



Bidding on Aprons

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During the recent 3rd Child & Youth Care World conference in Ventura, California we were hanging about (as CYC people are wont to do) looking at the variety of amazing items on bid for the CYC-Net silent auction. One of the items up for bid was an apron from Newfoundland and Labrador and this led to a conversation about aprons! Alas, only one of us won the



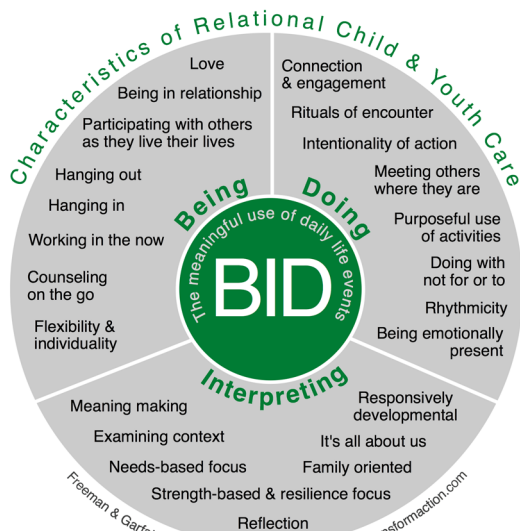
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apron but we both left with a new appreciation for the valuable versatility of them in our work.

So, why are we writing about aprons? Well, the more we talked, the more we realized that aprons are a nice addition to some aspects of child and youth care practice. And, we also realized, an apron is a potentially great tool for Child & Youth Care Workers. Hang on, we will get to the explanation!

The more we thought about aprons, their function, usefulness and potential meanings, the more we realized how they fit well with the Child & Youth Care approach to intervention: Being, Interpreting and Doing (BID). James Freeman (from Casa Pacifica in California) organized the characteristics of a Child & Youth Care approach under these 3 points of the process of intervention and, so, we use that as a framework for what follows. The diagram below represents this organization for those of you less familiar with it. (Freeman & Garfat, 2014).



So back to the multi-useful apron! The thing about aprons ... is that they can hold stories, stains, memories and history. And they can be such a resource for Child & Youth Care practitioners.

When we consider *Being* – being in relationship, in love, being flexible, participating with others when and where they live their lives, and working in the now, while hanging out or hanging in – we can find space for, and see the potential usefulness of, an apron. And the apron can find space for us.

An apron is not simply a fabric used to cover clothing, so it doesn't get stained (although that is certainly an important function) – an apron can be a way to demonstrate care. It can be a part of creating nourishment while planting seeds in a garden (seeds tucked in the pocket in front) or preparing a gourmet meal (that pocket will hold our spoons). It can be used to wipe tears from the eyes of a youth who is following her late mother's recipe for baking bread (and, if we have a blank apron, we can even write that recipe on the apron, personalizing the experience). It can send a message to a small child that it is okay to freely experiment with paint or glue or clay. It can *be there* 'with us; as a part of the experience, joining us together in the experience, especially if we each have our own aprons.

When we consider *Interpreting* – context, meaning making, needs and reflection – the apron can again be our friend. As we create moments for children and youth to take risks and try something new, we can observe their reactions, participation and questions. We can respond. If a recipe fails and the cake doesn't rise, an apron can be used to comfort or wipe a tear as we try to understand what this 'cake failure' means to the child and, indeed, to ourselves. Or when the cake is being decorated, it can be used to wipe the fingers covered in vibrant shades of icing as we celebrate this strength! As we wipe our hands on the apron, we can pause and reflect on the experience.

When we consider *Doing* – with intention and emotional presence - through activity, rhythmicity, rituals and engagement – we can trust that an apron will be a connector – between ourselves and the young person or between the young person and their history. Some grandmothers, for example, may have worn an



apron all day every day, ever present and ready for any task that may come. Some have several to match occasions or holidays – while others only have one – because it comfortable, durable and reliable. It is part of them and their story. We can learn much from these grandmothers! And if the young person had such a grandmother, we can use the apron as a vehicle through which to connect the young person to that memory.

We can use aprons to take risks (protecting us when working with oils and extreme heat), to establish routines (signifying that we are serious about the task at hand) and to encourage creativity (readying us for many projects). Even putting on the aprons can develop into a significant ritual. Aprons are often a medium of connection while cooking in the kitchen, preparing a birthday cake for a sibling, painting a memory box, working in the garden, fixing a bike, or molding clay into a vessel. Aprons also have practical uses that can help when planning activities. Pockets can hold important items such as tissues, pens, paintbrushes, and recipes. Or the bottom of the apron can be used to hold building blocks, eggs or flowers from the garden – and even a special treat for the young person. The possibilities are endless. Heck, they can even allow us to cover our heads, when the weather demands it.

Imagine gifting an apron when a child moves into a new foster or group home.



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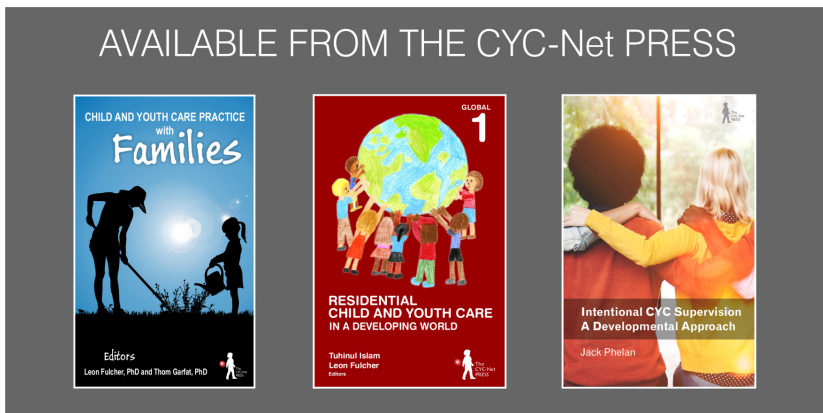
The apron can be the same pattern as the one worn by others or it can be a blank slate waiting to be designed. Or, together, the Child & Youth Care worker and young person can go and find an apron which reflects the child's personal expression of self. It can be used when teaching new things such as cracking an egg, measuring liquids or following a complicated recipe. But it can also be used to acknowledge the challenges of failing and the reward of experiencing success after trying again. Aprons help you to embrace the mess and continue on.

An apron can be used throughout the child's stay (coupled with a memory book of favourite recipes, activities and photos). It will hold memories and act as a transitional object when and if she moves on. Hopefully it will be part of many transitions and significant moments to come because the youth will see it as part of her story.

So please gift children and families aprons – as a means of connection – to ease a transition – to hold stories and become a vessel of memories (stains and all)!

Such a fine Child & Youth Care addition. We were thinking that maybe Child & Youth Care graduates should receive an apron, along with their certificate or degree!

Aprons are amazing!



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