



## TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH SARAH GILBERT FOR THE TAPPING IN SCHOOLS SUMMIT (OCTOBER 2022)

**ELENI VARDAKI:** Sarah, hi. Thanks so much for being here.

**SARAH GILBERT:** Thank you very much for having me.

**ELENI VARDAKI:** So let's dive in. Why did you decide to introduce EFT into schools?

**SARAH GILBERT:** Well, that's a long story, and it starts with me as a child. Because I was a very, very shy child, and I lacked confidence and I hadn't - I just was like a rabbit caught in the headlights. I went to Speech and Drama as a child, and then I trained as a Drama Teacher. So then I was working in lots of different schools. I'd had the same experience in every school with every child, that whilst you could put them on the stage and give them what I would call a "facade of confidence"...behind their eyes, and in their heart, you could see that it wasn't there. It was just - they would get up and do it for ya, and do it beautifully, and then shrink back into the shadows. And that used to frustrate me that I couldn't get to them, and I didn't know how to help them.

**SARAH GILBERT:** So after about 10 years of teaching, I then retrained to be an Actor. And it was during that journey that I discovered about Psychology, and about Counseling skills, and about the motivation behind our moves, and why we do things that we do and think the way we think. So that was a massive journey for me, and I learned so much. And then I started thinking, "Gosh, how can I help the children with this?" So I ended up working in the acting industry for a number of years. And then when my son was born in 2008, I sort of gave that up. And then when he started school, and I got mixing with children again and his little friends I thought, "You know, they are the same as they were before. Nothing's changed. In fact, they're even more insecure than they used to be. How can I do something? How can I help?"

And it was around about that time that I was introduced to EFT. And I did an EFT course, and I was absolutely blown away by the impact that it had on me, and the power that it had on me. So I thought, "What can I do? How can I introduce my acting skills, and teaching skills, and all the Psychology that I've learned, and the Counseling skills and the EFT?" And around about that time, I had the opportunity to write, to start writing. So then I thought, "How can I maybe make up some little stories?" So these little stories were created about the Little Sunflower characters. So there's 7 little characters. They all are different to look at, but when you get to know the characters, there's a mouse, there's a lion, there's a tortoise, a hair, there's a cat, a dog, and a monkey. And whilst they all look different, through the stories you find out that all their feelings are the same. They all feel anxious. They all feel nervous. They all feel worried. They feel shy. They feel insecure. And Little Sunflower teaches the children different skills, and they listen to the stories.



**SARAH GILBERT:** The teachers tell me that when they see or listen or hear a character that is like them, that they listen more closely, because they can see themselves in that character. So that the EFT, then, because the characters do EFT, the children are more open to actually taking part in doing EFT themselves. And it's been in schools now for over, a year - well, it was piloted. And then it was trialed. And then just as it was getting going, COVID hit <laughter> and then it wanted to come back, for a couple of years! So it launched again, properly, in September 2021, a year ago. So it's been in quite a few schools in the last year, and it's been an interesting journey that some schools that would maybe introduce, and they would dip in and dip out, have enjoyed it. But the schools that employed all the techniques, every day, are so many times a week, and did it for the entire year, they are the schools that have seen the difference, the emotional wellbeing difference in the children. Their emotional growth. Their resilience. Their ability to talk about their feelings. Their emotional maturity. Their ability to have compassion for others, and to listen to others, and think about others as well as themselves, and to support each other. So it's been a really fantastic and very interesting journey.

**SARAH GILBERT:** I work with Primary School children ages 6-10 years. I love actually working with the 6, 7, 8-year-olds because I think we need to introduce these skills. Like when we're learning to read, or write, or ride a bike, any of these skills, you know, once you learn them, you have them for life. And it's the skill that we need to learn from a young age. A life skill that they can take with them. You probably know about mental health issues, and the average age is now about 14...and getting lower. And people and schools, they focus on (children ages) 13-14 up, and adding in resources for them. Why wait until the problem is there? Get the intervention in from that age of 6 and 7, so the children absorb it, and it just becomes part of life.

**ELENI VARDAKI:** By the way, do you have the book handy, like a book handy you could show us, so in terms of the resources that have been used?

**SARAH GILBERT:** Well, I haven't got the book. I can't show you a physical book right now, because I didn't bring one with me, but I can show you some pictures on my (shares screen). (You can go to <https://littlesunflower.ie/shop/> to check out Sarah's Little Sunflower book series and resources for schools).

Now, where did it go? Okay. So this is just the Little Sunflower logo and the Little Sunflower character. So he actually makes noise, and he talks back to the characters when they talk to him. He makes the same sound all the time. It's like (demonstrates the sound). And that's the way of saying "Yes" or "No". So as the weeks go by, and the children complete the tasks in the program, and they do their EFT, each of the story has a different theme. So they add to it each week, and the Little Sunflower grows. So they can do arts and crafts, and I will show you...these are some of the images.

So Art, it's up to yourself what way you do. There's so many different elements to Little Sunflower, but as they do the story and they work on the different themes, you can add in a new stalk. So each week, the Little Sunflower will get bigger. So he's getting bigger and growing. The idea is for it to mirror the children's emotional growth, as well. The animations that we have, the Little Sunflower,



there's a song at the end, and the Little Sunflower grows and kind of curls its way around the screen. The children love to see it 'cause they wanna see - they want to know that they've done the work, right. So they can see the Little Sunflower getting bigger and getting happier for them. (Aw). So in this, there are arts and crafts obviously, and there's drama and games and literacy development and music and song and dance and all these different things, which as we all know are what help our mental health. But the main tool is EFT. But these pictures in particular, they mean a lot to me, because the one at the bottom with the little characters, Little Sunflower was introduced into an autism unit earlier this year. And this was drawn by a little boy (with autism) who is non-communicative. But he listened every week to the stories. The teacher knew he was enthusiastic. And then one day he took a piece of paper and his colors, and he presented this to the teacher. So she gave it to me, and I was just so thrilled and blown away by it. The picture beside it, with the tiny little flower, with the little face, and the slash for a mouth...

**ELENI VARDAKI:** Sorry, just to check, you said he listened to the stories, but was he also tapping along?

**SARAH GILBERT:** He was tapping along, yes. He did the tapping. He did the tapping every week. And what the teacher did as well is she took a sunflower vine. She made a vine, and she attached it to the wall with the numbers 1 to 10. And as each of these children came in every day, they would put their name on the number that they felt was relevant, to them. Then the teacher knew where they were, on the vine, and how much tapping she had to do, and how she had to work on it. But the children in that unit took to tapping so well that parents actually started to ring in to the school and say, "What is this thing they're doing? Because if they come home and have a bit of a meltdown, and we think, 'Oh here we go...', they would just say... 'I have to go to my bedroom now, and do my tapping. I will come back.'" And the child is (age) 7, 8, 9, 10 - whichever. They would just head off to the room, for about 10-15 minutes, do the little bit of tapping and come back, completely calm. And the parents are ringing and saying, "Whatever you're doing, keep doing it! Because..."

**ELENI VARDAKI:** Wow! I mean that level of self-regulation and emotional awareness, even some adults are still working on. I mean as adults, we're working on. And kids, having reached that level of emotional awareness and self-regulation? Incredible!

**SARAH GILBERT:** It is, and the children are enjoying it, and they are loving it, because I did a review at the end of the school year, and so many positive reviews about tapping and how they've used it for exams. One child she wrote, "I did it before I had to do my Maths exam 'cause I was very nervous. But it worked, because I passed." <Laughter>. Another one said, before I started this, I used to think that everybody else was better than me, but now I understand that I am my own person. And I thought, "That was a 9-year-old child wrote that." And I just thought that was mind blowing. And it just shows the power of the technique, and what can be done. (Yeah).

This little flower at the bottom, this was a 10-year-old boy who drew this, and he has emotional issues, and the teacher tasked him with making the sunflower after Week 1. So by Week 4 - he didn't do work in class, and he would sit and he would have a desk beside her, and he didn't really

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get involved in anything - but by Week 4 of tapping, and doing the stories, he'd said to the teacher: "You know, there's so many words that Sarah could have used, that she didn't use, and I think I'm going to look some up for her." So he took the iPad and he Googled words that mean the same as \_\_ (words Sarah used)\_\_. And the following week, he came in to me with a list of 14 (words) on a scrunched piece of paper. And he said, "You know, I think you could have told me that I am 'tremendous'. And you could have told me that I'm 'luminous.'" <Laughter> These incredible words that I haven't thought of. So I says, "You know what? Let's tap it right now." So the whole class, we tapped on his words. And this was the flower, the top flower, this is what he decided to draw instead. By Week 4 he said to the teacher, "I don't think that flower works. It's just not right. It doesn't feel right. Can I do another one?" And that's what he came up with.

**ELENI VARDAKI:** Wow, so you've got them before and after: before tapping how he felt, and after the tapping how he felt.

**SARAH GILBERT:** Yes. And the top picture on the right (all the little pictures are by 5 and 6-year-old children). The teacher, she drew the vine (top right picture), and added to it each week. But the amusing thing is that the children thought that the sunflower was growing on its own. <Laughter>. Yeah, so she would lift the head each week, and move it over a little bit, and add another bit of vine in with more positive words. But unfortunately when the classroom door up one day <laughter> until they come in and caught, they were like, "Miss..it's you! We thought it was growing on its own and we couldn't understand!" <Laughter> So they're very special. They're very special pictures, very special moments for me to know how much this means to the children, and much they're getting out of it. And then of course we have Little Sunflower toys, so the little characters, we have prototype toys at the minute, and they've got long arms. I'll stop the share, shall I? (Yeah).

This is Tobey Tortoise from...oh if you can see him, there. So they've got extra long arms so that they can tap themselves, or tap with the child. And then there's another little character, Milo Mouse, he's only got one ear in this picture! <Laughter> But he has two ears. He's just not showing up. But they've got extra long arms, so that they can tap. So what I would suggest, that if they have a special toy or favorite toy, to tap on the toy as well as tapping on themselves. Or have the toy tap on them. Something that gives them comfort, and something that feels special to them, and that they can connect with, emotionally, is very powerful.

**ELENI VARDAKI:** You've got covered so many tips here for the "How", and examples of results. Is there anything else you'd like to add, before we wrap up?

**SARAH GILBERT:** Well, there was a story about a little boy who he talked, and the rest of the class, we were all sitting in a group and playing a game about expressing our feelings, which isn't an easy thing to do, and saying something positive about ourselves. But he was telling the story of...he was on his way home, and some bigger boys locked him in the shed, and he was being bullied. And another little boy said, "Ah! I know who you're talking about. They broke my grandma's window." So that there was a mutual connection there, and they were both able to say, "I felt really scared." And the other fella says, "Yeah, I didn't like it. It made my granny sad, and I felt sad, and I didn't know that you felt like that!" "Yes. And when I was locked in the shed," he said, "I tapped to calm



myself down, and to tap away my anxiety until I got out." So, it does work. And the thing about children is they are little sponges. They will take it all on board.

**ELENI VARDAKI:** A lot of anti-bullying kind of initiatives in schools are focusing on the aggressive behavior, as opposed to empowering children with tools that can help them navigate the anxiety of being on the receiving end (yes) of bullying and aggression. Whether it's physical, or psychological, or what have you - verbal. Which is an important tool for life here. You know? And here's this child learning how to navigate the stress of being on the receiving end of that, and coming out empowered, and having his voice, and sharing that in his class.

**SARAH GILBERT:** And supporting each other. Both of them supporting each other. And another thing that I found very helpful as well, in promoting EFT, is working with teachers one-to-one. So whilst I bring the program to the classroom, and I had shown the children how to do it, I then would work one-to-one on a Zoom with a teacher. And you know it's like "Have you gotten anything you'd like to bring today?" When they actually experience the power of EFT and how we can get them maybe from a 7/10 or an 8/10 down to a 0...they think, "Oh wow! Yes. And now I know, as I felt it, how I can now bring it to the classroom."

**ELENI VARDAKI:** 'Cause they see the impact on their stress levels. Like it starts off 7, 8 and it goes down to 0. So, "Well if it helps me then...okay, now I have a deeper understanding of how to implement it."

**SARAH GILBERT:** Yes, and what I've been doing, and I know it's not traditional EFT, we start off with positive EFT - with the kids. We build up - not with the adults - with the children. We build up their (the kids') resilience and their self-esteem by constantly using positive EFT over and over and over again. That "I'm great", and "I'm a kind friend", and "I'm considerate", and "I'm thoughtful", and "I'm helpful", and "super", and "amazing", and "I'm...I'm all of these wonderful things!" And we do it, and do it, and do it. And once we have built them up for a few months, then we introduce traditional EFT. Because there's always things that happen in the classroom, or in the playground, where children are going to be hurt. Somebody's going to leave them out, or say something that hurts their feelings. And that's going to happen, every day. And does happen, every day. So then, when we have built them up, we introduce traditionally EFT and say, "Well, even though my friend left me today on my own and I felt sad, I accept my feelings and I love myself". Or whatever form. And the children then take into that as well. So then they're able to go and do that on their own. And they're doing it before exams, and they're doing it before they go on stage. And as that little boy did, he did it when he got locked away, "I'm locked in the shed, and I'm feeling worried and alarmed. I know I'm going to be okay. I accept my feelings." Yeah.

**ELENI VARDAKI:** Yeah. Oh gosh, Sarah - amazing! Thank you so much for sharing your adaptations, your ways, all these tools, resources, incredible creative work you've been doing, here, to bridge that gap between "We've got this amazing tool" and "How do we now bring it into education". And support students to see themselves for the beautiful flourishing, sunflowers - Little Sunflowers that (they are). Thank you so much for this.



**SARAH GILBERT:** Thank you very much for having me. It's been lovely to talk to you.