

# Special lock down tree of life for children and family

An article by Dina Scherrer

Dina offers all those who live and/or work with children and teenagers a special version of her Confined Life Tree.

The whole world has been confronted with COVID 19, the fear of COVID 19 and the prolonged confinement that is forcing all of us to rethink our ways of living, working and staying connected. Within the families, everyone is living the situation in their own way with ups and downs, looking for ways to keep hope.

In this context, parents of young children must, in the same day, juggle working at a distance, eating meals, supervising school work, compensating for the lack of activity, linked to confinement, by redoubling their imagination to occupy their young children for a large part of the day.

To you brave parents, in this period so special for you where you have to be in all places at once, I propose an activity to offer your young children called the Tree of Life. A metaphorical method of accompaniment that will have many benefits for them as well as for you. It will allow you to share a pleasant and playful moment with them while offering your children, in this destabilizing and anxiety-provoking period for them as well, the opportunity to create a space to talk about COVID 19 from the perspective of: how they themselves are courageously resisting the situation, what talents and strengths they are developing during this period, the ideas they have to cope, the people they can count on, the beautiful projects for their future life.

It is called the Tree of Life because it is an invitation to accompany your children on the side of life, the idea being to offer you an activity that both occupies the children and the family but also allows you to meet the resources of each member of the family during this period, to consolidate the bonds and to keep hope. I have therefore concocted a Tree of Life protocol "special confinement" for the children and the family.

To begin, get some coloured leaves and markers and ask your children to draw a tree with roots, trunk, branches, leaves and fruit on a large sheet of paper. Then, for each part of the tree, ask them to answer the questions below. The tree will be in three parts. You make your tree, identify the storms, anchor the learning. Parents can of course also make their own tree at the same time as their children. After drawing your tree:

## 1st step: making your Tree of Life

### The Roots

We'll start with the roots. Roots symbolize the story of our life, what life has already taught us, no matter how old we are. With the roots we will revisit a little

bit of our history and identify the small victories, the beautiful moments we have already lived in our lives. In all areas of our lives.

Put words at the level of the roots in response to :

- What small or big victories have you ever had? School victories, sports victories, personal victories?
- Do you have an example of something you have done that made you proud and/or happy?
- What are the most beautiful memories of your whole life that you keep precious in your head and in your heart? School, family, sports, friends memories....

Children write down at the root level all the words that come to mind. They can be words, sentences, people, anything they want without censoring themselves. Take as much time as you need. You can help your child answer questions by challenging them a little about the answers. When your child has finished this step, take a little time and ask them what they take away from this part of the exercise. What it says about him or her. What is important to him.

The intention for this part of the tree for your child is to make him aware that, no matter how old he is, he has experience on his life, life has already taught him a lot and small victories are already challenges that he has already had to face.

### **The ground**

With the roots we were more in the past. With the soil we enter the present and we will go and identify the needs of your children during this period. In order for the tree to grow, you have to water it. This is the moment when we will identify and note on the ground the two or three important needs for your child so that he can get through this period of confinement as well as possible.

Put words in the ground in response to :

- What do you need most right now to feel good?
- What is important for you to do even during this time of confinement?
- Take time with your child to hear his or her needs and work together to see how you can meet those needs in the context of your own needs. How could everyone take and what are everyone's ideas for how to make their needs come alive?

The intention in this part of the tree for your child is to see how to care for or support what helps him in this situation.

### **The trunk**

With the trunk, we will stay in the present and identify your children's resources. We're going to put words in the trunk. The trunk symbolizes the strength of the tree. What makes your child's tree strong and keeps it upright no matter what happens?

Put words in the trunk in response to:

- What qualities, skills, talents do you have, that your friends recognize you, that people appreciate in you? Parents can suggest qualities that they recognize in their children.
- What new qualities have you learned and developed from the small victories you've already achieved?
- What activities do you like to do that make you feel good right now?
- Has this period of confinement made you discover a quality that you didn't know you had?

Once your child has listed his or her main qualities, skills, ask your child to choose one or two of his or her main qualities that particularly help him or her and ask the following questions:

Where do you think you got these qualities from? How did you acquire them? Do you have another story where this quality expressed itself, helped you?

The same goes for the actions that he likes to do and that do him good. Same questions.

The intention in this part of the tree for your child is to reconnect him to his strengths, to show him that he is equipped to deal with the situation he is currently experiencing.

### **The branches**

The branches grow, ascend to the sky and grow stronger. With the branches we transport ourselves into the future. We look ahead and identify what your child concretely wishes for his or her life. What is a successful life for him. What is the beautiful thing that awaits me and makes me want to move forward in life?

Put words at the branch level in response to :

- What are the dreams, the plans for your life in the future?
- What is a successful life for you? What will you see as a successful life for you?
- What are the jobs that make you dream and that you would like to do? Why do you want to do them?
- When you look in front of you, what do you see yourself doing, what can you concretely achieve?
- What will be the first thing you want to do when life takes its course and you can go out again as normal?
- What has this period of confinement taught you? What will be different for you tomorrow? Do you think you'll have new urges?

The children write down the answers along branches, words, sentences. It can be very concrete or just an intention. Everything is ok and will inform the child about everything that is important to them. All the projects, desires that are important to him and that make him want to move forward in life. This part of the tree will help your child find hope and desire to move forward.

The intention in this part of the tree for your child is to find the motivation and meaning to want to write the rest of his story.

### **A bird on a branch**

Ask your child to draw a small bird on one of the branches. A bird sings. Ask your child to think of a song or music that he likes to listen to, that makes him feel good and gives him energy and courage. If possible, ask your child to make you listen to this music. Ask him a few questions related to this music or song: What is the story behind this song? Who introduced you to it? When you listen to it, how does it make you feel? What does it make possible for you? How does this song help you? Would listening to this song right now help you?

### **Leaves**

The leaves of the tree grow, fall, renew themselves. This is the part of the tree where we will recreate the bond, get your child out of isolation if necessary. The leaves will symbolize his support club. He's not alone in going through this particular time. We'll help him identify all the important people in his life, the ones he can count on.

Put words on the leaves in response to:

- Who are the people, the characters you love most in your life? At home, in the family, at school, friends...
- Who are the people you like to think about when things are not going well for you and it makes you feel good to think about them?
- Who are your heroes in life? The ones whose courage you admire?
- Do you have a secret friend, maybe one you've always imagined, a cuddly toy or something else... that you like to keep close to you sometimes, who you tell everything to, who protects you?

Your child will write down on each sheet of paper the names that come to him. Each sheet, a person, a character. Heroes, models. When he's finished, do the same as for the qualities, ask him to choose one or two people and go a little deeper so that they become a little more incarnate and help him. Once the person chosen, answer the following questions: If it's someone he really knows: Why did you choose this person? What do you like about them? What do you think this person likes about you? Imagining that this person is here with us, what would he or she say about you and your courage during this time of confinement? Would remembering this person help you in this time of confinement?

If it's a person your child doesn't know but who inspires him or her like a hero, ask: What does this person mean to you? What powers do you recognize in them? Are these powers also important to you? How do you think this person would react if he or she learned that he or she was important to you? What message would they be able to give you?

When your child is finished, ask what it feels like to talk about these people. The intention in this part of the tree for your child is to bring him or her out of isolation, to start a support club.

## The Fruits

Fruit is the gift that the tree produces when it is doing well. The fruit will embody the gifts of life. What life has given me.

Put words to the fruits in response to:

- What do you experience in your life as a chance, as a gift?
- What are the pleasant memories of your life that you want to keep in your memory as a gift?
- Write down what your child says. Choose one or two of its fruits and go a little deeper with the following questions: What is the story behind this gift? What does it say about you and what is important to you?

Your child's tree is now finished. We can move on to the second step.

### **Step 2: Identify the storms/brakes that might come between your child and his or her dreams**

After exploring your child's tree of life. After reconnecting him to his strengths, his dreams, his resource people, he should feel more equipped and stronger in the face of confinement. It is therefore now possible for him to anticipate the little storms that could come along and prevent him from keeping hope and confidence. Ask him the following questions:

- What do you think might prevent you from experiencing containment well?
- What do you think could make you sad or lose patience and courage during confinement?
- What has your Tree of Life taught you that if this happens you will be able to cope?

The idea being that your child is different from having realized our Tree of Life. You will, with him or her, further anchor this difference by going through the learnings of Step 3.

### **Step 3: Anchor the learning from your child's Tree of Life experience.**

In this last part, you are going to invite your child to synthesize what he or she learns from the Tree of Life experience and what it makes him or her want to put in place. This is the part where, if everything goes well, he can begin to project himself serenely into the future.

- What do you take away from your Tree of Life?
- What has your Tree of Life taught you about yourself, your courage?
- How will it help you to endure confinement?
- What, perhaps, surprised you?
- What does your tree make you want in relation to family, your studies?
- What new ideas does it give you to resist the current situation even more?
- What's the first thing you're going to do when you come out of confinement?

To end this activity with your child, you can ask the following two questions:

- If you had to give your tree of life a name, what name would you give it?
- If you learned that one of your friends was having trouble staying stuck at home, what ideas or advice could you give him or her to help him or her?

Your child has just had the experience of completing his or her Tree of Life to reconnect with his or her strengths. This will have allowed him to reflect deeply on the richness of his life and his dreams for the future.

If you do the Tree of Life as a family, everyone makes a tree of their resources. Then you post the trees on the same wall of the house, that makes the Family Life Forest. Each person presents his tree to the other members of the family. Those who listen enrich the tree of the one who tells by adding qualities they recognize in it. The listeners can also write down on post-it notes words of support that they will stick on the tree after the presentation. Like: I trust you, don't let go...

**Dina Scherrer**  
**Narrative Practitioner**

\*originally designed by David Denborough and Ncazelo Ncube \*