**‘What animal are you?’**

**An Activity for Foster Carers to Build Relationships and Connection with Children in their Care**

**PART I**

**Materials:** Paper, and kids choice of drawing materials eg. Crayons, textas, pastels.

**Instructions:** Ask the child to think about “if you were an animal, what kind would you be?” If they get stuck, I discuss with them the different characteristics of animals. Some are shy and quiet, others are happy and excited, while some are wild and angry.

Ask them to draw the animal that most closely resembles them. Encourage them to fill in the whole page, drawing the environment that the animal finds itself in on a daily basis.

Ask the child’s permission if you can draw an animal too.

**Things to Remember when Eploring the Picture with children:** As soon as they’ve given their animal a name e.g. turtle, always use “the turtle”, not “you” or the child’s name to ask questions e.g. what does the turtle like to do?

Stay with the metaphor, even though your child might say something like “I don’t like having to eat vegetables.” You could respond with “Yes, I’ve heard some turtles don’t like vegetables”. They may eventually share something really important, that they could not talk to you about in the first person.

These questions are just a guide, but you can ask others to explore further, as long as you stick to the metaphor.

**Exploring the child’s picture:**

Ask the child

* **What kind of animal is this? Can you describe it? What is …. like inside? (try to get the child to describe the character of the animal e.g. shy, wild, angry, happy, rather than it’s physical characteristics e.g. brown, big, stripey, long neck)**
* **What sort of things makes …… feel ….. (eg. shy, wild, angry, or happy)?**
* **What sort of things does ….. like? What sort of things does …. hate?**
* **What does ….. like to do for fun?**
* **What other animals does …. like hanging around with? What other animals does ….. fight with?**
* **What other animals does ……. have in his/her family? Which animal is ….. closest to?**
* **Can you tell me a little story about ……**

**Part II**

If you have both drawn a picture, get your child to ask questions about your picture or use the above questions as a guide to share some stories with your child.

Then bring the two pictures together to explore.

* **Do you think these animals talk the same language and understand each other?**
* **Do you think these animals get along together?**
* **If not, what do you think is stop them from getting along?**
* **Do you think the animals could get to like each other just a little bit more? What is one small thing they could do, to get along better?**
* **What are some things they like about each other? (share together)**
* **What good things do they like doing together?**
* **Can you make up a story about a time that the animals had fun together.**

You could invite your child to do a follow up picture with the two animals doing something fun together or getting along better. This is especially good if the child doesn’t talk much. The child may prefer to talk about your relationship by sharing a story about their picture.

* **What is working in the picture that allows the two animals to get on so well together?**

Don’t forget to put your pictures up on the fridge or bedroom wall, to refer to later.

This is just a beginning point to use the metaphor in your daily life together. Think creatively how you can use this to help your child communicate when they find it hard to talk about their feelings or problem solve. For example, check in with them “what do you think the turtle would do in this situation? Would he retreat inside his shell for a while and come out when he is ready? Or would he stick his neck out and say what needs to be said now?

Never underestimate the power of play as a tool to share, communicate and strengthen your relationship!