

Making Moments Meaningful in Child & Youth Care Practice

3rd Edition



Editors

Thom Garfat, Leon Fulcher and John Digney

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Introduction

Welcome to the 3rd edition of **Making Moments Meaningful** through the *Purposeful Use of Daily Life Events*. The use of daily life events has been around for a long time and is constantly being revisited or updated as new ideas emerge – see, for example the revised version of the Characteristics of a Relational Child & Youth Care Approach (Chapter 3), or any of the revised, or new, articles in this edition. The purposeful use of daily life events, founded on a Relational Child & Youth Care Approach, can help to reduce the intensity and duration of emotional pain with which young people, families or others may be living. Helping others learn how to live their life without pain is a primary focus of Relational Child & Youth Care practice.

The questions which underlay the *Purposeful Use of Daily Life Events* are these:

- How do we make an everyday life event (including a mere moment) meaningful?
- How do we help what might otherwise be an ordinary or fleeting moment transform into something meaningful in terms of achieving the ‘healing’ goals that we have established together to help young people and others reduce the pain in their lives?
- How do we ensure that our best efforts to make such a single moment or event, with this young person, as helpful, healing, and meaningful as it can be?

Those are, in many ways, the ultimate questions for our work if we want to be as effective as we can be in assisting other to move on to a place of less pain and trouble. We need to deeply wonder about how we can make the most of every little moment we have with them.

The deeply revised and new articles in this book are intended to open your critical and reflective self, to help ‘deepen’ your knowledge in the areas of a Relational Child and Youth Care Approach and the Purposeful Use of Daily Life Events. Of course, there is so much more we would have loved to have included, as is the case with most books, but we have focused on

some key concepts and would hope that the reader will continue to seek out the wealth of information that is available to us on the importance and relevance of using daily life events. Much additional information can be found at *The International Child and Youth Care Network* (<https://www.cyc-net.org>). We encourage you to go there and explore even further this aspect of helping traumatised, marginalised, and vulnerable young people and their families.

So, take your time, read, enjoy, and allow your reading time to be filled with meaningful moments for yourself – after all, meaningful moments are as important for us as for anyone.

Thom, John and Leon

Rosemere, Termonfeckin, and Tuai – Wairoa

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1. The Meaningful Use of Everyday Life Events in Child and Youth Care (Revised)

Thom Garfat

The use of daily life events has come to be the most defining characteristic of what we call a Relational Child and Youth Care approach (Garfat *et al*, 2018). Similar expressions have appeared from time to time, as others have expressed the idea that child and youth care involves, as stated by writers such as Fritz Redl (1959) and Lorraine Fox (1995), ‘exploiting’ the events that occur during the daily lives of children in our care, for the benefit of that child.

Redl’s expression was not readily incorporated into the field, probably because of the political associations attached to the word ‘exploiting’. Redl, of course, was talking about taking advantage of events, moments, as they occur in the life space of the child and while the words may not have caught on, the idea certainly did. Just as the definition of child and youth care has come to include ‘the relational’ (Bellefeuille & Ricks, 2008; Garfat *et al*, 2018) and the meaning of ‘life-space’ has changed (Gharabaghi & Stuart, 2013).

So too has the meaning of the phrase ‘daily life events’. Whereas it used to refer primarily to what we might call the routines and rituals of everyday life (meals, bedtimes, etc.), it has now come to refer to all the ‘moments’ which occur in the life-space – this ‘idea’ has been percolating and evolving over time (e.g., van der Westhuizen & Garfat, 2024.)

Maier (1987) encouraged us to attend to and use ‘the minutiae’ of everyday life, the little things, the small, seemingly unimportant events out of which the days of our lives are constructed: things like waiting for mealtimes, occasions of leave-taking, or just simply encountering one another. Followers of Redl suggest the use of life space interviews in which the care worker takes advantage of a singular event or moment (such as an

argument between two youth) as it is occurring or immediately after it occurs, specifically entering into the immediate life of the child (Brendtro & Long, 2002).

Peterson (1988) suggested watching for naturally occurring therapeutic opportunities that present themselves in the course of daily living and Guttman (1991) suggested that care workers must enter into the flow of immediacies of the child's experiencing. In this way they can use interventions which are congruent with the flow of that experiencing (Fulcher, 1991) and entering this flow of experiencing, as it is occurring, and helping the child to live differently in the context within which they find themselves (Fewster, 1990). This is central to relational child and youth care practice that has impact. This focus on what we might call joint experiencing between child and worker. Facilitating opportunities for change within this joint experiencing highlights the commonly identified CYC characteristic of 'doing with'. In many ways this 'doing with' is what distinguishes our work from the interventive efforts of other professionals.

In relational child and youth care practice that has impact, the worker becomes, with the child, the co-creator of a therapeutic context (Durrant, 1993; Maier, 1994; Peterson, 1988) within which the child might experience the opportunity for positive change. This focus on the joint experiencing of what Garfat (2008) called the 'in-between, between us', is the essence of contemporary, relational Child and Youth Care Practice (Garfat & Fulcher, 2012), for it is through the everyday moments and opportunities that we might find the pathway to the creation of the truly relational experience.

Recent writings have demonstrated the use of daily life events in education, training, supervision, family work, community, and many other areas. Further, as Gharabaghi (2013) suggests, we are even finding ways to be present in the everyday moments of peoples' lives when we are not 'physically there' aided by digital technology. Building on our powerful history, we are finding ways to make all moments meaningful.

Requirements

Child and Youth Care practice has evolved over time, and the expression 'the use of daily life events' might be rephrased as '*the entering into, and purposeful use of, daily life events, as they are occurring, for the benefit of the child, youth or family*'. Such practice involves enhanced capacity on the part of child and youth care workers. They must, for example,

- have knowledge of child development (Eisikovits, Beker, & Guttmann, 1991; Maier, 1987),
- know about the process of change (Garfat, Fulcher & Digney, 2025),
- possess an active self-awareness which allows the worker to distinguish self from other (Garfat, 1994; Ricks, 1989),
- be able to enter into an intimate caring relationship (Austin & Halpin, 1987, 1989) that involves attachment (Maier, 1993) and belonging (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 2002),
- understand the process of meaning-making (Bruner, 1990; Garfat et al., 2018; Krueger, 1994; VanderVen, 1992),
- have a framework for organizing their interventive actions (Eisikovits, Beker, & Guttmann, 1991; Garfat et al, 2018; Garfat & Newcomen, 1992),
- understand the meaning and dynamics of relational practice (Garfat & Fulcher, 2012; Garfat, Gaitens, Hadley & Leggett, 2024; Gharabaghi, 2024; Digney, 2024),
- understand how relationships create the life-space (Gharabaghi & Stuart, 2013),
- understand and be able to live the characteristics of Relational Child & Youth Care Practice (this book, Chapter 2).

All of this is necessary for recognising, using, or even creating opportunities in the daily life events of a child, youth, or family's life. The use of daily life events as they are occurring is one of the foundational characteristics that distinguish child and youth care practice from other forms of helping – which may also use daily life events, but at a distance removed from the immediacy of the experience itself.

The child and youth care focus on making everyday moments meaningful and therapeutic has been one of the most profound evolutions of our field and the more we focus on making moments meaningful in this way, the more helpful we will be to the young people and families with whom we work.

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