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## Emotions-Monster-Mix

In child and adolescent psychotherapy or counseling, it is not uncommon for children and adolescents to respond to the question »Why are you here today?« with »I don't know«, followed by: »Because my parents or my teacher want me to be here«. And to the question that follows, »And why do your parents or your teachers want you to come here to me?«, the child or adolescent sometimes answers straight forward with, »Because I'm bad / angry / upset / sad / scared / shy / withdrawn / ...«.



These responses may be the first indications of the adoption of third-party values and moral evaluation into one's own self, which have led to the affected child's or adolescent's perception of him / herself being the problem or experiencing him / herself being dominated by the problem. (We do speak of »problem« here, but this term is only a placeholder for any symptoms that indicate the need of counseling or therapy).

Excessive demands and resignation both on the part of the person affected and on the part of those involved usually make the already tense situation even more difficult. Statements such as: »You are an aggressive child«, »You are always so impulsive« or »You don't dare to do anything« are heard so often by the affected children and adolescents, that they are convinced that it is true and then reactively behave in such a way.

**Externalization of problems.** In order to get out of this cycle of faulty assumptions, expectations and fears, the technique of externalizing problems has been used in child and adoles-

cent psychotherapy for some time. Michael White and David Epston (2013) developed this technique and successfully applied it in various counseling and therapy settings. In this approach, while working on the disorder model, therapists assist the patient in distinguishing between »being a problem themselves« and merely having a problem. In the context of this dissection, negatively experienced behaviors and dysfunctional attributions can be decoupled from the help-seeker's identity. The child or adolescent can now reinterpret his or her reality.



Furthermore, abstracting the problem leads to a new understanding, which in turn enables and encourages new behaviors. Therefore, gradual externalization can be the needed connection between the internal attitudes (emotions, cognitions, motives) and the external world, realizing not only a new reality, but also a linguistic separation of the problem and the patient's identity.

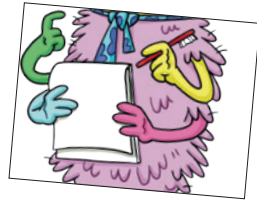
The basic idea of this set of cards is for children and adolescents to recognize the effects their problem is having on their lives and relationships and thus to enable them to actively exert a positive influence on the problem themselves. Get away from the deficit-oriented way of thinking about the problem – towards self-efficacy and new experiences.



## Description of the card set

The card set »Emotions-Monster-Mix« consists of a total of 16 monsters for externalizing with children. The individual emotions monsters are all made up of:

- (1) headgear,
- (2) face,
- (3) body,
- (4) legs and feet.



On the backs of the cards there is a picture of a dice with the numbers 1-4. The individual cards can be combined with each other as desired.

## Application variants

### Variant 1: use in psychotherapy

Children usually gladly accept the offer to create an Emotions-Monster – and thus a proxy – for the problem that is distressing them.

**Creating the Emotions-Monster.** Sort the cards according to the number on the dice shown on the back.

This will give you one pile with headgear, one with faces, one with bodies, and one with legs and feet.



(The cards marked with a green dot in the upper right corner will only be needed in the further course of therapy or counseling. Please put them aside for the time being).

Start with the stack that has the dice number 2 on the back of the cards. The stack should lie on the table with the reverse side facing up between you and the patient. Piles 1, 3 and 4 are also on the table, but will not be needed until the next steps.



In order to visualize a problem successfully, it can be helpful to think about a situation in which the problem occurred. Then you can construct the problem's appearance. The following question can be helpful as an introduction:

Now show the patient the cards of the stack one after the

Imagine the problem would now sit here at the table with us – how would it look at us? Let's find out together what the »problem« we just talked about might look like. Now, take a look at these cards [stack 2].

other and talk about the details of the faces. Which face fits the problem best and why? It is possible that the child will not find a matching face for the problem among the cards – use this opportunity to learn more about the problem and give the child the opportunity to draw a matching face himself (see online materials).

In the next step, please take pile 3 and give the patient the opportunity to find the appropriate body for the problem. (Here too, it may be possible that the patient does not find the right

body among the cards and would prefer to paint it himself.)

In pile 4 there are examples of legs and feet, which are selected next, to match the patient's problem. With the last pile (1), the »problem monster« finally receives a headress.

As you can see, the process of putting together an Emotions-Monster is not about finding the »right«, predefined monster, but about the individual composition by the child or adolescent.

**Naming the Emotions-Monster.** In the process of visualization, the different characteristics of the problem are dissected by the individual body segments while dysfunctional attributes, attitudes and actions from one's own identity are ascribed to the representative. Already in this process, attention should be paid to a consistent linguistic separation of the problem and the identity of the patient. It is advisable to speak of the »thing«, the »subject / matter« or the »monster« before the patient finds a suitable name. The names listed below are only for orientation purposes. The patient gives his individual Monster-Mix a name of his own, which is coherent for the patient, and the Monster-Mix will henceforth be addressed only with this name. (How is »Filthy Fly« doing today?)

**Exploration of the problem monster.** Based on the Emotions-Monster created, many aspects and effects of the problem can now be discussed.

The following questions can provide helpful information (here are sample questions on the topic of anxiety):



- (1) Now, when I see your fear monster like this, I can imagine it much better. How long have you known each other?
- (2) Does the monster announce itself somehow, for example, by ringing the doorbell, or does it suddenly just sit next to you?
- (3) What could the monster want from you?
- (4) What changes when the monster is suddenly there?
- (5) Why does the monster come to you?
- (6) Are there rooms or places where the monster comes to visit you more often?
- (7) Are there places where or times when the monster has never visited you?
- (8) What kinds of things drive the monster away?
- (9) What does the monster not like at all?
- (10) What would happen if we put the monster in the wooden box and tied a thick rope around it?

The resulting change in the patient's relationship to the problem takes place in the therapeutic process from an imaginary to a concrete vision of a life without a problem, thus creating room for action and motivation for further therapy.



**Disempowerment of the problem monster.** The cards marked with a green dot can be incorporated into the visualization in the further course of the therapy and thus symbolize the gradual disempowerment of the »problem«. For example, in the course of therapy a child or adolescent might like to put a rainbow shirt on his / her anger monster because he / she has noticed that the monster with the colorful shirt does not take things all that seriously and instead of getting upset simply laughs along sometimes.

### Variation 2: Monster-Mix

Place all the Monster-Mix cards, well shuffled face down on the table. The dice on the backs of the cards can be seen.

The cards with the green dot are included in the game.

The player who starts the game rolls the dice and may take a card according to the number on the dice. This card is placed in front of the player with the dice facing up. Then it is the next player's turn. He or she also rolls the dice and takes a card corresponding to the number shown and places it in front of him- or herself. Each number from 1 to 4 may be selected only once and has to be put into the correct order.

**Example:** Jonas rolls a 2 and chooses a card from the table that has a dice with the number 2 on it. He places it in front of him, still face down. After him, it is the next player's turn. When it is Jonas' turn again, he rolls the dice first. If he throws a 2 again, it is immediately the next player's turn, since Jonas already got a card with the number 2. However, if he rolls a 1, 3 or 4, he may take a corresponding card and place it face down in front of him.

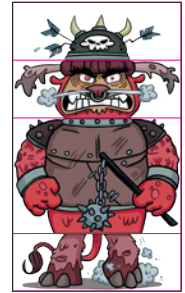
If a player rolls a mean 5, he must skip a round. In contrast, a player who rolled a magic 6 may take a card of his choice. Once a player has collected all four Monster-Mix cards, he shouts out loud »Monster-Mix« and the final round begins. Now the other players may roll the dice once again and try to complete their Monster-Mix. As soon as the final round is over, the player who shouted »Monster-Mix« may first turn over his or her cards and take a close look at the Monster-Mix in order to answer the following questions in the next step:

- (1) Which name fits well to this monster?
- (2) What feelings does the monster show?
- (3) What might have just happened to the monster?
- (4) What would help the monster feel better?
- (5) If this monster were your pet, who would you show it to and why?



All players who also have all four Monster-Mix cards may look at their monster too and answer the questions. Each player who has managed to complete the Monster-Mix and answer all the questions is the winner.

### The Emotions-Monsters at a glance



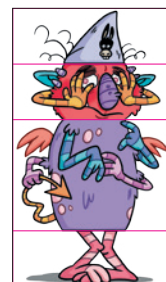
**Averill Angry** (angry, aggressive)



**Almar Anxious** (anxious, worried)



**Gilda Grief** (sadness, loss)



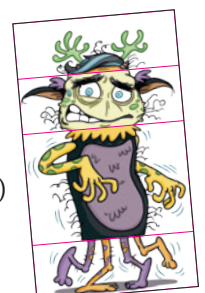
**Selby Shame** (ashamed)



**Sam Sick** (ill, without appetite)



**Gilberta Guilty** (guilty)



**Nordbert Nervous** (restless, nervous)



**Mira Messy** (confused, crazy)



**Cevin Concentrated** (concentrated)



**Danny Distracted** (distracted, unfocused)



**Holly Happy** (peaceful, happy)

**Ernie Evil** (evil, mean)



**Stacey Stage-Fright** (excited, palpitations, stage fright)

### The five positive monsters (cards marked in green)

Since almost all monsters lose their terror when we pay them some attention, it is worth getting to know them better.

**Bob Balanced** (balanced, relaxed)



**Wendelin Witty** (witty, funny)

**Jeanne Joy** (joy, health)



### Online materials

On our website [www.beltz.de](http://www.beltz.de) you can find the following additional materials (e.g. by entering the GTIN in the search field):

- **Blank copy template:** If the child does not find one of the given motives on the cards suitable for a problem or feeling, it is a good idea for him or her to create a motive on his or her own. So that further work with the monsters can proceed unchanged, templates for the individual cards are available in the online material in the original format to be cut out.
- **Frame for my monster:** In this safety frame, the monster is well-kept and can easily be photocopied. As externalizing and therapeutic homework will continue to change the monster as therapy progresses, appropriate »cards« can always be inserted.

**Literature:** White, M. & Epston, D. (2013). Taming the monsters. The narrative approach in family therapy. Heidelberg: Auer.

Rossa – Rossa

### The Kunterbunts

The card Game for getting to know Emotions: 120 picture cards with 24-page booklet in sturdy box.

With illustrations by Pe Grigo.

With online material.

ISBN: 978-3-621-28523-0

May we introduce – the Kunterbunts!

»Walk the dog« - you have to skip a turn. »Family visit« - you draw two cards. In psychotherapy sessions with children there is a lot of playing and »The Kunterbunts« is an easy game developed for this purpose based on »Uno« rules. In addition to fun, it teaches empathy as well as the reciprocal effects of emotions in families. Suitable for all who work with children in a therapeutic or counseling setting.

