The Tree of Life project at UCLH: A group approach to exploring identity for young people living with Type 1 Diabetes

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Setting the focus

- Paediatric and Adolescent Psychology team connected to the Diabetes team
- Offer psychological support for young people with diabetes and their families
- Tree of Life groups began in 2010 in response to ‘traditional’ psychological approaches being perceived as implying that problems are located within the young person rather than a legitimate expression of distress associated with a chronic condition
- Adapted from a project for traumatised children who had lost parents to HIV/AIDS (Ncube, 2006; Denborough, 2008)
The groups

- Age specific groups
  - Under 11
  - 11-12
  - 13+
- A chance to explore identity outside of Type 1 Diabetes
- A chance to meet others
- Peer trainers – buffer / staying connected
- Support at lunch time for carb counting / injections
- Tree of Life technique used in 1:1 sessions too
Narrative Therapy Principles

• Young People are experts in their lives (Anderson and Goolishan, 1992)
Narrative Therapy Principles

- Problems are separate from people
Narrative Therapy Principles

- Narrative Therapy assumes that people have skills, values, commitments and abilities which help reduce the influence of problems in their lives such as living with a health condition.
Narrative Therapy Principles

• Interested in stories about lives and relationships
Narrative Therapy Principles

• Safe place to stand or Riverbank Position (Kaseke 2010)
Aims of the Tree of Life project

• Meet others living with diabetes.
• Feel comfortable sharing experiences and the effects of diabetes.
• Develop positive views of themselves to increase self-esteem.
• Learn about and share knowledge of living with diabetes.
• Position and confirm themselves as experts in their condition.
• Change their relationship with diabetes so it impacts less negatively on their lives.
What is the ‘Tree of Life’?

- **Leaves:** Significant people
- **Branches:** Hopes & dreams
- **Trunk:** Skills & abilities
- **Ground:** Hobbies, daily life
- **Flowers:** Gifts you give to others
- **Fruits:** Gifts given by others
- **Roots:** Culture, family history
Storms and Responses

Having to take responsibility (Maturity)

Bullies - people being mean, worries about work

Divorce - remembering to buy

Earthquakes, volcanoes, illnesses

Thinking about what eat, annoying, wearing wrist band

People dying, pets running away

Fights, arguments, terrorism

Kidnapping - using knowledge

Nerves about being with people who know less about diabetes

Frustration: things happening that you are not in control of

Being treated like a child, wanting to be independent

Dealing with others new, getting offended

Physical effects - high, low

Physical effects

Time it takes to take care of diabetes - mental, physical effects

Not fitting in with clothing
Evaluating the Tree of Life project: An innovative way of engaging children and young people with type 1 diabetes

Abstract

Type 1 diabetes interferes in the lives of children and young people, interrupting relationships and impacting on quality of life. It can dominate the lives of teenagers, taking over their identity and leaving them feeling disconnected from family and friends.
The Tree of Life is an innovative one-day group event for young people with diabetes aged 10–19 years. It enables young people to build positive views of themselves, with an identity separate from diabetes, thereby enhancing self-esteem and empowering them to feel it is possible to reduce the negative influence of diabetes in and on their lives. To date, 93 young people have attended 17 Tree of Life day events at University College London Hospital. Attendees state that the project has helped them to develop positive views of themselves and feel less isolated by connecting, learning from and sharing knowledge with others living with type 1 diabetes.
UCLH Tree of Life Video

https://www.digibete.org/emotional-wellbeing/
What difference does it make?

• A total of 93 children and young people (60 female and 33 male) attended 17 groups (12 adolescent groups and five child groups) between July 2010 and September 2016.

• Data from the feedback interviews at the end of the days have been transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis (Casdagli L, Christie D, Girling I, Ali S, Fredman G, 2017)
Themes from the evaluation

• Connecting with others
  – From isolation to inclusion
  – An open space to share experiences
  – Learning from each other about living with diabetes

• Building a positive view of the self
  – Focusing on my qualities
  – Separating myself from diabetes
  – Empowerment
Training for other services/teams

• Our psychology team at UCLH regularly facilitates narrative training events that include learning about both Tree of Life and Beads of Life techniques
• The next event is fully booked but if you are interested in attending subsequent events, please email uclh.capsychology@nhs.net
Questions?

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References


