

# Speaking freely from the heart...

After escaping domestic violence, survivors are left with the heavy task of repairing their remaining family relationships, and children have limited tools to express what they have experienced. Leaders share that for many participants, the Feeling Friends workshop is a safe way to acknowledge their feelings and open communication.



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**A**n eight year-old girl who was residing at the shelter was exhibiting a lot of adverse behavior: she refused to attend school and was violent with the other children. One day, she had such an intense and overwhelming episode that we called the Psychiatric Emergency Team (PET).

Unable to communicate her feelings, the girl sat mute in the corner, refusing to talk or make eye contact. While waiting for the PET team to arrive I knew that I needed to find a way for her to access and process her inner turmoil. I decided to combine the Feeling Friends and Heart Stories workshops so she could speak freely from her heart, through her art.

Using AWBW’s Feeling Faces chart made it easy to create a small banner that contained the different feeling words that empowered the girl to identify and define a myriad of feelings and emotions. She created three hearts on her project. Each heart contained a feeling word. The girl wrote safety in the largest heart which allowed me to recognize her need for safety and reinforced that she would not articulate or trust us enough to share her emotions until she felt safe.

The art was so effective in helping her regulate her emotions that by the time the PET team arrived they didn’t need to take her! Once I discovered what a wonderful communication tool the project was, I shared it with her mother and helped the girl hang it on the wall of her room. From that day on, every morning the girl would choose which feeling best represented how she felt that day and then placed the feeling word banner in her feeling friend’s hands. This ensured that the girl would not get embarrassed and hide her feelings, but rather



communicate her feelings through her feeling friend. Now her mother has insight into how to meet her daughter’s needs.

Since that day I have seen a complete change in the girl’s ability to cope. She is a lot more cooperative; she attends school and interacts with the other children in a positive way!

Based on annual evaluations submitted by facilitators in 2018:

**96% agree that the art workshops helped them to make breakthroughs with participants who are difficult to reach and connect with**