

Helping your child share their views using the three islands tool

The Three Islands tool is a simple way to help your child or young person share what they think and feel about their lives.

You can use it to help them talk about home, school or both.

It can help your child to share what they think about:

- the support they already have
- what has worked or not worked for them
- what help they would like and who should give it
- any risks, strengths, hopes and dreams

What you need to do

Find a quiet and safe space for you and your child to be in, where they will feel comfortable and you won't be disturbed.

You'll need three large pieces of paper and some pens, plus some sticky tape. Some people find it helpful to have some small toys or models to use. You will also need something to write on yourself, so you can make notes about what's said.

Ask your child to draw three islands on the pieces of paper. Stick the pieces together in a line with some sticky tape. Then ask them to draw a bridge between the first two islands and a gate in the middle of it. The third island is left on its own. You can help them do this.

Label as:

- The first island is the 'The Island of Always'
- The second island is 'The Island of Sometimes'

- The third island (the one on its own) is 'The Island of Far Away'

Explain that this is a game and that they live on the first island and this is where they are all the time (the island of always). Ask them to draw themselves on the island or use a toy to be them. Then ask them to draw anything else they want to be on this island with them. This could be people, animals, activities or objects. So, they could put family, friends, pets, a cuddly toy or Xbox console, swimming or books about dinosaurs. Essentially anything that's important and which they really like and want to have with them all the time.

On the second island, ask them to draw or put anything that they want to see or do, but not all the time (the island of sometimes). Explain they have the only key to the gate on the bridge, so anything on the second island can only cross when they let them.

On the third island, ask the child or young person to draw or put anything that they want to be far away from them or never see again (the island of far away).

When they are drawing or putting toys on the islands, ask them who or what they are and why they have put something on a particular island. Write down the things they say so you have a record later.

If you're writing things down for your child always try and use their exact words and ideas. It's a good idea to read everything back to them before you finish each island. This gives you an opportunity to dig a bit further into an issue if you need to.

When you've finished, ask your child if you can share the drawing with other people and tell them who that will be. Tell your child what the information will be used for and what will happen next.

Tips

- You can use this tool to ask your child about lots of topics, such as school, home, social life and friendships.
- If your child is likely to draw rather than write, you might need bigger pieces of paper to give them plenty of room.
- When you're exploring things that your child always or sometimes wants, it often gives you a good way to talk about what they never want, and what they're worried about. Always check which island the things that they've said should go on – don't assume.
- Try not to question where your child places things. For example, you can ask why they have put their grandma on the second island but don't say: 'Oh, but I would have thought grandma should be on island one?' Your child may end up trying to please you or say what they think you'd want to hear, or not hear.
- It's worth bearing in mind that there may also be immediate reasons why your child has put something on either the second or third islands – for example, they may put your cat on island two because the cat scratched them earlier in the day.
- It might take your child a while, maybe almost to the end of your talk, to say the things they are most worried about. So, before you finish, it's always a good idea to ask if there is anything they want to add to any of the islands.

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