- Are children free to experiment with all of Morten's flexibility or are they constrained in the way they choose to model him?
- Do children try stroking his fur, or not like it, or do they show little interest in his texture?
- Do children prefer touching one side more than the other side of Morten?
- Do children like Morten sitting on their lap, or do they move him around?
- Do children hold Morten close or not? Do they throw him, or hit him, or give him away?
- Do children try to care for Morten. If so how?

How do children relate to Morten's many facial features?

- Do children play with all of the facial features, or avoid some?
- Are children flexible with the faces they construct or do they prefer displaying one set of features?
- How do children interact with unused features? Do they line them up or tuck them inside his pouch, or something else?





Evoked new narratives:

Morten confers themes of shifting identity and expression. He offers the opportunity for helpers to explore with children the concept of 'the monster within'. Many children who have experienced trauma can have a sense of themselves as 'bad'. There can be parts of themselves that they find monstrous and unlovable. Feedback from those around them can have been at times shunning and isolating. They might be understood as 'the naughty kid' at school and in conflict or abandoned as 'too difficult' at home. Morten Monster could be a perfectly relatable character for these children. He represents a vehicle for common perceptions of monsters to be addressed and then set aside. Through their interactions they can come to realise that he is a 'friendly monster' and he has suffered from the misconception of others in the past perhaps just like themselves.

- What ideas might children hold about Morten and his story when they first meet him?
- What do children think about Morten after they interact with his story?
- How might children represent their story using Morten as the protagonist?
- What might Morten be able to say for children who are struggling to own the words?
- How might Morten sound when he talks?
- What other stories might children weave using Morten as the protagonist?

Morten is constructed as a character of many parts. He has an array of interchangeable facial features and has two distinct sides to himself as suggested by his purple furry back and corduroy front. He provides the opportunity to explore through story, the idea of different parts of self and how they interact and fit together, or don't, in an unintegrated way.

- How might children respond to the idea of holding different parts of self?
- What kind of stories might emerge about the different parts of them self?
- How might a story help to make sense of how their parts operate?
- What might it be like for children to be invited to begin to acknowledge difficult parts of their self?

Jacob is 9 years old and has grown up in a home where his dad was often very sick or angry and his mum had to work a lot. He has seen his dad hurt his mum very badly. Jacob now lives in a different house to his dad and his dad has given him lots of confusing messages about why he no longer lives with the family, and what is going to happen to Jacob. Jacob feels very confused, angry and lonely and shows most of his feelings through aggression. He feels he has a good side and a bad side, and hasn't found helpful ways to express what he is feeling.

Morten was used with Jacob to help him explore aspects of his developing identity, e.g. his self described 'good side and bad side', and how he could hold all of these aspects concurrently in an alternative, more coherent narrative of himself. Morten also supported Jacob to develop connections between his feelings and what was happening in his body. While initially he struggled talking about his feelings, he used Morten to help show his worker and mother how he was feeling by choosing the face that Morten would show.

Morten may come to resemble someone other than the child playing with him. Children could use him to represent important others in their lives in an attempt to better understand them. For example the idea of others having compartmentalised selves could help a child grasp how other people can possess un-integrated parts, which may get in the way of them being all they want to be in relationship with the child.

Saskia is 8 years old and lives with her maternal Grandparents. She has lived with her mother on and off throughout her life, however her mother's drug dependency makes it difficult for her to care for Saskia on a day to day basis. Her mum makes plans with Saskia that she struggles to follow through with. Saskia is confused and sad about her mother's now fleeting appearances in her life. She loves her mum but keeps feeling hurt and rejected by her.

Morten was used with Saskia to help her talk about the different parts of her mum that she experiences. Saskia was able to assemble facial expressions that most suited the "happy" side of mum and the "not caring" side of mum and then with her worker's help she wrote a letter to each of these sides expressing her feelings, needs and hopes. Saskia was able to share her letters with her Gran who listened really well, and then gave her a big, long hug.

There is an opportunity to play with embodying aspects from Morten's story from the Big Tree. We know that Morten is a friendly monster that wouldn't hurt anyone. But he hasn't always been accepted by others in this way. Morten offers the opportunity for embodied exploration of what it is like in the body to feel unlovable, and then what it can be like for the body to feel acceptance.

- For children working with Morten, how might they move his body and arrange his facial features when he feels unlovable and rejected by others?
- What might children imagine could be going on inside his body at this time?
- How might they move him and re-arrange his facial features when he realises that others can recognise his worth and do want to be close with him?
- What might it be like for children to explore this idea with their own bodies?
- How might they move and re-shape themselves in light of feeling acceptance and care?
- How might they draw what is going on inside their bodies at this time?

Morten offers the chance for children to embody the emotional expressions that Morten can show using the various facial features that he comes with, or perhaps using others that they create themselves.

- How might children embody the feeling associated with a smiling Morten, or a sad faced Morten, or an unsure faced Morten?
- How might children embody a feeling with the aim of communicating the feeling with their counsellor or parent/carer?
- How might the counsellor or parent/carer arrange Morten's facial features to guess at a feeling being embodied by the child?

Morten is made with two sides, a purple furry side, and a blue corduroy one. These differently textured fabrics could convey different moods or parts of self.

- How might children embody the essence or character of Morten's purple side with his furry textured material, and how might this compare with how they embody his blue, smoother corduroy side?




Rohan is 4 years old and lives with his mum who is recovering from substance abuse issues and violence perpetrated by Rohan's Dad. Rohan hasn't had any contact with his Dad since he was 4 months of age. Rohan's mum described frequently having trouble with Rohan's angry outbursts and times when he could escalate quickly into a state where he seemed "out of control." She talked about him hitting her and other children in child care when he got into these states.

Morten was used with Rohan to provide him with some behavioural options for when he started to feel angry or upset. He delighted in acting out movements that a monster might make, such as stomping and voicing monster like sounds. Morten was taken to Rohan's child care centre where they read his story and the educators used him to talk with all of the children about feelings. The children and educators played with his changeable facial features and talked about "o.k. Morten things to do" when feeling angry or upset. All of the children practiced stomping and pretending to be Morten as they moved around the room.


Shaun was 10 years of age when he presented at counseling. There were allegations he was sexually abused by his mother's ex-boyfriend. Shaun commenced counselling because he was found engaging in problem sexual behaviour with his younger sister's friend. Shaun has not wished to discuss the incident or anything in relation to this behaviour. In sessions he covered his down turned face when there was any suggestion of it. Shaun has a mild intellectual disability and was described as 'odd' by his classroom teacher who also talked about his struggle with unstructured social situations.

Morton was introduced to Shaun in a counselling session. Shaun played around with Morten's changeable facial features and watched Morten's story on the Big Tree App. The session continued with Shaun choosing to keep Morten on his lap facing the counsellor. The counsellor brought up the problem sexual behaviour incident and Shaun didn't cover his face. Instead he turned Morten away. The counsellor commented on this. She invited Shaun to demonstrate how Morten felt using his changeable facial features. Shaun did so and could manage to talk about a range of mixed up feelings 'Morten' was experiencing. Morten seemed to allow Shaun for the first time in sessions to be able to move beyond some of the shame that he had previously been getting stuck in.





Morten can help children learn about emotional expression through his changeable facial parts that like Mr. Potato Head can be swapped around. This enables children to explore different feelings, their meaning and experiences these relate to. A parent/carer can be involved in this exploration of a child's identity and emotional world, supporting the child to be more aware, resourced and connected in this area. The many facial features also encourage an exploration of who they are, who they want to be, and qualities of themselves they are proud of.



Emotionally connect:


- Without speaking children might try expressing to their counsellor and parent/carer how they are feeling by arranging Morten's facial features to show them?
- Children might try expressing how they think others are feeling by arranging Morten's facial features to show them?
- A counsellor or parent/carer might guess at a child's feeling state and arrange Morten's facial features to reflect this guess before checking with the child if the guess is correct?

The face we show the world can be at times at odds with the feelings we hold inside. Morten offers us the chance to explore this concept of dissonance with children. His changeable facial features could be used to show the concealed feelings too difficult for children to put words to.


- How might children arrange Morten's facial features to demonstrate their inside feelings?
- Morten could be used to show 'outside' feelings on his corduroy side using his stick able facial features and 'inside' feelings could be shown by balancing facial features on his purple other side.

Of all the Big Tree dolls Morten is perhaps the most appropriate figure to approach conversations about complex feelings such as shame and self-disgust as his story reveals he has experienced both. These feelings can be difficult to process and Morten offers us the opportunity for an external aid to help navigate these conversations.

- Do children know about the feelings of shame and disgust? Can they recognise these feelings in Morten at the beginning of his story?
- What happens to Morten's feelings of shame and disgust by the end of the story?
- What helps Morten to feel less shame and disgust?



Morten has struggled in the past with forging relationships. He has felt unlovable and worthless. It was only through being brave enough to begin trusting in others that Morten managed to find he could have friends and was a worthwhile Monster. Morten's story and themes reveal vulnerability, hope, and transformation when it comes to capacity to shift the way we relate with others. He is a Monster who has found acceptance along the way and his triumph is one which can provide children with ideas around the relationships they have and are yet to have in their lives.



Enhance relationships:

Morten can be used as a tool, or mouthpiece for children struggling relationally. They can use his voice to express needs and concerns they can't yet own themselves.

- What does Morten's story tell us about relationships?
- What did you think and feel when Morten was brave enough to try to change the way he related with those around him?
- Is there a way children could use Morten to express their relational needs?

Morten is the only one of the Big Tree dolls who is an imaginary creature. Monsters don't exist in the real world as monkeys, kittens, and caterpillars do. Given this, there could be more latitude around Morten than the others when it comes to things like, where he might have come from, what his family might be like, and how he might relate with them. It could be fun to invite children to explore questions like.....

- What might Morten's Mum/Dad/carer be like? What are their best qualities and are there parts Morten would like to change?
- If Morten had brothers or sisters what might they be like? What are their best parts and what are the parts Morten would like to change?
- Pretend that Morten got his picture taken with his family. Can you draw what this might look like?
- If Morten was to have dinner with his family around the kitchen table how might that go?
- Is there anything you think Morten might like his Mum or Dad to know?
- Is there anything you think Morten might like his brothers or sisters to know?
- Is there anything Morten might like to say to his Mum or Dad or brothers or sisters?
- Pretend Morten lives in a house with his family. Could you draw a picture of them living in the house together?

Ollie Monkey

Key Themes: Nurture and nourishment, being heard and finding a voice

Explore:


Ollie is a soft, velvety, wide eyed monkey with a giant mouth that holds a collection of delicious food. From fruit and veggies to an ice cream and cupcake, Ollie has the most wonderful balance of foods to share with everyone. Ollie's mouth is enormous and you could envisage him singing or making lots of noise if he wanted to. When zipped shut however, you can feel assured that anything you have told him or put inside his mouth will be kept very safely inside. Ollie has long, generous arms that help him move around and share big hugs.

- How do children approach Ollie?
- Do they hold him? If so, how?
- Do children animate Ollie? If so how?
- How do children explore Ollie's features?
- How long does it take children to open Ollie's mouth zip?
- How do children interact with the food inside Ollie's mouth? Do they share it? Or line it up? Or pretend to eat it? Or put it somewhere?
- How do children play with Ollie's empty mouth?
- Can children show care for Ollie? If so, how do they go about this?


Evoke new narratives:

- What stories do children tell with Ollie?
- How do they have him interact with the environment?
- What words do they put into his mouth?
- What character/s do they assign him?







Ollie's principle themes are nurture and nourishment. According to his Big Tree story, in past times he has yearned for someone to look after him. His bright eyes and velvety fur were once less vibrant and he was hungry not only for food but for love.



Ollie is a monkey who was able to move from having to look after himself to being cared for by an adopted family. This narrative of finding love and accepting care could be a useful parable for children who have experienced isolation or separation due to trauma. It may be a very relatable tale for children in the out of home care system. The story could evoke the following questions and observations:

- Wow, how amazing was Ollie to have to look after himself when he had to.
- What kind of strengths do you think Ollie has inside that helped him get by in the big tree, by himself when he needed to?
- What things do you think would have been hard for Ollie living by himself?
- What do you think Ollie might have missed most when he had to be by himself?
- Have you ever felt that you needed to look after yourself? What strengths got you through this?
- What do you think it might have been like for Ollie to discover that he could become part of a family?
- Do you think there might have been anything hard about becoming a part of a new family?
- What do you think were the best things about Ollie finding that he could be a part of a new family?
- Do you think Ollie's idea about what family is might have changed for him over time?
- What do you find are the best things about being part of a family?



Zach is 5 years of age and there have been many big recent transitions for him. Recently he moved into a foster care placement. His mother had been unable to care for him and his father had not had anything to do with him since his birth. On the day before he was placed into care, Zach was found in a filthy state curled up asleep on a dog bed in the neighbour's garage. Once in care, Zach's foster carers began to find food hidden in his room. Despite trying to talk with him about it, this behaviour was not shifting.

Zach, his carers and therapeutic specialist read Ollie's story from the Big Tree, which talked about how Ollie had once been hungry and felt empty inside. The story talked about how when Ollie realised he could be part of a family they helped each other to the Big Tree's yummy fruit, and after a while he didn't feel the same hungriness inside anymore. This story seemed relatable and assuring for Zach. He liked to hear it over and over again. Zach was drawn to playing with Ollie and his food. Zach's carers bought a range of wooden play food and they would play picnics and cafes with the food and Ollie at home. Zach kept this play food in his room. Zach's real food hoarding lessened as his connection with his carers grew.

A metaphor associated with Ollie is that of being heard and finding voice. Ollie has prominent, exaggerated, receptive looking facial features. He is a monkey interested in connecting and learning about others. His enormous mouth is unmissable. His bright red mouth zip is inviting to those who play with him. Ollie's mouth not only likes to eat, it also likes to talk. Ollie could become a useful mouthpiece for children who are not used to having their own stories heard. Children could share ideas with him with the implied understanding that their ideas would be safe and only shared with others when they are ready to open Ollie's mouth zip. Children could draw or write about ideas or feelings which could be stored in Ollie's mouth. Children could demonstrate to grown ups around them when they are ready to share their thoughts by Ollie's opened or closed mouth zip.

Tammy was abandoned by both of her parents early in her life, and has lived with significant sadness and shame about herself. She viewed herself as a small, lonely, unlovable girl with a strong sense that feelings are not safe to have or share.

Tammy was 9 years old when she started therapy. She spent much time in therapy exploring the concept of having a voice with Ollie and he became her mouthpiece with his enormous mouth. Tammy used Ollie to say important things about herself and the world. She shared the following about Ollie:

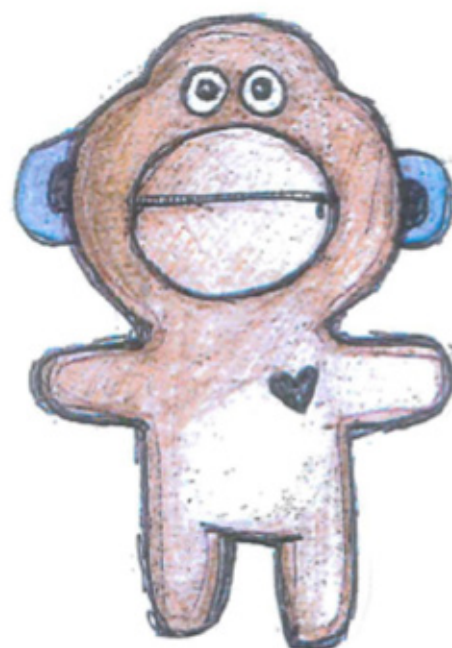
“He is soft and he sits on me warmly. When I have him with me I feel like I have a million voices, all different but all me. He spoke words for me when I was scared to, but now I can say my own words. I feel brave and loved by Ollie and all the important people around me”


Embodiment:

According to his Big Tree Tale Ollie is a monkey who has experienced feeling empty and alone as well as finally being met and finding fullness. He offers children the opportunity to embody the sensation of feeling full.

- How would you move like a hungry monkey?
- How would it feel in your body if you were a hungry monkey and you came across some of the yummiest food you had ever tasted?
- How would it be in your body to be eating a feast of yummy food?
- Can you imagine how happy your tummy might be to be full of yummy food right now? What does that feel like?

Many would describe monkeys as playful, social animals. They share many similarities with humans. Asking children to embody a monkey's movements could be a fun way of getting children into their bodies and out of their heads. Inviting children to be a monkey with a parent or caregiver could gently challenge them to interact in a body to body way, without words. This could be a helpful way of encouraging somatic literacy and sharing together.





Luca was 4 when he entered a refuge with his mum as they escaped family violence. His mum struggled to play and just have fun with Luca at this time.

Ollie was introduced to Luca and Mum. As Luca played with Ollie, Luca asked for the Wiggles 'Monkey Dance' song because he loved the Wiggles. Workers played this and '5 little monkeys', and everyone danced with Luca acting out playful monkey movements such as jumping, and swinging. This provided Luca's mum the opportunity to get playful and smile with Luca in a way she struggled to initiate herself. It also provided Luca the opportunity to experience his mum with delight and joy in a way he hadn't known her for a long time.

Emotionally Connect:

Ollie is a monkey who experiences nurture and nourishment after missing out for a long time. He offers us the opportunity to explore a child's emotions connected with receiving nurture and nourishment having missed out in the past. These emotions are not always straight forward and can sometimes be confusing for children who find it hard to trust care providers when they have been let down in the past. When exploring feelings associated with these key themes we need to recognise that it is only when children believe that they are worthy of receiving nurture and nourishment that they will be able to accept this form of care.


- How do you think Ollie might have felt when he discovered he could be part of a family?
- What does it feel like when your parent/carer does something that shows they care for you?
- What kind of things help you understand that your parent/carer loves you?
- What kind of things does your parent/carer do that show you they care for you?
- Is there anything you would like your parent/carer to do that would help you know they love you?
- Do you know what trust means?
- How do you know that you can trust somebody?
- How do you let other people know that you trust them?
- How should other people let you know that they trust you?
- What are some things other people could do to earn your trust?




Secondary themes offered in the design of Ollie are those of finding voice and being heard. These tasks are often considered risks for children who have experienced trauma. They have often gone un-heard for so long, they find it difficult or useless to give voice to their deepest needs and feelings, or to believe that anyone is interested in what they might have to contribute. Ollie is interested. His bright, curious facial features attest to his interest and his enormous mouth and its accompanying vocal cords could be very loud should they need to be. I wonder what feelings children might consider sharing with the help of Ollie?

- Maybe you could whisper your feeling/s into Ollie's ear and he could say it for you?
- How about we write down or draw your feeling/s, then Ollie can look at them and say them for you?
- We could write down or draw your feelings and put them in Ollie's mouth if they feel too hard to tell Mum/Dad/Carer/Sibling/etc yourself? This way Ollie could tell the person for you?
- Imagine Ollie was feeling what you feel inside right now. Would you like to open his mouth and let out the feeling?

Ollie's mouth zip could be used as a scaling tool for feelings. Children who have experienced trauma often struggle with emotional literacy and their idea of feeling something, for example anger might be like an on and off switch, instead of graduated. What if we invited children to think and talk more about the gradation of feelings by changing how open Ollie's mouth zip is. For example if Ollie was feeling overjoyed he might have his zip all the way open, then lots of happiness can get out. If he felt content his zip might be more like half way shut- where he isn't overflowing with happiness, but still feeling some happiness. Children could make up their own scales with Ollie's mouth zip which could encourage them into a more mindful and developed relationship with their feelings.




Ollie's themes of nurture and nourishment encourage the idea of exploring 'being cared for.'



Enhance Relationships:

The experience of abuse related trauma for children involves being deprived of care in some way. This may be as concrete as food on the table, through to emotional neglect. These experiences can result in children internalising negative views of themselves in relationships and themselves. They can find it difficult to accept help from others and benefit from opportunities offered to them given their lack of self-worth and damaged belief in others. Ollie is a wonderful assistant in this way as he can model to children and parents/carers how to accept care and nourishment through the metaphor of eating and sharing food.

- Invite a parent or carer and a child to set up and share a pretend picnic together.
- What foods does a parent or carer know that their child loves to eat?
- What foods does the child know their parent/carers loves to eat?
- Ask the child if they could invite a small group to lunch (they might be real or made up characters) who they might invite? Then use toys or the like to play out the lunch.
- Invite a parent or carer and a child to plan a special meal together.
- Invite a child to design and make a menu for a special family meal together.
- Invite a parent or carer to consider cooking something with her/his child that they then eat together.
- Make individualised place mats together for the dining room table at home using A3 paper which could then be laminated. Have each mat include special information about individual family members or pictures the family member might like.
- Dress up the dining table at home like a restaurant and pretend the family are going out to the restaurant for dinner. Involve extended family or friends as waiters or the chef.
- Invite a parent/carers to plan a special meal for the child and then post an invitation to the meal in the letterbox for the child to retrieve with the mail.
- Put one of Ollie's pieces of food in the child's school lunch box along with a supportive note for the child to find when they open it.



Tahlia was 7 years of age when a worker started visiting them at home. The worker was helping with increasing mum's parental confidence and strengthening the parent/child bond.

Tahlia was introduced to Ollie. She was keen to look inside Ollie's mouth and at the various foods he held inside. She sorted them into 'sometimes' foods and 'every day' foods and there was talk about the benefits of eating well in order to feel good. Good foods were seen as a way of taking care of ourselves. Tahlia's mum, Margaret discussed the ways that she takes care of Tahlia through the types of foods she buys, and her choice of foods that Tahlia likes best. Tahlia talked about how meat lovers pizza made her feel sick in the stomach and how strawberry milk made her feel tired. This was significant for Tahlia who generally found it hard to reflect on her internal experience.

Tahlia decided that Ollie was 2 years old and she talked about what foods a two year old may eat. Margaret talked about the foods she fed Tahlia when she was little and how she knew which ones Tahlia liked or didn't. Margaret talked about how she made Tahlia's favourite food (Spaghetti bolognese) and then put it in the blender to make it easier for her to eat. This was a nice exploration of Margaret's 'knowing' about Tahlia and provided the opportunity to talk through nurturing and happy memories together.

Kai was 8 years of age when his anxiety spiked at school. He frequently reported tummy upsets and sometimes threw up when he became emotionally worked up. Kai was struggling with sleep and over-tired during the day. Kai had been referred to a psychologist and the school was doing their best to support Kai while he awaited allocation to the psychologist.

Kai's school counselor, Sonia introduced Kai to Ollie. She told Kai that Ollie was a magic monkey. She said if kids had any questions or worries they could write them on a note and zip them into his mouth. Kai liked this idea. He also liked having Ollie on his lap in the bean bag in the corner of the classroom. When he patted him, he felt more connected and focussed. Kai, his teacher and school counselor began sharing messages by posting notes in Ollie's mouth for each other. Kai grew in confidence to share his feelings and ideas through this note sharing. His teacher also had time to thoughtfully compose her notes back to him, and check in with the school counsellor should she need to. Kai's anxiety lessened. Ollie remained a part of his school journey throughout the year.

Many children who have experienced trauma have felt unheard and have had their voice silenced. Ollie's big ears and big mouth that is controlled by a zip offer children a confidant who can hear their story. Children then have the power to decide if they would like Ollie to help them share their story by opening his mouth zip. They might have written it down on a note and placed it in his mouth or told him things that they would normally find too hard. Ollie's design allows him to companion a child to share their story at their own pace, with total control.

Susan Kitten

Key Themes: Practicing Relaxation and Calm. Exploring self narratives.

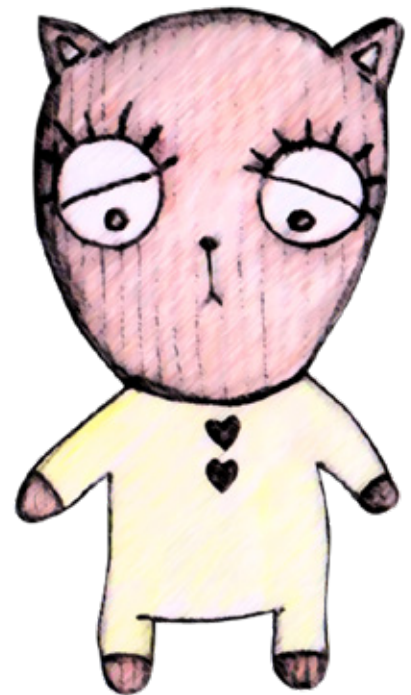
Explore:

Susan is constructed out of subtle pastel colours, she wears pyjamas reminiscent of warm, soft flannelette sheets. Her eyelids that open and close sit above her prominent and engaging eyes. Susan has a press stud anchoring a little flap to a pocket in the back of her head which holds a concertinaed book of images that can be tucked away inside. Some conceive of this as a blanket that Susan can wrap around herself when it's taken out of her head.

- How do children approach Susan?
- How do they move with her?
- Do they seek to cuddle or comfort her?
- Are children orientated to care for Susan?
- Do they use her to relate with others?
- Do children play with her eyelids? Eg. winking, sleeping, blinking?
- How do children find their way to the compartment in her head?
- How do they interact with the compartment in her head?
- How do they interact with the concertinaed book and symbols inside her head?

Evoke new narratives:

Susan's story from the Big Tree is one of feeling hostage to fears and worries until she comes across some strategies to soothe her body and mind. Feeling scared and worried can be common experiences for children who have experienced trauma. Susan's story provides a narrative of hope for these children, offering initial recognition of the feelings of worry and fear, and then ways to approach and deal with these worries and fears.




- Do children relate to Susan's story from the Big Tree?
- How did Susan's worries and fears effect her in her Big Tree story?
- What kind of dreams and nightmares do you think Susan might have had?
- What kind of dreams and nightmares have children had?
- Are children's worries and fears effecting their lives? If so how?
- What might life be like if children could change their relationship with worries and fears?
- Can children remember a time with less worries and fears?
- What are some of the activities that Susan learned in her story from the Big Tree that helped her feel a bit freer from worries and fears?


Children can metaphorically glimpse into Susan's mind with the removable concertinaed book of symbols, representing imaginings or knowings that Susan carries with her. The velcroed nature of these shiftable symbols confer the notion that our internal images and dreams can shift and change, and that we can have some authorship in their assemblage.


Susan's story from the Big Tree invites children to attend to their own metaphoric 'mind book'.

- How do children understand Susan's 'Image book' in her mind?
- If children were to make up a story using the images in Susan's book how might the story go?
- If you had an 'image book' in your mind what might some of the images be?
- Are there any images in your book you wish you could change?
- Are there any images in your book you are proud of, or that make you happy?
- Can you tell a story with the images you identify in your book?
- Are there any images you would like to invite into your mind's book that aren't already there? How might these images change the story?



Susan is a figure intended to help children with their sleep. Her design includes big, closable eyes which could be closed to represent her slipping off to sleep. Night time can be fraught for children who have experienced trauma. It can often be the time when the abuse was perpetrated against them or a loved one, and/or it can be the time when their unguarded mind generates nightmares. Susan's lessons about calming and relaxation can be taken to bed with children and can help them not only find sleep but develop positive imagery to hopefully be woven into dreams throughout the night.





Hazel was 7 years of age. She lived in foster care and had a therapeutic specialist supporting her placement. Hazel was haunted by a re-occurring nightmare that contained very distinct images, such as a wolf and a gun. She would wake and scream out for her carer who was always quickly by her side to hear about her bad dream.

Hazel and her carer told the therapeutic specialist about her nightmare. The therapeutic specialist introduced Hazel to Susan. Hazel played with Susan and wrapped her in a doll's blanket. She pulled out the concertinaed book in Susan's head compartment and learned about Susan's story from the Big Tree. The therapeutic specialist talked about Susan's book of pictures that she took with her into her dreams. She gave Hazel her own blank concertinaed book. With her carers help Hazel came up with a set of images that she loved to think about. Hazel drew these as pictures in her concertinaed book. She and her carer also pasted in some photos of Hazel having fun on some of the pages. Hazel had a strong connection with a Super Hero cartoon that she would rush home from school to watch in the afternoons. These super heroes featured in her image book. The book was kept on her bedside table and before sleep she and the carer would look through it. With this routine in place, Hazel's re-occurring nightmare began to change. They started to involve some of the super heroes from her image book. When she did wake up during the night Hazel said she would pick up her image book and look through it before seeking out her carer, and this helped her to feel better. Hazel's carer said Hazel wasn't as afraid of sleep anymore and that her night-time routine was easier since she met sleepy Susan.

Embody:

Susan is a cat. Cats conjure images as varied as playfully chasing balls of wool, slinking about mysteriously, or curling up asleep in a patch of sunshine. Embodying the many activities and moods of a cat could be explored with children in a therapeutic sense.

Erin was 8 when she began coming to counselling. Her parents argued a lot, and she used to spend a lot of time in her room to try to escape their fights. Her neighbours had a cat that sometimes came into their yard and Erin loved watching the cat from her bedroom window. Erin picked Susan up from a group of toys in the corner of the therapy room. She told her counsellor about their neighbour's cat. Erin and the counsellor began to act out cat like movements such as batting some scrunched up paper around and arching their backs. The counsellor then stretched and yawned like a tired cat. Erin approached the beanbag and curled up like a cat might. As she did this, the counsellor commented on how contented Erin looked. Erin began making the sound of a purring cat. After a time the counsellor invited Erin to stretch like a cat waking up from a peaceful slumber.

In the coming weeks from time to time Erin would choose to take on the same curled up position in the beanbag as she had during this exploration and sometimes she would purr if she liked something that was going on in session.

A child closing Susan's eyelids could be her/his way of indicating that it is time to take a break or slow down. Babbette Rothchild in her trauma therapy work invokes a car metaphor when she advocates for an initial focus on helping clients to be able to use the brake before anything else in therapy. Susan's eyelids could be a child's version of the brake.

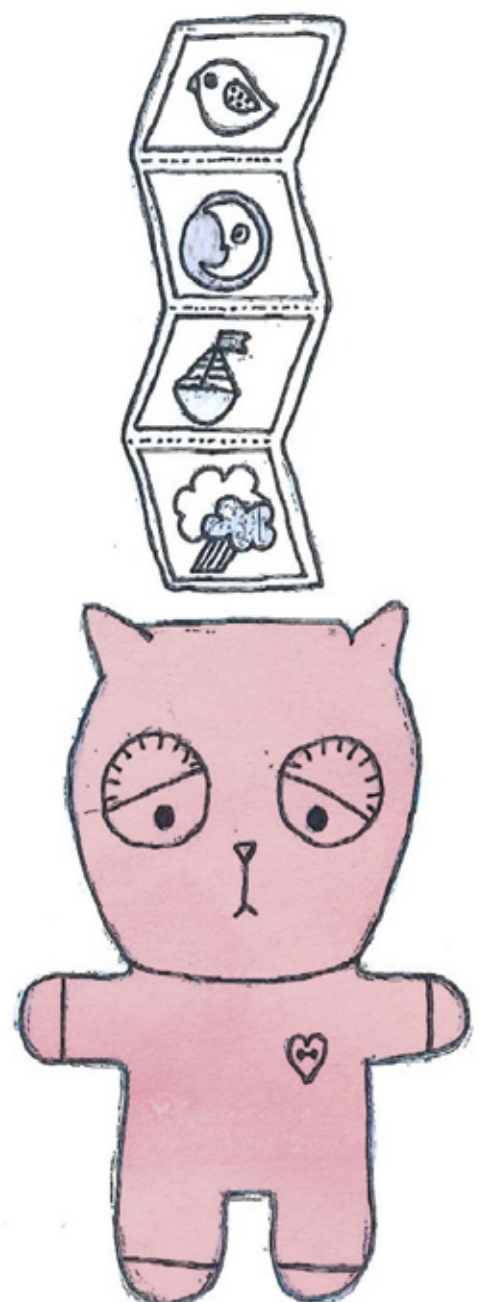
Susan's big, closable eyelids differentiate her from other toys. This aspect of her design could be an invitation to consider when and why we close our eyes. The obvious time we close our eyes is when we sleep and Susan's tale from the Big Tree tells us a story about her finding sleep. Another time we close our eyes could be when we don't want to see something. Sometimes the world can feel like it is too much or too hard for us. Many children who have experienced trauma will understand this idea. Susan could be used in a therapeutic sense for children to communicate this. She could be a child's companion to help tell others when it's too hard.

Emotional Connection:

Not many dolls are designed to communicate the feelings of worry and fear. Susan is. She is a highly relatable companion for children with worries and fears. Children may come to relate to her as a character that reflects their own emotional struggles. Susan was constructed for children who have experienced trauma to join with because there is a suggestion built into her design that she has experienced troubled times, and that she will understand. Susan is learning ways to help herself to regulate her sometimes overwhelming thoughts, emotions and bodily responses.

Susan offers us opportunities to help children connect with and explore their own bodily responses when experiencing troubled times or strong difficult feelings.

- Susan's story from the Big Tree shows us that our bodies have their own ways of reacting to traumatic things. Can you remember how Susan's body reacted to her nightmare?
- Can you draw a picture of what was happening in Susan's body at this time? (You might use a gingerbread man like outline in the shape of Susan to provide a basis for children's body mapping?)
- Why do you think Susan's body changed like that when she got scared? (This could become an opportunity for some psycho-education with children about the various ways our bodies try to protect us and help us survive in the face of trauma.)
- When a child is ready Susan's body mapping may become a jumping off point for children to become more connected with their own bodies. With a generic gingerbread man like outline, children could be invited to represent what happens in their own bodies when they feel happy, or sad, or angry, or scared, or worried?
- Susan is learning some ways to feel less worried and scared. Many techniques could be usefully taught to children at this point based on Susan's learnings:
 - Mindfulness based practices
 - Breath work
 - Regulatory activities or movements
 - Creative Visualisations



Chase was 5 years old when he, his Mum, and big brother escaped a situation of family violence. Chase was struggling to believe in the safety of his new world. He was frequently hypervigilant and talked about his fear of his Dad finding them. Chase's mum, Kate participated with Chase in therapy sessions. Chase and Kate were introduced to Susan. Over some sessions Chase would often choose to make a burrow for Susan in the bean bag so she was almost hidden, or he would fortify her beneath cushions. One time Chase said "now no baddies can get her."

Susan became an available figure in the therapy room for Chase from week to week. He would sometimes choose to pick her up and often his play would involve building her a safe place. Over time this pattern in Chase's play began to diminish. The counsellor utilized Susan to introduce Chase and Kate to some regulation techniques that she said Susan had taught her, because Susan found that she often felt scared and worried. Chase enjoyed having Susan on his lap at these times.



Enhance Relationships:

Many parents/carers wonder about what goes on in their children's minds. In the same way children will often guess at what their parents/carers are thinking and feeling based on their past experiences and developmental stage. Susan provides a wonderful tool for all to share and learn about the thoughts and feelings of others through her concertinaed book of images or symbols. If children and parents/carers can grasp the metaphoric meaning of Susan's mind book they might be able to share from their own.

- Invite children and parents/carers to think about their own mind's book of images or pictures.
- If a child could see into their parents/carer's mind what kind of images or pictures do they think might be in there?
- What kind of a story might a child tell with the pictures or images that they imagine in their parents/carer's mind? Present the child with a blank concertinaed book and invite her/him to assemble the story.



- What might it be like for a parent/carer to learn about their child's idea of an imagined story from her/his parents/carer's mind?
- Invite a parent/carer to create a concertinaed book filled with images, drawings, or photos relating to the things that they love about their child/ren.
- Invite a child to create a concertinaed book filled with images, drawings, or photos relating to the things that they love about their parent/carer.
- Are there any images in the child or parent/carer's book that are the same? What do each think of the other's books? Were there any surprises?

Tess was 6 when she moved into her third foster care placement. She had been in and out of the system as her parents had both struggled to consistently provide her care over time.

Tess began at a new school with her new foster carer's support. It was a bumpy transition. Susan was a classroom toy that the teacher gave Tess soon after coming to the school. She became a frequent companion for Tess in the classroom. She seemed to feel safer and less vigilant with her under her arm or on her lap. Tess used to look forward to going to school, just to see Susan. Sometimes when the teacher needed to help Tess it was easier for the teacher to speak with Tess via Susan. Susan became a tool for her to share her ideas and more difficult feelings which she struggled to own herself.

Ellen Caterpillar

Key Themes: Transformation and Increasing Adaptability.

Explore:

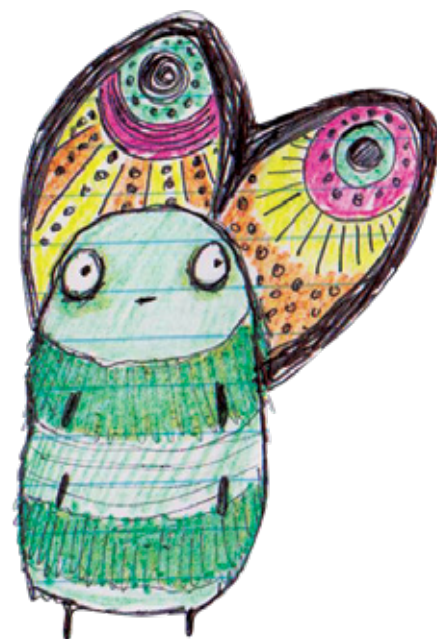
Ellen is made from green corduroy and jersey materials reminiscent of a child's fleecy, comfy tracksuit. Her brightly coloured feelers and alert looking eyes draw attention and with some exploration children will find a pouch in her back. Inside the pouch is a set of brightly coloured, tactile butterfly wings. As children unfurl them they will find buttons and shiny additions, along with patches of fur, and bright bobbed trim.

- How do children initially approach and interact with Ellen?
- Do children show care towards Ellen?
- How do children find their way to Ellen's wings in her pouch?
- How do children engage with Ellen's transformative potential?
- Do children leave Ellen in either state of being a caterpillar or butterfly, or do they play with these states?
- How do children interact with Ellen's elaborately tactile wings?

Evoke new narratives:

Ellen's story is about transformation and achieving increased adaptability.

Children often cope with trauma by developing an external focus to look to get their needs met. They may have had to rely on unreliable adults to look after them, and in order to get their needs met they get good at intuiting what state their guardian is experiencing. This outward focus can emerge in lieu of a soundly established internal world and capacity for self-reflection. Having a finely tuned radar picking up signals from the outside world makes sense to Ellen. She is a caterpillar who spends her days sensing the world through her feelers with little form of protection or time for internal reflection. It is only after being cocooned away that Ellen can emerge a-new. Hers is a perfect story for children ready to step into a more reflective way of being in the world. The emergence of Ellen's wings, allows children to consider that they too could someday fly.



- Children might like to consider the world of Ellen as a caterpillar, inching around the Big Tree. What is her life like at this time?
- Without big teeth, or fast legs, what is it that keeps Ellen the caterpillar safe?
- What does feeling safe mean to you?
- What does building herself a cocoon offer Ellen?
- What do you think is going on for Ellen while in her cocoon?
- What is life like for Ellen as a butterfly compared with being a caterpillar?
- What might have Ellen learned as a caterpillar that helps her when she becomes a butterfly?
- What do you think it is like to be a butterfly?

As a young child Kyle was exposed to both emotional and physical abuse. He struggled to know his feelings and trust others, and couldn't tell people what he needed. When his school chaplain worked with him, he couldn't choose a single strength card for himself, or identify things he liked or disliked.

Ellen became the doll Kyle used to work on learning more about himself and building his hopeful future story. The school chaplain ran an art session with his class and they made cocoons by paper-macheing around balloons and then cutting the dried cocoon shells in half. On the inside of their cocoons they collaged pictures they liked. They then placed Ellen inside as a caterpillar, before hatching her out as a butterfly. On the outside of the cocoons, children from the class wrote things they liked about each other on everyone's cocoons. Ellen became a regular feature in the classroom. Kyle liked to hold her and sit her on his knee. Kyle said... "When I hold Ellen, it feels like she is hugging me"



Like the rings of a tree trunk tell a story of its life, Ellen's butterfly wings could represent all that she has learned and triumphed over, in her time as a caterpillar. It is only when Ellen draws on the resources she has gathered as a caterpillar that she is able to create her own wings in her cocoon. It follows then, that her wings could be a representation or mapping of the things she has learned about herself and the strengths she has gained.

- If children had wings what patterns, images, textures, and/or words might appear on them?
- How might children's strengths and qualities be reflected in their wings?
- If a parent/carer was invited to draw or represent their child's wings, how might they do this?
- Invite a parent/carer and child to draw or make each other's wings.



Molly who is 6 years of age lives with her grandmother, Anne. Her parents both have mental health issues along with chronic substance abuse problems, and both were unable to look after her anymore. Anne felt conflicted when it came to the care of Molly. She wanted her daughter to be able to care for Molly, however this was not the case and she felt it was unfortunate that she was the only one left in the family able to care for her.

Molly came into therapy with a poor sense of self. She lacked resources and her Nanna who was her primary caregiver struggled to emotionally support her at times within counselling sessions. Through counselling Molly came to know Ellen the caterpillar. She particularly loved her wings. Molly said they reminded her of all the bibs and bobs her Nanna had in her craft room. Anne loved craft. The counsellor and Molly learned about Ellen's story from the Big Tree. Molly commented that she "wished she could turn into a butterfly." The following session, the counsellor brought in some fairy wings and gave them to Molly explaining that they were butterfly wings. Molly was overjoyed and flew around the room. With puff paint Anne and Molly wrote and drew on the new wings. Anne identified and wrote Molly's strengths on the wings. Molly took the wings home. She excitedly brought them in a week later to show her counsellor. Over the week her and her Nanna had worked together to bead and sew the wings making them elaborate and beautiful. Molly said they were "just like Ellen's now". Anne had found a way to connect with Molly that utilized her strengths and felt connecting for both of them.

Embodiment:

Ellen's archetypal 'ugly duckling' story of transformation from a caterpillar into a butterfly lends itself to embodied exploration.

- What kind of movements and shapes might children take on when embodying Ellen the caterpillar as she goes about life?
- How might it feel for children to have a go at moving into a cocoon, the site of transformation? Might it feel containing or constraining or something else?
- What movements and shapes might children embody when in their cocoon? Option- use a body sock to represent the cocoon.
- What movements and shapes might children embody when emerging from their cocoon?
- Can children imagine the sensation of unfurling their wings for the first time?
- How might children move around the space if imagining themselves as Ellen soaring off into the sky?



From early on in his counselling sessions Michael who was 8 years of age, demonstrated that he loved to feel contained. Sitting with a weighted blanket, moving in a body sock, and having pillows piled on top of him while he curled up in the bean bag were all activities he enjoyed and would initiate. His carer described him as full of beans and his teacher talked about him having trouble being still and paying attention for any length of time. When Michael learned about Ellen's story from the Big Tree he loved the image of her tucked up in her cocoon. He would sit with Ellen and try to wrap her up in her own wings as he felt the varied textures sewn into them. He liked the breathing technique taught by the Ellen on the Big Tree app and would hop into a body sock with only his head sticking out and focus on extending his outbreath like the app encouraged. Michael's School Teacher and Aide were interested in hearing about what he was learning in counselling and the school purchased a weighted blanket for his use in the classroom. Michael and his Aide would stop and practice 'Ellen breathing' when he became too distracted in class-time. Throughout his time in counselling, Michael would notice if the counsellor forgot to bring Ellen into his session and he would request that she be there.

Lucy and her sister Kayla were living with their mum in a refuge. They had escaped a family violence situation that the girls had grown up in. Lucy was 10 and Kayla was 8 years of age. They were participating in counselling and being supported by workers at the refuge. The girls loved butterflies and would often draw them when doodling. Ellen was introduced to the family in family therapy sessions. With reference to Ellen's story from the Big Tree, the girls and their mum used glass paint to paint a butterfly which they said represented their new family and the hope they now held for a violence free future. They decided to stick it on the lounge room window at the refuge. Lucy said "when people visit they comment on the butterfly... They say it's beautiful. They don't know that it's our family butterfly, but we do."

Emotional Connection:

Ellen offers children opportunities to explore emotional content around transformation. Personal growth and change is not necessarily easily achieved and can be accompanied by a range of feelings, from fear and uncertainty to pride in achievement. Ellen provides children with a vehicle for thinking about change.

- What are some feelings that emerge for children when they think about the idea of change or the unfamiliar?
- What are some ways of helping children to tolerate difficult feelings as they strive to make changes in their lives?
- How can we help children celebrate their achievements in ways that they can emotionally tolerate and integrate?
- How can we help children to think about change as a process which can be tolerable and even rewarding, rather than threatening and de-stabilising?

Enhance Relationships:

Ellen is a companion useful to children coming to the end of their therapeutic journey. She offers children and their parents/carers the opportunity to explore the concept of transformation and increased adaptability together as they reflect on their therapeutic journey.

- How might a parent/carer reflect about and celebrate with their child their transformations?
- How might a parent/carer and child reflect about and celebrate their family's transformations?
- How might children communicate with their parents/carers their thoughts and feelings about achieving change over time?
- Children and parents/carers who make their way through therapeutic journeys often change together. How might a child draw or represent their parent/carer's butterfly as they reflect upon change? How might a parent/carer draw or represent their child's butterfly? How might a family draw or represent their transformed family butterfly?

Activity Ideas for working with the Big Tree dolls



Morten Monster Exploring Identity and Emotional Expression

Explore:

Notice the way children spontaneously orientate, approach, and physically interact with their doll.

Notice how children position themselves with their doll and how they go about being with their doll in a physical sense.

How should Morten's face be arranged?

What do you think Morten's nose is smelling right now?

What do you think Morten's eyes can see right now?

What can Morten hear right now?

Is there a place Morten needs to be in this room right now?

Is there anywhere in this room he doesn't want to be?

Is there something that catches Morten's eye in this room?
Something that he is interested in?

Can you imagine Morten's favourite things to hear/ see/ smell/ touch/ taste? What are your favourites?

Evoke new Narratives:

Notice the way children interpret and respond to the doll's stories from the Big Tree.

Notice the narratives that children build around the dolls.

Can you tell a story with Morten changing his facial expressions as you need to throughout the story?

Tell a story about something that you have experienced. Now you get to go back and edit this story if you like. Might Morten have any editing ideas?

What if Morten had superpowers and showed up in your story? How might your story be different?

What do you think Morten might have written in his letter to his neighbours at the end of his Tale from the Big Tree?

How are you like Morten? How are you different?

Did any part of Morten's tale from the Big Tree stick out more than other parts for you? Have you ever known anyone who has felt like Morten did in his story?

Morten is a monster. We don't know that much about monsters. If you imagined Morten's monster family what do you think they might look like? Would you like to draw them? Can you tell a story about Morten and his monster family?

What other kind of Monster's can you imagine? If Morten went to school with other kinds of Monsters, what might they be like. You might like to draw some of these other monsters? What are their names? What kind of personalities do they have?

If Morten was someone in your family, who might he be? What about the other Big Tree dolls? Who might they be if they were people that you know? You could play what happened when these characters met each other.

Embodiment:

Offering opportunities for children to embody aspects of the doll's stories and selves.

Noticing the way children experiment with shifting ways of being in their body and can try on new or unfamiliar ways of moving and posturing inspired by the Big Tree dolls.

How do you imagine Morten might speak? If you were to give him a voice what would it sound like?

Do you want to try practicing some Monster faces in the mirror.

Have you ever had an interaction with someone when you felt small and couldn't find the voice you needed? Re-imagine this, with Morten in your place, towering over who ever it was, speaking and being heard. Step into the shoes (or paws) of Morten and feel in your body what it's like to be heard.

How might Morten move? Hey, let's imagine we are Morten and move around the room. Let's be big, strong, booming monsters. Now let's be tiny, quiet monsters. What other kind of monsters could we be?

Do you think that the way Morten might move would change depending upon how he feels, which he shows us in his facial expressions? Change around Morten's face and then strike a pose or move like he might as his facial expression shows us.

Imagine seeing the world through the many eyes of Morten. What might the world look like if you had many eyes to see it with? If you could locate your eyes anywhere on your body where would you put them? What would you like to see? What would the world feel like if you didn't have a nose? Morten may not have a nose. How might it change Morten's experience of the world to not be able to smell anything? What would that be like for you? Morten might not always have a mouth. I wonder what it feels like for him to not have a mouth? What would it be like if we didn't have mouths? What would it feel like if we had many mouths? How might the world be different for us with many mouths?

Pick up each of Morten's facial features, one at a time. Hold the facial feature in your hand and identify as many things that you can sense with that facial feature, right now.

A Morten Yoga pose= Mountain Pose

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VewFujuSxJ0>

Emotionally Connect:

Learning about feelings with the help of the dolls.

Noticing how children reflect and have insight into their shifting feelings with reference to the tools and symbols built into the dolls.

Noticing how children relate to the emotional content built into the character's stories from the Big Tree.

Share your feelings with Morten by arranging his face according to the way you feel right now.

Does Morten's face show how he is feeling right now?

Do the expressions on people's faces always match up with what they are feeling inside? Do your inside feelings always match what you show those on the outside?

You might like to create your own facial features for Morten. Draw some on pieces of paper and cut them out. Put velcro spots on the back of them and stick them to Morten's spots.

Morten has a purple fury side and a blue corduroy side. Morten's fury side could be his wild side, and his corduroy side could be his calm side. Can you think of times when you have felt calm and times when you have felt wild? What are some things that help you feel calm? If you have felt wild sometimes like Morten, what has that been like?

Feelings can change around a lot. Make a stop motion film of Morten's changing facial features. Narrate the film according to how Morten may be feeling with his particular facial features.

Enhance Relationships:

Noticing how children relate with others with their Big Tree doll/s.

Finding ways the Big Tree dolls can act as a bridge for resourcing to extend from therapeutic spaces into everyday life.

Can Morten say things for you to those you love?

Morten might want to whisper things in the ear of a parent/carer or other significant person. You might like to help him. What might he say?

Morten could be used to explain how the same event can elicit different feelings in different people.

Use Morten's facial features to show us how you feel about..... teacher, parent, carer, sibling, peer, etc.

Has a parent/carer in your life shown you different sides of themselves? A wild side, or an ordered side, like the two different fabrics that make up Morten.

Facial Expression Mastermind

The 'mastermind' needs to write down or draw a feeling on a hidden piece of paper. Put Mortens facial features in a bag or a container. You might like to add some more facial features by drawing some on paper and sticking a Velcro spot on the back of them (eg. tear, rosy cheeks, eyebrows). Those other than the mastermind take turns in picking out facial features and sticking them on Morten's Velcro circles. The task is to continue to add facial features until they resemble a face showing the feeling written/drawn on the hidden piece of paper. At this time, the mastermind reveals the hidden piece of paper.

Morten's Scout Out

Maybe something new is coming up for you that you feel unsure about, eg. school, or camp, or access with a parent. Let Morten scout it out for you first. You might like to go with Morten on the scout, or let him go on his own at first. Your parent/carer might like to take him to the new place and get some video or photos of him in the new place. You can watch the video or look at the photos and ask questions about the new place with your parent/carer or significant adult. Morten would be happy to accompany you to the new place when it's time to go.



Ollie Monkey

Nurture, Nourishment, Being Heard and Finding Voice

Explore:

Notice the way children spontaneously orientate, approach, and physically interact with their doll.

Notice how children position themselves with their doll and how they go about being with their doll in a physical sense.

Imagine the smell of each of Ollie's foods. Pretend to taste them. What is the yummiest? What is the yuckiest? Can you put them in order from yucky to yummy? What are your favourite foods?

How do you think your parent/carer would order Ollie's food from yummiest to yuckiest? Compare your orderings. What is your parent/carer's favourite food?

Take an individual chocolate or a sultana and give one to Ollie. Embark on a mindful eating challenge with Ollie. Visit the following link for a suggested script:

<http://www.meditationinschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Mindfulness-and-the-Art-of-Chocolate-Eating.pdf>

Evoked new Narratives:

Notice the way children interpret and respond to the doll's stories from the Big Tree.

Notice the narratives that children build around the dolls.

Ollie is a great listener. If you have something to tell him, he won't tell anyone until you are ready. Just whisper your thoughts into his big, open ears.

Ollie has a big mouth you can open via a zip. Open his zip for him to talk. Close the zip if you don't want him to talk anymore.

Ollie has been known to keep children's notes in his big mouth. Zipped up, safe and sound.

You might want to share a note with someone? Put it in Ollie's mouth, he would be happy to pass it on. He's a great postie.

If Ollie had someone over for dinner who would it be? What might they eat? What might they talk about?

Ollie swings from tree to tree. We all swing from one thing to the next, swinging through life. What do you take with you that helps you to swing through life? Is there anyone swinging with you? How do you know where you are headed? Is it important to keep track of where you have been? How do you focus on the tree ahead and also the trees further away?

Embody:

Offering opportunities for children to embody aspects of the doll's stories and selves.

Noticing the way children experiment with shifting ways of being in their body and can try on new or unfamiliar ways of moving and posturing inspired by the Big Tree dolls.

Share some of Ollie's food. Imagine smelling the food, and tasting it, and then it going down into your tummy, making you feel full and content.

Some baby monkeys are carried on the backs of their mum. Can you carry Ollie around on your back?

Open your mouth as wide as Ollie can. Laugh like a happy Ollie. What might Ollie's voice sound like?

Have you ever felt like your mouth has been zipped closed? Practice opening the zip, bit by bit, and see how that feels.

Ollie has extra-long arms because he loves hugs. If it feels ok, give Ollie a hug.

Ollie's extra-long arms help him swing through the forest. Swing with Ollie through a forest. Feel what it is like to be a playful, swinging monkey.

Ollie has a big mouth. How loud do you think he could be with his mouth zipped open? How quiet do you think he could whisper with his mouth zip nearly closed? Invite a child to take on Ollie's voice-loud and soft.

Master the Monkey Mind - Kid's 5 minute mindfulness practice
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2cSCCUpVZQ>

Emotionally Connect:

Learning about feelings with the help of the dolls.

Noticing how children reflect and have insight into their shifting feelings with reference to the tools and symbols built into the dolls.

Noticing how children relate to the emotional content built into the character's stories from the Big Tree.

Ollie eats everything. Did you know that he even eats worries? If you are carrying any worries you could consider drawing or writing them down to give to Ollie to munch up. Hear him do a big burp after he eats up your worries.

We know from Ollie's Big Tree Tale, that he hasn't always been a happy monkey. As the only monkey in the Big Tree, he ended up having to find his own family. This was scary and hard at times. There were many ups and downs. Have you ever experienced ups and downs? Your parent/carer or significant adult might like to ask you, what was the biggest up that happened today? What was the lowest down that happened today? How might you draw both things in a picture?

Ollie can hold any difficult things to think about in his mouth. Just write them down or draw them on a piece of paper and pop it inside his zippered mouth.

Have you ever felt like you have had to hold onto any difficult things? I wonder what that feels like?

Enhance Relationships:

Noticing how children relate with others with their Big Tree doll/s.

Finding ways the Big Tree dolls can act as a bridge for resourcing to extend from therapeutic spaces into everyday life.

Use Ollie in initial sessions to build rapport through Ollie's smiles and sharing.

Hide and Seek

Play Hide and Seek with Ollie's food. What is it like to be the hider or the seeker? Your parent/carer or significant adult could use 'warmer' and 'colder' as guides to help find the felt food. Swap roles with your parent/carer. What is that like?

Ollie could be like a postie with his giant mouth acting like a post box. Children and their parent/carer could write notes to each other with Ollie's zipped up mouth holding mail in transit. Ollie could also transport messages to the child's teacher or other significant person.

Share a pretend picnic with Ollie. Ollie can provide the food.

Your parent/carer writes positive messages about you and feeds them to Ollie. You find them after unzipping Ollie's mouth.

Ollie's Restaurant

Ollie loves sharing food with others. His biggest wish is to one day run his own restaurant. Families could help Ollie by taking him home and setting up a mock restaurant at home. Don't forget to set a place for Ollie at the table.

Ollie's Restaurant Placemats

Ollie needs some help to set up his restaurant. Draw or collage a placemat for your parent/carer and yourself on the provided A4 paper. What might you include in your drawing/collage? Pictures of things you like? A message about something you like about yourself or your parent/carer? Your parent/carer might like to also draw/collage you a placemat and fill it with things that they know and love about you. Your worker will laminate your placemats for you.

(In a family group setting) Everyone draw/collage their own placemat. You might like to include your names and things that you are interested in? Your worker can laminate your placemats for you.

Menu Design

You could design a menu for your family, thinking about including favourite foods of family members and including foods that are good for our bodies.



Susan Kitten Practicing Relaxation and Exploring Self Narratives

Explore:

Notice the way children spontaneously orientate, approach, and physically interact with their doll.

Notice how children position themselves with their doll and how they go about being with their doll in a physical sense.

Is Susan awake or asleep? Open and close her eyelids to show how awake or asleep she feels.

What do you think the fold out book in Susan's head represents?

Arrange the valcroed symbols the way you feel like they should go in the fold out book, or on the table or floor in front of you.

Are you drawn to any symbols more than others?

Evoked new Narratives:

Notice the way children interpret and respond to the doll's stories from the Big Tree.

Notice the narratives that children build around the dolls.

Do you think you could tell a story using Susan's symbols?

If you were to represent your life story with 4 - 8 significant symbols, what would those symbols be? Do they have an order? How might you tell your story?

Utilize a roll of at least 3 ply paper towel. This could represent Susan's concertinaed book in her head. You are invited to draw or write a story on the panelled towel.

Susan's concertinaed book is double sided. One side could represent a slate for stories from the night (eg. dreams), and the other side could represent a slate for stories from the day. What kind of symbols might you draw or arrange when thinking about the day, and then thinking about the night?

Susan's concertinaed book includes half cool coloured symbols and half warm coloured symbols. The cool coloured symbols including a moon, and could represent an opening for stories from the night (eg. dreams), and the warm coloured symbols, including a sun, could represent an opening for stories from the day. What kind of symbols might you draw or arrange when thinking about the day, and then thinking about the night?

Susan writes her dreams in her book she keeps in her head. It helps her to write them down and talk with the moon about them. Should you have dreams, good or bad, your parent/carer could put a blank note pad next to your bed like Susan's dream book. You could write or draw on the pad should you have dreams or nightmares that you remember. You can tell Susan and your parent/carer about your dreams.

At the end of her tale from the Big Tree, Susan looks forward to going to bed at night. She needs a routine around bedtime. Would you like to invent Susan's bedtime routine? An adult might give you an old shoe box or tissue box for you to make into a bed for Susan. After you have made her a bed, invent a bedtime routine for Susan and practice it along-side Susan when it's your bedtime.

Susan wants to practice finding ways to relax and feel more calm. Would you like to write a story about how she does this?

Embody:

Offering opportunities for children to embody aspects of the doll's stories and selves.

Noticing the way children experiment with shifting ways of being in their body and can try on new or unfamiliar ways of moving and posturing inspired by the Big Tree dolls.

Move like a kitten. Embody the many moods of a cat, from playful and alert, to sleepy and content. Move between these physical states. Spring around the room together, before stretching like a cat might when it wakes up. Have a huge yawn- through the body. Use youtube clips of cats to encourage taking on the physicality of a cat in various states, eg. Curled up in a ball, stretching, back arched hissing, lying in a patch of sun, tapping a ball of wool.

Practice purring like Susan. This extends the out breath (which slows the heart rate and is regulating for mild hyperarousal).

You and your parent/carer could show each other you are happy by purring when you feel happy together.

Pretend that you have a pocket in the back of your head. You have the key for opening this pocket. Pretend pulling things out of the pocket to look at them. What kind of things do you keep in the pocket in your head? What kind of thoughts, feelings, pictures, sounds, smells do you find in there? Are there things you carry in your head that are heavier or lighter than others? Are there some things you would like to give away, or change? Which things are precious to you?

Rock a bye Susan

Lie on your back with Susan resting on your tummy. When you breathe in and out notice how she goes up and down on your tummy. The more you breathe in and out the sleepier Susan gets until she falls off to sleep. <https://www.susankaisergreenland.com/watch-1/rock-a-bye>

Yoga Pose – 'Zen the Cat' pose - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XCQfYsFa3Q>

Emotionally Connect:

Learning about feelings with the help of the dolls.

Noticing how children reflect and have insight into their shifting feelings with reference to the tools and symbols built into the dolls.

Noticing how children relate to the emotional content built into the character's stories from the Big Tree.

What do you think Susan might be worried about?

Susan sleeps in the branches of the Big Tree. She does this because it's too scary to go to sleep on the ground. What is it like going to sleep for you?

Susan has often felt over-run by strong, difficult feelings. She has had to learn ways to cope with these feelings. Susan has found that practicing some breathing tricks and mindful activities can help her body and mind feel calmer.

Susan has found the following websites helpful: You might like to try some of the following websites? Adults in your life might like to practice some calming activities with you?

<https://www.susankaisergreenland.com/watch-demonstrations>

<https://annakaharris.com/mindfulness-for-children/>

<https://www.headspace.com/>

Susan is learning that all feelings are ok. She is realising that when she shares her feelings it helps. You might like to share some of your feelings with Susan? She knows what it's like to have strong feelings. She is ready to understand.

Susan's feelings are written in the book she keeps inside her head. Sometimes Susan feels so anxious and worried that she forgets her worries are only a part of her book. Take a look at Susan's book. Notice that Susan's book contains her worries, as well as lots of other things. Maybe there is an adult in your life that could mind these worries. You and your adult could put them in a box that your adult will keep for you. Practice taking them out of Susan's book, and your own book, pull them off their velcro circles, and give them to your adult. They will be safe with them.

Have you ever gone to pat a cat and it runs away? What does it feel like? Why might it run away? What do you think it is feeling? How can you show it that it is ok? What does it feel like when someone doesn't share or seem to understand your feelings? What do they need to do to better understand what you are feeling?

Enhance Relationships:

Noticing how children relate with others with their Big Tree doll/s.

Finding ways the Big Tree dolls can act as a bridge for resourcing to extend from therapeutic spaces into everyday life.

If someone is saying something that feels hard to hear, or asking you to talk about something you can't talk about right now, tell them by agreeing with them that you will close Susan's eyes if this happens. This will show them that you and Susan need a rest or are not ready to talk right now.

Susan resembles a baby. She could be used as a resource for parents/carers to talk about what a baby needs. The parent/carer could model caring for a baby.

You and your parent/carer could make a bedtime story together. Your parent/carer can then read it to you and Susan while you snuggle together.

You might like to pull Susan's concertinaed book out of her head and use it to tell your parent/carer a story.

Susan loves hugs and lullabies and bed time stories- they help her to go to sleep. Do you think you might be able to give Susan a cuddle, and perhaps your parent/carer might be able to sing her a lullaby or read her a bed-time story?

Your parent/carer has her/his own concertinaed book in her/his head. One part of this book includes drawings and words about you. We invite your parent/carer to create some drawings and words showing times of joy she/he remembers spending with you. Your parent/carer might also like to show you the part of the book from her/his head that includes words describing what she/he loves about you.



Ellen Caterpillar

Transformation and Increasing Adaptability

Explore:

Notice the way children spontaneously orientate, approach, and physically interact with their doll.

Notice how children position themselves with their doll and how they go about being with their doll in a physical sense.

Does it feel like Ellen needs to be a caterpillar or a butterfly right now?

When you find Ellen's wings, what is your favourite colour, shape and texture on Ellen's wings? Why? Is there anything on her wings you don't like?

Can you see somewhere in the room that would be best for Ellen to build her cocoon? Help her build a cocoon.

Ellen's wings can flutter if you help them. Does Ellen feel like exploring the space? Can you help her?

Evoke new Narratives:

Notice the way children interpret and respond to the doll's stories from the Big Tree.

Notice the narratives that children build around the dolls.

Caterpillars stay in their cocoons for as little as 2 weeks. What if you had your own cocoon- a safe place for transformation. Draw what your cocoon might look like.

Make a list of what you might like to take into your own cocoon. What would be the most important things for you as you transform? If you like you could draw the inside of your own cocoon. How might Ellen know that it is safe enough to weave a cocoon? Where would you choose to locate your cocoon?

Are there some times or places that it is safest to be a caterpillar? Are there some times or places that it is safe to be a butterfly?

Every butterfly has been a caterpillar. What is it like to own your inner caterpillar?

It is an enormous challenge for a caterpillar to change into a butterfly. Tell a story about a time in your life when something has been challenging and led to transformation and growth.

When caterpillars transform, they build a cocoon somewhere they deem safe enough, and become jelly like inside, before turning into a butterfly. Things grow from softness, and vulnerability, not hardness. Have you ever felt vulnerable and safe enough, and has this ever led to change?

When a caterpillar transforms, they re-arrange themselves. They take some parts of themselves, leave some parts, and recycle some parts into something new. If you were transforming into a butterfly what parts of yourself and your world do you think that you would take, leave, and recycle?

Draw your own set of wings (or your parent/carer could provide you with a template to draw/paint within).

Ellen's wings are the embodiment of her transformation. Imagine if you were to grow wings and written and pictured on your wings were all of the things that have helped you to grow, transform, and be who you are. What kind of things would be on your wings? Would you like to draw your wings?

I wonder what your parents/carers wings might look like? What is pictured or written on their wings?

If you had wings, where would you fly?

Embody:

Offering opportunities for children to embody aspects of the doll's stories and selves.

Noticing the way children experiment with shifting ways of being in their body and can try on new or unfamiliar ways of moving and posturing inspired by the Big Tree dolls.

What might it be like to not have arms or legs, to inch around the forest? Can you pretend you are a caterpillar?

Create a cocoon for yourself. Cushions, yoga mats, lycra body socks, blankets, beanbags are all good tools to provide for this activity.

What does it feel like to be in your cocoon?

When you are ready you can come out of your cocoon. How does it feel when you unfurl your wings for the first time? Take off into the sky when you are ready. What does it feel like in your body to fly for the first time with your new wings? What can you see from up in the sky? What does it sound like? Smell like? What does it feel like?

Where do you fly? Are you flying away from something, or towards something, or both?

What is it like to touch Ellen's wings? Are there textures you like, or dislike? Are there parts of her wings that you are attracted to more than others? Have you felt textures like the ones you liked on Ellen's wings before anywhere?

Kids Butterfly Yoga pose -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zhtl7WAQfnc>

Emotionally Connect:

Learning about feelings with the help of the dolls.

Noticing how children reflect and have insight into their shifting feelings with reference to the tools and symbols built into the dolls.

Noticing how children relate to the emotional content built into the character's stories from the Big Tree.

How do you think Ellen feels right now?

Do you think Ellen might feel the same or different when she is a caterpillar compared to when she is a butterfly? If so, how?

I wonder what it might have felt like for Ellen to change so much? How have you changed over time? What does it feel like to you to change? Has anything, or anyone helped you to change?

Is there anything that Ellen Butterfly misses about being a caterpillar?

What do other people think and feel about Ellen's change?

How do you imagine Ellen might be feeling when she first realises that she has wings and works out that she can fly? Have you ever felt like that?

What makes you feel more beautiful and strong?

Enhance Relationships:

Noticing how children relate with others with their Big Tree doll/s.

Finding ways the Big Tree dolls can act as a bridge for resourcing to extend from therapeutic spaces into everyday life.

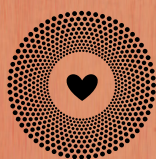
With your parent or carer go on a hunt outside in the garden, or park, or local bushland to find leaves, and flowers, and nuts, and stones, and dirt you might use to decorate your own set of wings. On cardboard draw or get your parent/carer to draw the outline of a butterfly's wings. Your parent/carer might like to decorate her/his own set of wings.

Ellen has wings on one side and the other. Draw a blank butterfly with blank wings. On one side you might like to fill Ellen's wings with all of the good stuff you have learned from your mum, and on the other side all the good stuff learned from your Dad.

Imagine if Ellen was to fly out of the room and off into the sky. With your parent/carer imagine going on a flight together. You could pick the places to visit and your parent/carer or significant adult could tell a story of how you get there, flying through branches and soaring up into the sky.

If your parent/carer was to draw you as a butterfly how might she/he do that? What colours would he/she use? What words describing your best qualities might be written on your wings?

Use a butterfly picture template. Cut off both wings. Take the wings from one side and let your parent/carer take the wings from the other side. Each of you are invited to write or draw 5 things you love about the other on your wings. Return the completed wings to the butterfly and share what is written or drawn on the wings with each other.



**Australian
Childhood
Foundation**



Phone 1300 381 581

info@childhood.org.au

www.professionals.childhood.org.au

