



What is Thinking Space?

Thinking Space is a cognitive analytic therapy – informed project that uses relationship-based practice to help young people in residential and secure care settings to understand themselves through the context of their past. Thinking Space provides a designated space for young people to speak about their experiences and emotions without this being recorded or shared.

The aim of Thinking Space is to give young people a unique opportunity to work through the impact of their past experiences and attachment relationships. By doing this, young people will ideally be able to better understand why they feel and cope in certain ways, and be able to manage this going forward.



Process Evaluation

This evaluation was completed using the MRC guidance for Process Evaluation of Complex Interventions. This considers the wider context and how it mediates the effect of the intervention on outcomes.

Method

Research Design

Mixed-method approach combining quantitative and qualitative data.

Participants

6 young people who completed all four stages of Thinking Space (storytelling, mapping, coping, ending)

Data Collection

- Surveys for young people after finishing the process
- Surveys for key staff who work with the young people involved
- Interview with practitioner
- Thematic logs of sessions

Data Analysis

Statistical analysis and thematic coding.

Research Lead

Sydney Guinchard, Why Not Trust

Timeline

July 2024 – August 2025

Executive Summary

A process evaluation of “Thinking Space” following completion by the first cohort of young people

Aims of Evaluation

- ✓ To determine not only *if* Thinking Space is working, but *how* it is working in its current context.
- ✓ To collate the perspectives of young people, secure/residential care staff, and the practitioner to inform future implementation.
- ✓ To gain a preliminary understanding of what outcomes may be associated with young people’s involvement in Thinking Space.

Findings

Young People Survey

Self-Rated Improvements

1. Better understanding of responses
2. Identifying positive relationships
3. Feeling more capable of making positive changes
4. Letting go of maladaptive coping strategies and learning more effective coping skills to use going forward

Staff Feedback

Observations on YP by staff

- YP were more aware of their feelings & triggers and better able to express this
- YP showed improved behavioural &/or emotional regulation skills
- YP had stronger relationships with staff, and many had better relationships with peers

Practitioner Interview

- The collaborative nature of the CAT-informed process allowed YP to create their own understanding of themselves
- The relationship between YP & practitioner allowed them to “try out” ways of relating and managing rupture & repair
- Through participating in Thinking Space, many YP developed their ability to understand others’ actions, recognising everyone has their own past as well

Context

Setting: The majority of YP included were living in secure care, with only one being in a residential unit. Future evaluations should aim to compare how Thinking Space functions in different settings.

Policy: During this implementation of Thinking Space, Scotland ended the use of Young Offenders’ Institutions (YOIs) for under 18s. This resulted in young people from YOIs being moved to secure centres, somewhat changing the types of external behaviours that YP were exhibiting in the centre.

Discussion

To our knowledge, this is the first evaluation of CAT or a CAT-informed approach being implemented with young people in care. This initial evaluation suggests that Thinking Space helps young people in secure and residential care gain a better understanding of themselves and their past experiences, and can apply this understanding to their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Young people may also develop improved empathy for others, which could potentially have positive implications on offending behaviour. Finally, through participating in Thinking Space, young people are supported to identify positive relationships that they do have and build more trusting relationships going forward.

Key Takeaways

- ✓ Young people in care, particularly secure care, benefit from having a confidential space to explore their pasts and relationships
- ✓ The collaborative and relational approach of Thinking Space helps young people engage and cocreate their self-understanding
- ✓ Projects like Thinking Space can be a useful way to support the mental health of young people who experience barriers to formal mental health support

Links

- ✓ <https://whynottrust.org/thinking-space/>

- ✓ To read the full evaluation:

[Click here or scan QR code](#)

