

Parents Play Kit



Supporting your child's emotional wellbeing
A playful and empathic approach



The Manor House, Little Wittenham, Oxfordshire, OX14 4RA

info@clear-sky.org.uk | 01865 362789 | www.clear-sky.org.uk

Registered Charity No: 1140441 | Company Registration No: 7273425

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About Clear Sky



Clear Sky is a children's charity promoting emotional wellbeing for children and young people through one-to-one Play & Creative Arts Therapy.

Aside from delivering 1:1 and group Play and Creative Arts Therapy in schools, we also do a lot of work with parents, practitioners and schools.

Play for parents

We deliver popular parenting courses including; Playful Parents, Heart to Heart and PCAP.

Play for practitioners

We deliver face to face professional training to practitioners in PCAP, Heart to Heart and Baby Bonding to around 100 professionals each year. Clear Sky provide practitioner licenses for Attachment Play courses to practitioners all over Great Britain. Professionals can also become a member of our learning Institute for Play and Attachment for ongoing CPD, support and networking opportunities.

Play for schools

We deliver workshops and seminars to partners such as the National Education Union, County Councils and other organisations. Last year we delivered these to hundreds of teachers across the UK.

We also have a learning Institute for schools, which equips schools with the tools to enhance emotional and mental wellbeing for pupils and staff.

We are proud to be members of an All-Party Parliamentary Group and have contributed to government briefing papers. We are champions for the Children First Alliance; supporting a movement to appoint a Minister for children and young people!



About this book

The aim of this book is to provide some playful tips and ideas to help parents support their child's wellbeing.

Throughout this book, you can expect to find tools that support with communication with little ones, to best help them process challenging feelings. You'll then find games that can strengthen the relationship between you and your child, as well as allow you to have lots of fun. Many of the documents are also designed to be standalone resources.

Although this book was originally created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the content is fully transferable. Therefore, this could relate to uncertainty of any situation, such as moving to secondary school.

The Parents Play Kit has been developed by
Clear Sky's Head of Therapeutic Thinking
- Becky Hill.

Meet Sunny!

Hi, I'm Sunny, Clear Sky's mascot and I represent all the children who have received Play & Creative Arts Therapy through Clear Sky. I haven't had the easiest start in life, but with the help of Clear Sky life seems to be getting better day by day! I used to find it difficult to get on with my family and make friends, but since I have been seeing my Therapist we have found new ways for me to express myself through play and creativity. I just love playing – not only is it fun, but it makes me feel better and closer to the people around me! Everybody should learn the Power of Play!



Let's Play! Resource List

At Clear Sky, we aim to create games that require minimal, or no resources, so that you don't need to take a quick trip to the shop to be able to play the games in this pack. Anything you do require will hopefully be easily found in your craft box if you have one, around the house, garden or cheap and easy to source.

Here is a list of some of the resources we refer to in this pack:

- Yourself with a little bit of headspace
- Masking tape
- Glue
- Pens/ pencils/ paints
- Paper/ card
- Paper plates
- Tins
- Elastic bands
- Old jars or bottles
- Pom poms
- Paper straws
- Kitchen roll or toilet roll tubes
- String or ribbon
- Junk box modelling items such as shoe boxes
- Balloons
- Things from around the home, like wooden spoons!
- Flour/ baby oil/ food colouring for sensory play
- Pebbles or smooth stones - you can find these outside or buy them in a craft shop
- Blankets
- Ample buckets of imagination!

Supporting your child's emotional wellbeing

Just like us adults, children might be experiencing a variety of difficult emotions in response to the current uncertainty we are experiencing. Young children don't always have the words to express their difficult feelings. Therefore, anxiety and other emotions can be expressed through their actions and behaviours.

A few examples might be:

- Tummy aches or headaches
- Difficulty concentrating
- Trouble sleeping
- Angry outbursts
- Tearful
- Nightmares
- Refusal to engage
- Seeking more attention than usual



If your child is experiencing any of the above feelings, they might need you to help them recognise this:

"You've had lot's of tummy aches recently, that's no fun. I'm wondering if you might be feeling a bit worried about things?"

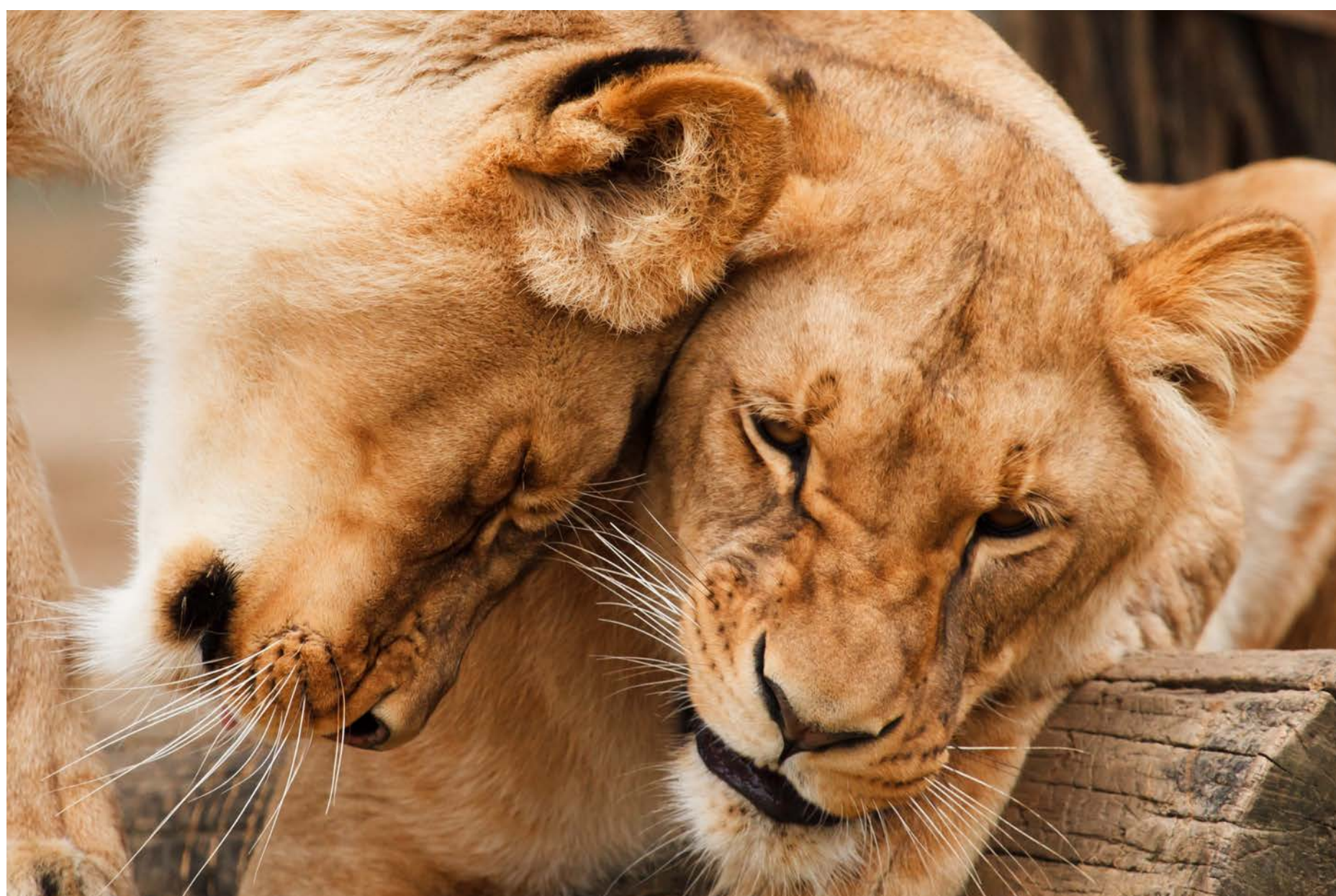
Things I can say instead of "don't worry"

Tolerating our children's challenging feelings can be tough. It can trigger our own distress and we can worry that giving time to difficult feelings might make them worse. We might say things like "try not to worry about it or "it won't happen to us."

When we empathise with our children's feelings, we begin to help soothe their distress.

Here are a few things you can say instead of "don't worry"

- "It does feel scary doesn't it, you aren't alone in feeling like this."
- "I have scary feelings too sometimes."
- Just be there and sit with them.



Structure

There are lots of things that can help children to process and manage overwhelming feelings in times of uncertainty. Times of uncertainty and change naturally give rise to feelings of anxiety, as we are unable to predict what is going to happen.

Creating a consistent structure can help children to feel in control of their environment and therefore, reduce stress and anxiety. It is important to find a daily structure that works for you and your family.

Here are some of the key things that could be included into your daily structure to support your child's wellbeing:

1:1 time

Movement

Mindfulness
and
relaxation

Play and
creativity

Learning

Fresh air

Keep reading for more ideas...

Children thrive on 1:1 time with their parents/carers. At Clear Sky, we call it 'You and Me Time'. It can be difficult to find the time or headspace for 1:1 playtimes every day, particularly if you have more than one child. Here's what's great, just 20-30 minutes per week can be enough.

Below are our top tips for enjoying some 1:1 time with your children

- Add it to the weekly schedule - at the same time, on same day, for the same amount of time each week.
- Let your child lead and choose what they want to do with the time.
- 'You and Me Time' happens even if the child has expressed challenging behaviours or has broken rules throughout the day (some 1:1 time is probably what they need).
- Introduce some safe but gentle boundaries such as 'we look after you, we look after me and we look after anything we choose to play with during You and Me Time'.
- Remind the child of the rules if they are struggling to stick to them.



Movement

Building regular movement breaks into your day can help children to regulate difficult feelings, to focus and to sleep better.

Here's an activity that you could try

- Together with your children, create some movement cards. They can choose some movements to write on them and draw a picture/ decorate them if they'd like to.

Skipping
(imaginary rope)

Running on
the spot

Big stretch

Jumping
jacks

Do a silly
dance

Press ups

Some ideas could be:

- Put all of the cards into a pot.
- Pull out a card, set a 30 second timer and perform the movement until the timer stops.
- Choose 10 cards (5 minutes of movement) before moving onto your next daily activity.



Mindfulness & Relaxation

Mindfulness is about awareness in the present moment. This includes being aware of your thoughts and feelings, your body and what is happening around you. With the current change and uncertainty we are facing, focusing on the here and now feels more difficult. Taking time to breathe and give our minds a break from thinking can help soothe and calm any difficult feelings being experienced.

Here is an activity that is also used by our therapists to support children in feeling grounded and calm at the end of a session.

Teddy breathing

- Ask your child to choose a soft toy.
- Ask them to lay on their back with their soft toy on their tummy.
- As you count to three, ask them to breathe in through their nose, filling up their belly. They should be able to watch their soft toy rise up as they breathe.
- Count to three and ask them to breathe out through their mouth as they watch their soft toy gently lower.
- Practice up to 10 times, or more if you are really enjoying it.

Parents

it is extremely important that you too are getting your own downtime to rest and recuperate. On page 12, there is a link to some free online guided relaxations for both you and your little ones.



Play is essential for playings sake and every child needs the time and space to play. When children play, they have an opportunity to explore their world. They can test out and try new things or new ways of being; they build resilience by experiencing failure and having another go.

It is important to make space for play every day. Find a balance between making time for free play, where children can choose what they want to do (providing it's safe) and also some play that is guided by an adult.

Here is one of our favourite games. It's great to play before getting stuck into creative writing, art or other creative activities as it encourages spontaneity:

Anything can be anything

- Pick an object - anything will do, a stick, a tea towel...
- Explain that "this object can become whatever you want it to be."
- You say "This is not a stick, this is" and mime what it is.
- Your child (ren) have to guess what you are pretending it is (it really can be anything, a horse, a wand, an earring, a steering wheel, a phone etc.)
- Pass the object to your child and let them have a go.




Learning

Every child needs their own balance of learning, movement, play and relaxation.

Get creative with what you are learning, let them make up a dance routine, draw the flowers in the garden and learn about the bees. Take time to think about relationships and learn about empathy, fix a bike, grow some vegetables...

Children often have a positive relationship with their teacher. The child could create a notebook out of paper, and at the end of each day, they can write a note to their teacher, letting them know what they have done.



Remember that learning can take many forms. For example, you can bake and do maths whilst measuring out the ingredients.

Further Resources

Explaining Coronavirus in child friendly language

Tips for talking to children about coronavirus (from the UK mental health foundation)

<https://mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/talking-to-children>

Free downloadable picture books for primary aged children to help them understand Coronavirus

<https://www.mindheart.co/descargables>

[https://nursedottybooks.com/dave-the-dog-is-worried-about-coronavirus-2/?](https://nursedottybooks.com/dave-the-dog-is-worried-about-coronavirus-2/?fbclid=IwAR1GVgFeDXl9EZK6Rvtd0wNw8zgdsct8cgzhYe00dchUmTF9d71rsN8FZ8)

[fbclid=IwAR1GVgFeDXl9EZK6Rvtd0wNw8zgdsct8cgzhYe00dchUmTF9d71rsN8FZ8](https://nursedottybooks.com/dave-the-dog-is-worried-about-coronavirus-2/?fbclid=IwAR1GVgFeDXl9EZK6Rvtd0wNw8zgdsct8cgzhYe00dchUmTF9d71rsN8FZ8)

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Story-about-Coronavirus.pdf>

Movement

Search 'PE with Joe Wicks' on Youtube, for a 30 minute classes.

Mindfulness and Relaxation

Tamara Levitt has made some of the content from the 'Calm' app freely accessible for this current time. The below link has resources for both adults and children.

<https://blog.calm.com/take-a-deep-breath>

Further Resources Continued

Play

Keep reading for documents on attachment games, movement games and creative games that you can play with your child/ children.

Learning

Use BBC Bitesize to help with your homework, revision and learning. Find free videos, step-by-step guides, activities and quizzes by level and subject.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize>



Introduction to Play

Children don't say "I had a hard day, can I talk to you about it?"

They say "will you play with me?"

Lawrence J. Cohen

At Clear Sky, we know that being playful can create a magical bond between adults and children. Making time for playing games is vital, and it is also important to include playful interactions throughout the day.

As adults, when things aren't going to plan, our 'go to' is often to talk about consequences. Playful energy can release tension from situations and according to the experts, a playful response is far more effective than resorting to discipline.

The next section of the book 'Let's Play' includes practical tips as well fun and creative games to do with your child at home.



Let's play!

Let's imagine your little one is putting up a battle about putting his shoes on before your trip to the park. A common response might be "you will put your shoes on now, or you won't get an ice cream at the park," and often leads to further upset.

Instead, you could try saying:

"Ahhh you don't want your shoes on? Hmmm, well, we need to keep our feet safe, so we're going to have to get them on somehow. Let's see what your feet have to say about it...What's your left foot called? Okay, Bob, why do you not want to wear the shoe today? It smells?!"

Well, you probably aren't wrong there! Let's have a sniff... ewww, rotten cabbage! Right, let me reach into my pocket for some magic cleaning dust, us adults are good at cleaning... ready, close your eyes, let's sprinkle it into your shoe... smells much better. Let's get this lovely smelling shoe onto your left foot, Bob, and then we'll have a chat with your right foot and find out what his problem is."

The truth is, children respond well to 'goofing around' and it's important for them to feel as though us big people are on their level sometimes. Children find transitions difficult, they are too focussed upon play to stop and think about the next thing. As adults, we are often focussed upon the end result, (in the case above, getting shoes on) that we don't join the child in their world. It's easy to forget that children enjoy just 'being,' they aren't focussed on schedules and planned activities. Although goofing around can feel like you're taking the long route, it's a fantastic way to connect with your little ones without arguments, which creates less stress for all involved.

We have thought about a few different scenarios that the parents and carers we work with tell us can be challenging, to help this we've come up with some playful ways to respond.

Let's play!

Getting dressed in the morning

It's a tough time of day. As adults, we've got to get ourselves ready as well as our little ones and we've got our stresses of the day ahead weighing us down. All we want is for our little ones to get themselves dressed, yet that's an impossible thought as they won't even let you dress them.

Quick wins

- Make it a challenge - see if your little one can get dressed before you can.
- Be silly - grab their pants and ask 'is this a parachute? No? Oh right, what do you do with these then?'
- Make time for connection in the morning. Those first few minutes when little ones wake up are very important. Perhaps you could have 5 minutes together before the day starts - cuddling, reading together or having a nice chat.

Tidying up

Tidying up is never fun, children don't ever want to stop playing, and often, mess doesn't bother them. We're going to be tidying up toys and clothes for quite some time, so it's important we try to find some fun in it.

Quick wins

- Make a tidy up game!
 - Set the clock - can we finish tidying up before the timer goes (keep it short, no longer than 5-15 minutes, age dependent.)
 - Use colours - let's pick up everything that has the colour blue on it. Keep going with different colours until all of the tidying is done.
 - Explain to your little ones that you are all hoovers and you are going to Hoover up the toys and see how many everyone can collect.
 - Role play - pretend to be cleaners, you could even wear costumes, but remember to put them away after!

Let's play!

Eating food

Your little one often refuses, she doesn't like carrots (even though she chose them) and doesn't want the ham sandwich she chose either. All you want is for them to fuel their bodies with something nutritious!

Quick wins

- Pop some fruit/veg sticks in a bowl for them to snack on in front of the TV whilst they're distracted - it's always a treat having food away from the table.
- Create themed dinner nights like a Mexican or Italian night. Cook foods that they can be part of like fajitas or homemade pizzas.
- Turn the topic of conversation away from what you're eating. Ask each person about something that happened during their day.
- If all else fails, grab a blanket, sit on the floor and have a picnic one evening.

Not wanting to go to bed

You just settle down on the sofa ready to eat your dinner and you hear a little voice call "I need just one more hug."

Quick wins

Make a ritual that is performed nightly, so that your little one knows what is coming and can predict what's next in their gentle bedtime routine. We say it a lot, but making time to connect is always a quick win. Remember, investing in your child's bedtime routine to help them sleep better is likely to have a positive impact upon your own sleep! Here are a few ideas that you can include;

- Spend 5-10 minutes having one final play time of the day (this could be in the bath), ensure you have a timer set.
- Play relaxing music and adjust the lighting (lava lamps are great) whilst playing to support your little one to begin to relax.

Let's play!

- Ask your child to share one thing from their day that made them happy, and one thing that they are looking forward to, or, make a list of the people you love.
- Try a breathing exercise or use a creative visualisation.

We know that it isn't always easy to be calm in stressful situations. In fact, when we feel stressed, it can be difficult to even imagine a time when we didn't feel that way. Try to be kind to yourself when things do go wrong, we can always apologise if we respond to a situation in a way we hadn't hoped to.

Making time for yourself each week will support you to maintain headspace and remain calm in stressful situations. Try to give yourself a bit of time each week (or even more often if you can) to do whatever makes you feel calm.

A few ideas could be:

- Reading
- Guided relaxations or meditations
- A nice bath
- Time with friends
- A quiet cup of tea

Remember, we can't pour from an empty cup. We must look after ourselves in order to be able to look after others.

"Taking care of myself doesn't mean me first, it means me too."

L.R.Knost

The Importance of Listening

"Sometimes we need someone to just listen. Not to try and fix anything or to offer alternatives, but just to be there... to listen. An ear that listens, can be medicine for a heart that hurts." Steve Maraboli

Active listening is a key ingredient for healthy relationships. Active listening is when you concentrate on the person talking to really hear what they are saying, in their words, actions, facial expressions and body language.

When we listen to a child, really listen, we create the opportunity for them to rely on us a trusted adult in their life. Further, when a child comes to us to express difficult feelings, an empathic response can help them move through the difficulty, whilst improving their ability to self-regulate.

By listening, we show children that they are valued, which in turn can increase their self-esteem.



The Importance of Listening

What does active listening look like?

The listener might:

- Nod and make encouraging noises like 'mmhmm,' or, 'oh,' to support the child to know that you are listening
- Mirror the facial expressions of the child
- Show open body language
- Give eye contact
- Avoid asking questions or giving judgments
- Be present - not looking at your phone or fiddling with something

Quick win - 30 second bursts of attention

We can give children 30 seconds bursts of attention to help them feel that their needs are being met.

- Stop what you are doing for 30 seconds – e.g. turn the hob off, or say to the person on the phone ‘can you hold for 30 seconds?’ Or close your laptop for 30 seconds.
- Give your child eye contact and say, ‘you have my attention for 30 seconds before I need to carry on with my work/cooking etc.’
- Use active listening skills to hear what your child is saying.
- After 30 seconds say, ‘I must get back to my work/cooking now, and we can have more time to talk about this later.’
- Most times the child will skip off, happy that their need for attention has been met in the moment.



Empathic vs. Dismissive Listening

Empathic listening "I want to hear you"

'That sounds like
it was really
tough'

'Ah, you really
loved
it didn't you'

'Gosh, I bet you
were scared?'

'Tell me more...'

Dismissive listening "I want to fix you"

'Yes, and I've had
a hard day too'

'No point in
worrying about
something that
hasn't happened'

'Hmmm.. Why
don't you do ...
instead?'

'I had a time
when that
happened to me.
What I did was...'

Fun in 5,
with things from around the home

Let's play!
Let's make a drum set!



Follow our step-by-step guide below or watch the [video](#) on our Facebook page to find out how to make your own drum set.

The good stuff

- Bonding
- Spontaneity
- Creativity
- Playfulness

Fun in 5, with things from around the home

Step 1: you'll need a few tins, balloons, elastic bands, scissors and some makeshift drum sticks.



Step 2: cut the end off of the balloon.



Step 3: wrap the balloon around the tin (using different sized tins will create different drum sounds).



Step 4: secure with an elastic band.



Fun in 5, with things from around the home

It's time for a game!

Call and response


Invite your child to bang a rhythm on their drum. Pay close attention and try to copy the rhythm exactly as you heard it.

A few tips to adopt during play:

- Try to stay really focussed on your child.
- Help them to know you are focussed by maintaining eye contact and positioning your body towards theirs.
- Mirror not only their drum beat, but reflect back their body language too.
- If the child's rhythm is too long, let them know that you will try your best to remember it!

A few tips for when creating your drum set:

- Use a safety tin opener to make sure your tins aren't sharp.
- Using different sized tins will allow you to create different sounds with your drums.



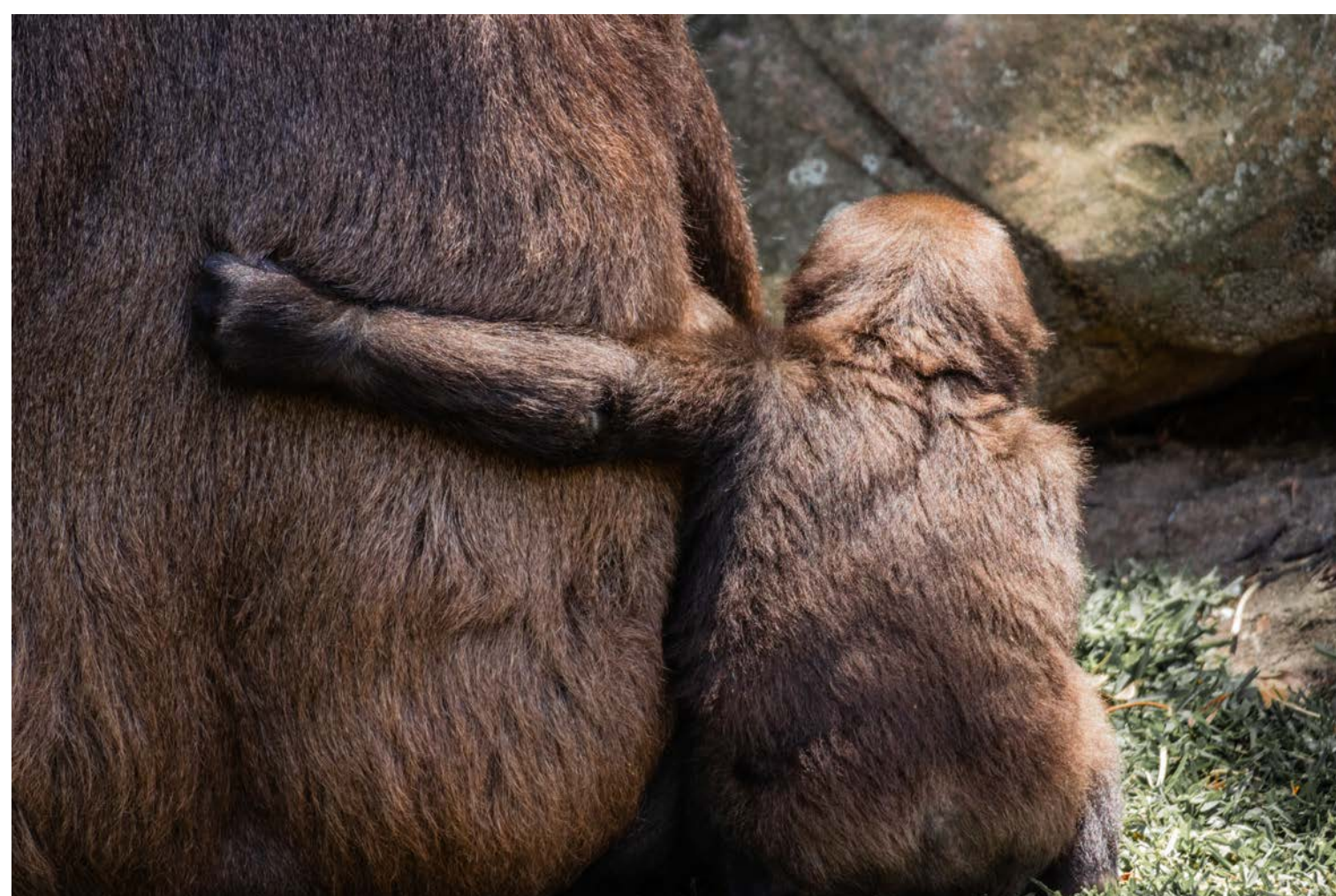
The next page
shares a bit about
why this is important
for my brain!

Fun in 5, with things from around the home

This back and forth interaction might remind you of conversations with babies or infants. Picture this, a baby is sat in her buggy beside the river with mum. Mum looks at baby and makes eye contact. Baby looks away and then looks back. Mum gives her a smile, waves, and says 'hello you', the baby giggles with delight and points to the duckling strolling by. Mum says 'a baby duckling! It's very cute and fluffy isn't it?' Baby claps her hands, delighted with mums happy response, and mum smiles back at baby.

This meaningful interaction is building babies brains, having a positive impact upon their social skills, helping them to form relationships. It also impacts the development of language and cognitive skills.

We can continue this kind of interaction with children (and adults) too through verbal communication and play! These interactions help children to feel seen and heard, helping them to know that their thoughts and feelings are important and understood. In this game, we are developing a stronger bond with our little ones.



Play Skills

Let your child take the lead

- Become part of their play, but try not to dictate it.
- Let them know that you are there to help if they need it and that they can ask at any time.
- In imaginary play, allow them to create the story.
- If you're unsure on your role, use an 'off stage whisper', pop your hand to the side of your mouth and ask 'what does the elephant do next?'
- When playing games that have rules, let your child dictate what they are.

Embrace repetition

- Children often learn through repetitive play and will move onto a new game when they feel ready.

Anything can be anything

- In a child's imagination, anything can be anything! A plane becomes a submarine, or a dog could be an elephant. If we name things for the child, we place limitations on their imaginative play.

Reflect feelings

- Let the child know that you can see how they are feeling.
- If your child is smiling say "you look happy about that!" or if they look frustrated say "that's not working out the way you would like it to, is it!"
- You can also let them know by using your facial expressions.

Fun in 5, with things from around the home

Let's play!
Let's make a fortune teller!



For step-by-step guidance on how to make a fortune teller, watch our [video](https://vimeo.com/417227187) - <https://vimeo.com/417227187>.

Keep reading for ideas and games to include inside your fortune teller.

The good stuff

- Connection
- Bonding
- Spontaneity

Fun in 5, with things from around the home

There are lots of things that could go inside your fortune teller. We like the idea of filling it with positive affirmations. Our favourite idea is to fill it with short games that you can play with your little ones that allow you to connect with one another.

A few ideas could be:

- Passing a ball back and forth
- Eye spy
- Simon says
- Making a secret handshake
- Hide and seek
- Staring contest
- Clapping rhythms

Although, we are sure your little ones will have lots of ideas of games to put inside.

Your child might be able to assemble the fortune teller themselves, or they might need a bit of support from an adult. Once the fortune teller is made, spend some time together filling each triangle with a different game. You can ask your child what games they like to play with you to help with ideas.



1:1 Time or 'You and Me Time'

"The best thing you can spend on your child is your time."

Louise Hart

We know we talk about the importance of 1:1 time a lot, so here are a few of the benefits:

- Help strengthen the bond between you and your little one.
- Support the child to feel more secure and held in mind, in turn, reducing 'attachment seeking behaviours.' These are often referred to as 'attention seeking behaviours.' Usually, the child is seeking connection, so we like to reframe it as 'attachment seeking behaviours.' This means one result can often be that you gain more time for yourself overall.
- Deepen our empathy for our child, helping us to understand their needs more.
- Build your child's self-esteem.

'You and Me time'

Our lovely friend and colleague, Debi Maskell-Graham, named 1:1 play sessions between an adult and a child 'You and Me time.'

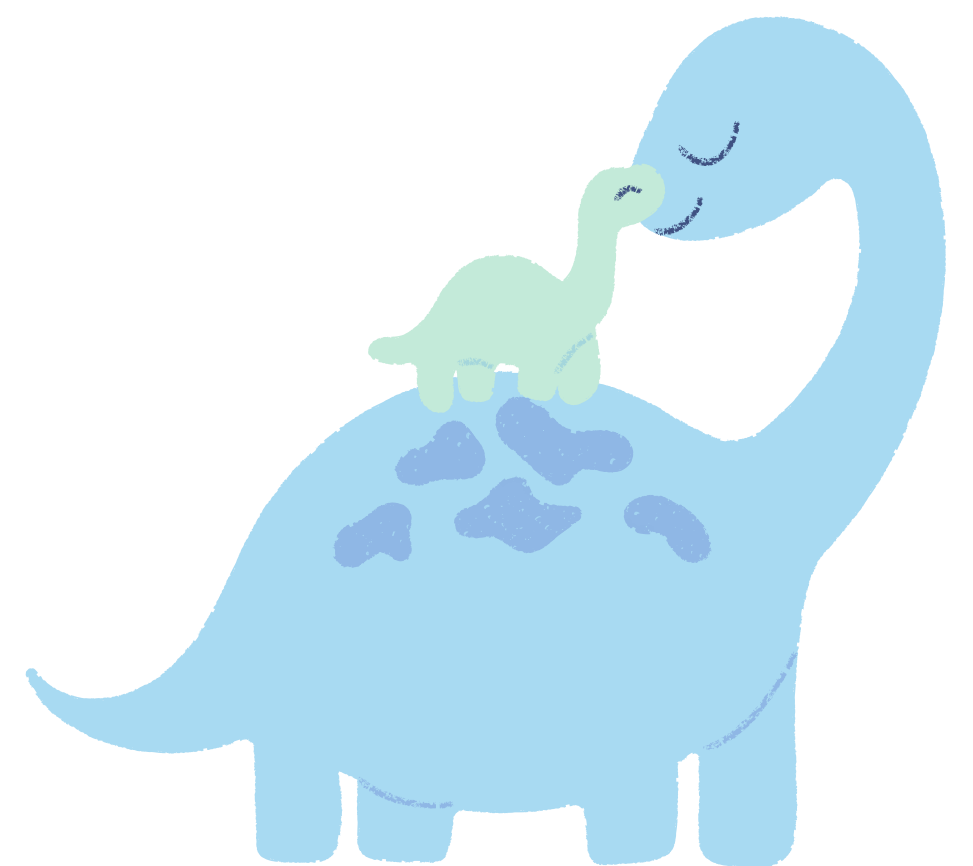
- Parents gather a box or bag of toys and craft items that their child would enjoy playing with.
- Parents select a 20-30 minute weekly time slot that 'You and Me time' sessions take place, in a warm space without disruptions.



1:1 Time

A few tips to adopt during 1:1 time

- Support your child to understand the boundaries of their 1:1 time (what day or date it is, how often it is and for how long.)
- Let the child know when they have 5 minutes and 1 minute left.
- We find that simple rules such as 'when we play together, we look after you, we look after me and we look after the toys' often help the child to understand the boundaries.
- Gently remind your child of the rules if they forget them.
- Allow the child to choose the game or activity or provide a few options of games/ activities that they enjoy, that you are happy to play during that time.
- Try to remain focussed on being with your little one. If it has been a difficult day and headspace is limited, perhaps try a meditation beforehand. Giving your full presence is the best present you can give.
- Making a box or bag of toys might not be the right approach for you and your child. You might choose to do an activity such as baking, or playing football in your time together.
- Last but not least, of course - have fun!



1:1 Time

A few tips to overcome challenges of managing 1:1 time

Spending 1:1 time with all of your children if you have more than one can be challenging. We have found that letting each child have 15-30 minutes extra time awake, on a specific evening of the week, is a good way to allow this to happen.

If spending 1:1 time with each of your children every week feels challenging (which for many of us it will do), one idea is to set aside time monthly. If your child is born on the 12th of June for example, on the 12th of each month, they get to stay up and have 30 minutes 1:1 time with a parent/carer.



Fun in 5,
with things from around the home

Let's play!

Let's make 'You and Me Time' craft boxes!



Follow our step-by-step guide below to find out how to make your own.

The good stuff

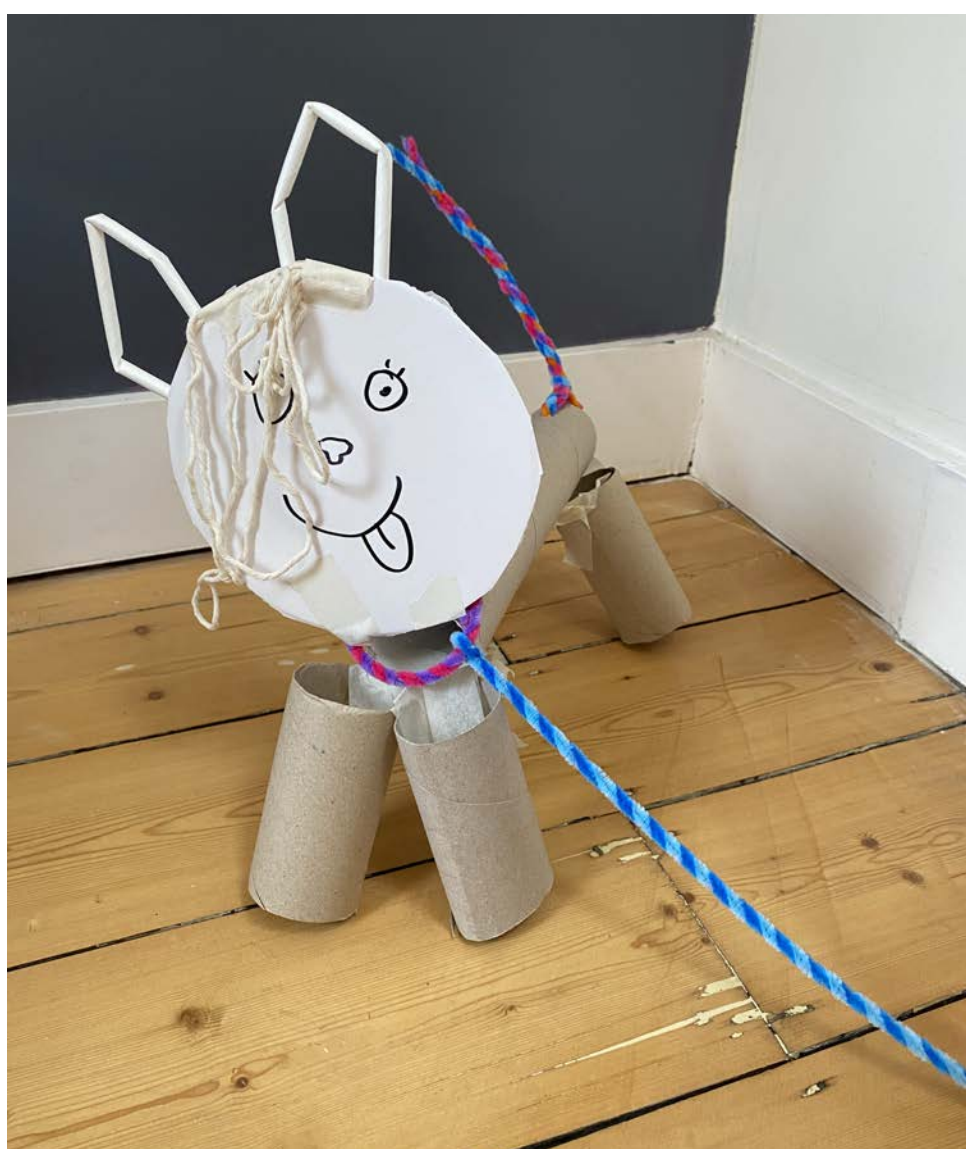
- Creativity & imagination
- Spontaneity
- Bonding

Fun in 5, with things from around the home



Gather some craft materials from around the home, things like stickers, pens, tape, glue, news paper, string, pipe cleaners, straws, pegs, lolly pop sticks, paper, shells, leaves, small empty cardboard boxes, whatever you can find. Pop it into a shoe box and let your little one get creative. Replenish as necessary.

Try not to worry about not knowing what to do. When you give children a box of objects their imaginations take over and they will create all sorts of things. They might make a picture, build sculptures, they might even create games!



You could play with your 'You and Me time' boxes every week, on the same day, at the same time, in the same room, for the same amount of time. Just refill some of the art materials as they start to deplete.

Fun in 5,
with things from around the home

Let's play!

Let's make sensory jars!



Follow our step-by-step guide below to find out how to make your own sensory jars.

The good stuff

- Creativity
- Time in nature
- Bonding

Fun in 5, with things from around the home



All you'll need is some petals and shrubbery, glass bottles and water. Some string to decorate is a nice to have, but not vital. The first step is to take your little ones out foraging for different flowers. There are so many wild flowers growing everywhere in the spring/summer. Depending upon the time of year, you might find some petals starting to drop off of the flowers in your garden. Equally, if you have recently purchased or received a bunch of flowers, using the petals off of those will add a nice splash of colour, make sure you enjoy them first though!

Once you've foraged for petals, pick them off and lay them to dry overnight on a baking tray. You can use them straight away, but they tend to last longer in the bottles once they have dried out.



Chop up a few green leaves and mix them with the petals in a bowl. It starts to resemble an eco friendly glitter that creates a lot less mess! You are now ready to pop the colourful mixture into your bottles. Fill them with water and enjoy. Keep reading for further ideas.

Fun in 5, with things from around the home

Let's play!

Filling the jars with the beautiful eco friendly glitter mix is fun enough in itself. We also have a few other ideas to make the play even more special!

You and Me Jars

Explain to your little one that you are going to make 'You and me jars.' Instead of mixing up all of the colourful petals, you can keep them separate from each other. Each coloured petal can represent a quality about the other person or a memory that you share together. For example, you might say, "I'm going to put the pink petals in my jar, to represent the warm feeling in my tummy when we cuddle before bed," or "I'm going to use the blue petals as a reminder of when we swam in the sea together in Devon." When you have both added lots of petals and memories/ thoughts or feelings, seal with the lid and create a little tag for each jar.

When using eco friendly glitter, after a few days, the petals will begin to wilt in the jars. After filling the jars with precious memories, you and your little one are likely to feel quite attached to your jars and so it is important to let them know that the flowers might wilt in advance. You could say 'when the flowers start to wilt, let's take the jars into the garden and empty them into the flower bed. That way, the petals will feed the flowers with our happy thoughts and memories.'



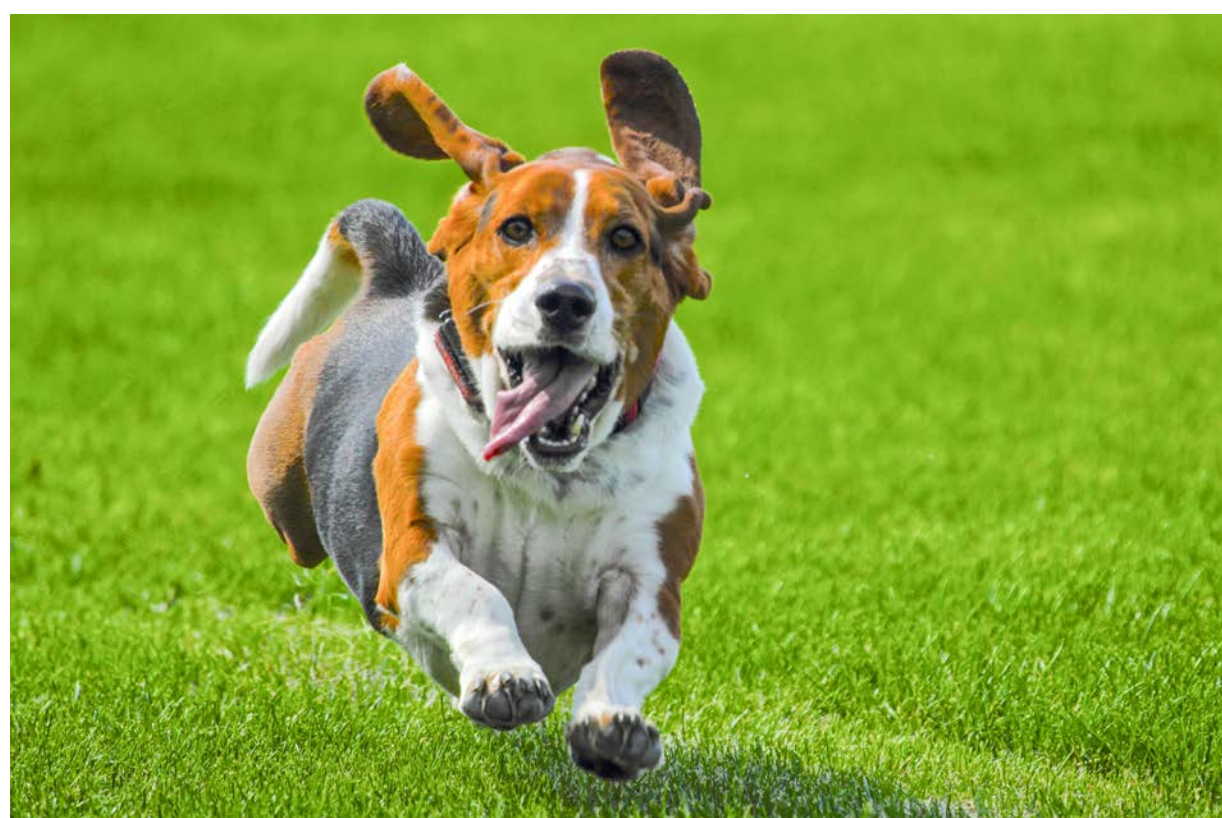
Self-regulation

What is self-regulation?

Self-regulation allows children to control their emotions, behaviours, thoughts and body movements. It's about managing disruptive emotions and impulses, whilst staying calm and focussed. Emotional regulation is a skill that develops over time. When children develop the skill, they can be flexible when expectations change, they can calm themselves down (self-soothe) when they feel stressed and they can manage frustrating feelings without having an outburst. Managing to do all of these things is a hard task and sometimes, even as adults, we too become overwhelmed and don't quite respond to situations in the way that we would have chosen to if we were feeling regulated.

Scientists have shared a few ways that we can support a child to learn to control impulses, movement games being one of them. Including movement breaks into your daily schedule, where your child(ren) can release excess energy and increase body awareness is a great place to start.

Keep reading to see a few of our favourite games alongside some of our top tips for setting up ready to play.



Movement games to increase self-regulation

A few tips for setting up a safe playing space

Tip one: before playing, ensure that your child(ren) clearly understand the rules of the game. Further, ensure that your child(ren) understand your boundaries, for example, no running in the house, and what happens if they break that rule. We often find that letting children know "if you choose to break the rules, I will gently let you know twice". If it happens a third time, you are choosing to end the game and that's okay, we will go and get a quick sip of water and a piece of fruit before we move onto the next activity of the day."

Tip two: some of the games are competitive. It's okay to let your child win, in fact, it can even boost their self-esteem to know they are really good at it. It is also a great opportunity for adults to model losing gracefully.



Movement games to increase self-regulation

Drum Beats

Adults, you are going to create a rhythm on a drum for your child(ren) to walk around to. Explain that they are going to walk slowly to the slow beat and fast to the fast beat. When you make no rhythm they have to try to be still! If you don't have a drum, you can clap, bang a pan or use fast and slow music tracks.

Variation one: once they get the hang of it, ask them to respond to opposite beats. Walk fast to the slow beat and slow to the fast beat. This will also encourage them to focus.

Variation two: associate movements to the drum beats (particularly helpful if you are in a small space with no access to a garden). The slow beat means stomp your feet. The fast beat means do jumping jacks.

Animal walks

These silly walks make exercise fun for little ones, allowing them to be creative and burn off excess energy. There are lots of animals walks to do such as bear walks on all fours, kangaroo jumps as high as you can, penguin waddles, crab walks and donkey kicks putting all of your weight into your arms and shoulders. If you are stuck for ideas, type 'animal walks' into google to get inspiration.



Movement games to increase self-regulation

Up, Down, Stomp, Clap (chair based and indoors!)

When you say

"up" the children raise their arms in the air

"down" they put their arms by their sides

"stomp" they stomp both feet

"clap" they clap both hands

Variation: switch the cues! up means down, down means up etc.

Red light, green light

Create a start line and a finish line. Your child(ren) and any other adults joining in begin on the start line. When you say "green light" everyone moves towards the finish line. When you say "red light" everyone has to stop. If any of the players move when you say "red light" they must go back to the start line. The aim is to be the first to cross the finish line.

Variation one: introduce new colours that represent different movements for example, purple light means crawling, orange light means skip, blue light means gallop.

Variation two: for those playing indoors or in a smaller space. Green light means walk with one foot in front of the other, amber light means slow motion, red light means freeze. If there are three or more children playing and there isn't enough space, designate a child to be the leader and call out the cues.



Fun in 5, with things from around the home

Let's play! Let's build a high tower!

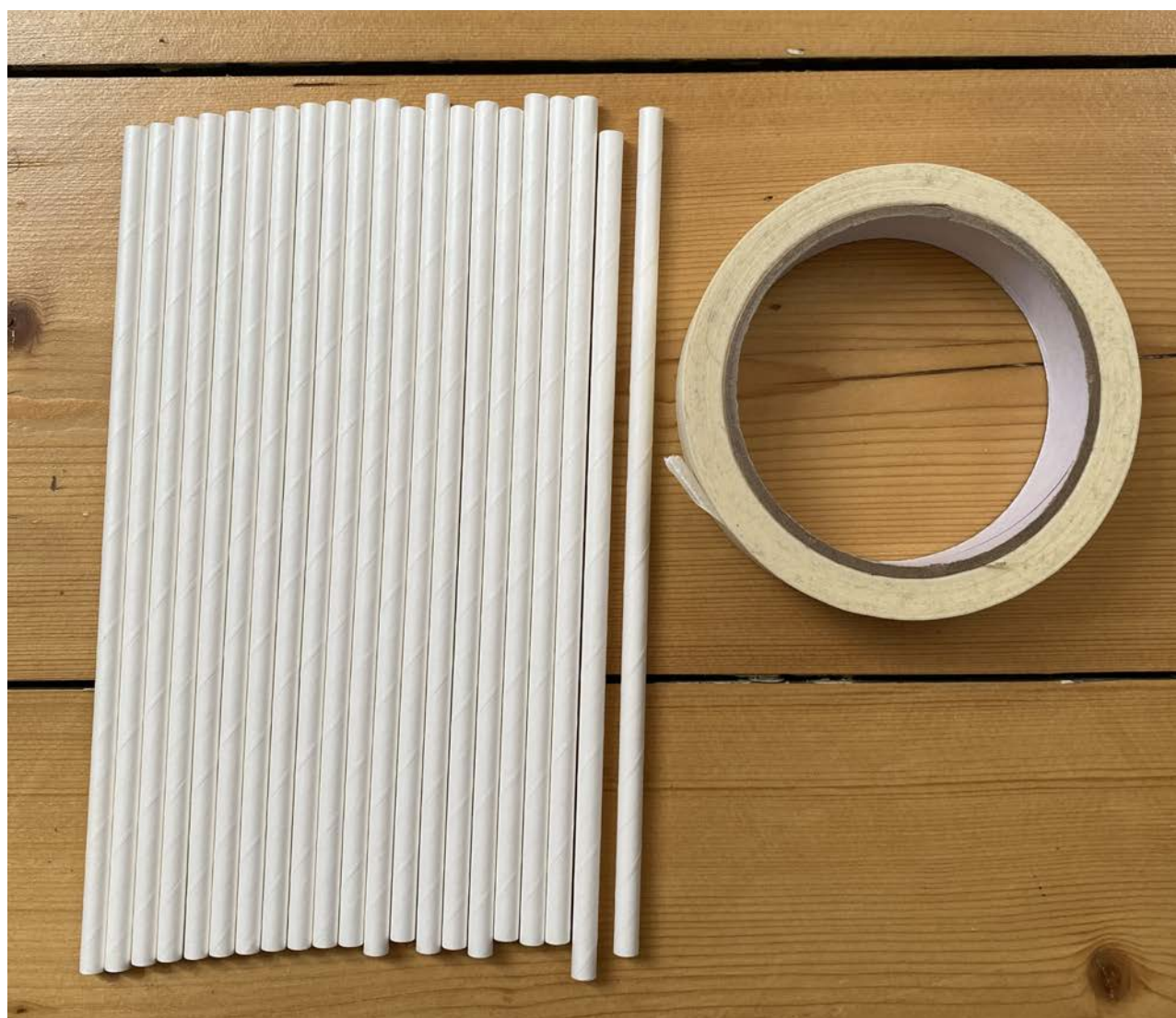


Follow our step-by-step guide below to find out how to make your own high tower.

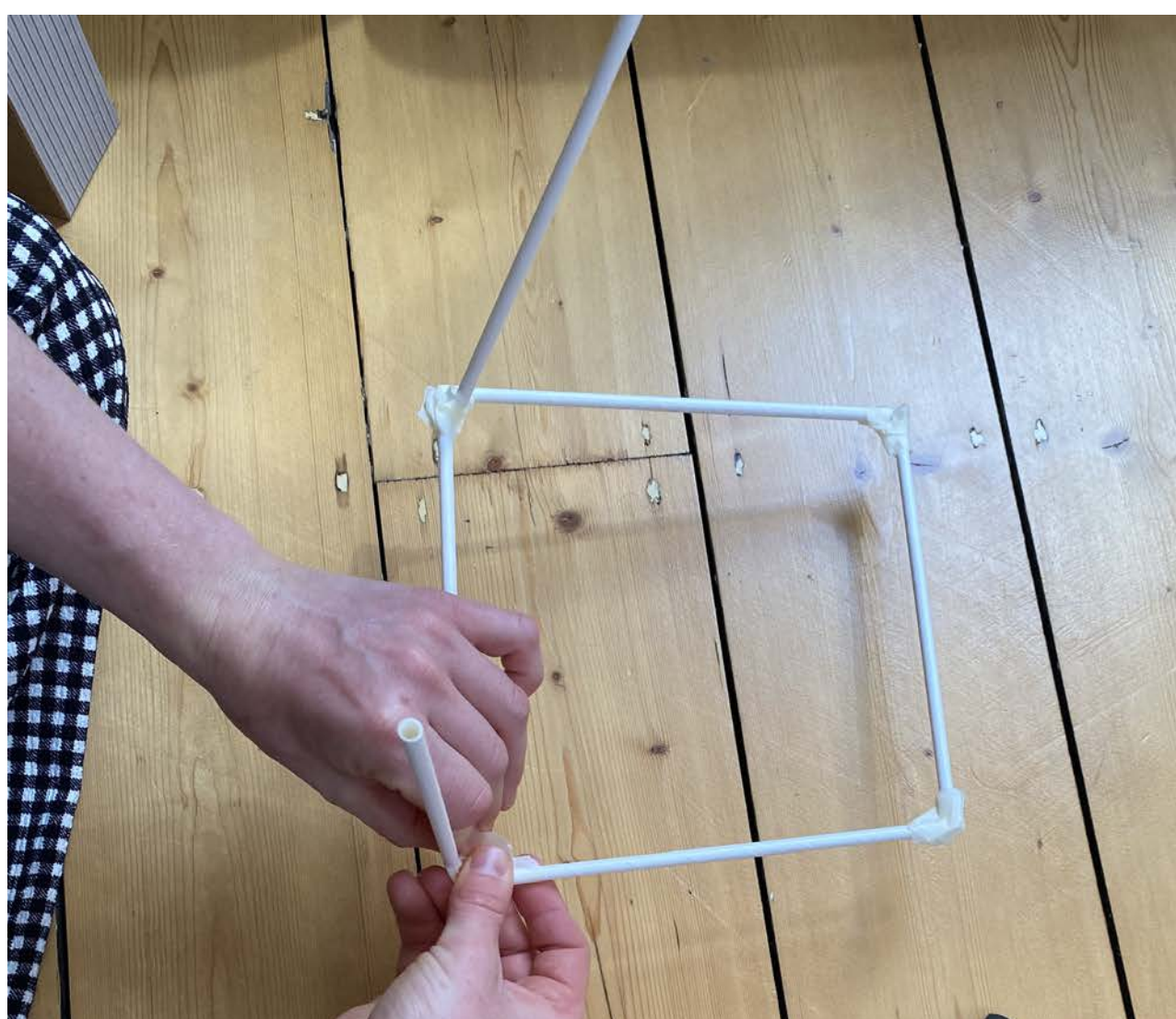
The good stuff

- Concentration & focus
- Imagination
- Determination
- Self-esteem
- Bonding

Fun in 5, with things from around the home



- All you'll need is some paper straws and masking tape!
- Let your child know that using the straws and masking tape, the aim is to build a tower as high as they can!
- Let them know that you are there to help them if they would like you to, and that otherwise, you will just sit and watch!



Fun in 5, with things from around the home

Top tip: Let your little one work it out

As adults, we have had lots of experiences that have allowed us to look at this task and find a fairly easy way to create a strong enough tower that can gain some height. Our little ones are yet to gain many of these experiences. They might initially find it really difficult to figure out how to keep their tower strong whilst getting it as high as they'd like it to be. As adults, we might see an easy way out and it is important that we don't intrude upon the play by telling the child just how they can make it work (even if it is a bit frustrating). Instead, just try to be with your child. When you can see they're struggling, let them know, "ahh you're really trying and it keeps on falling down! How frustrating." If they ask for your help, then of course we will support them, but it's important not to jump in with our ideas before we are asked. If they manage to figure it out for themselves, they will gain even more from the play experience.

Fun in 5, with things from around the home

Let's play!

Let's make a pom pom maze!



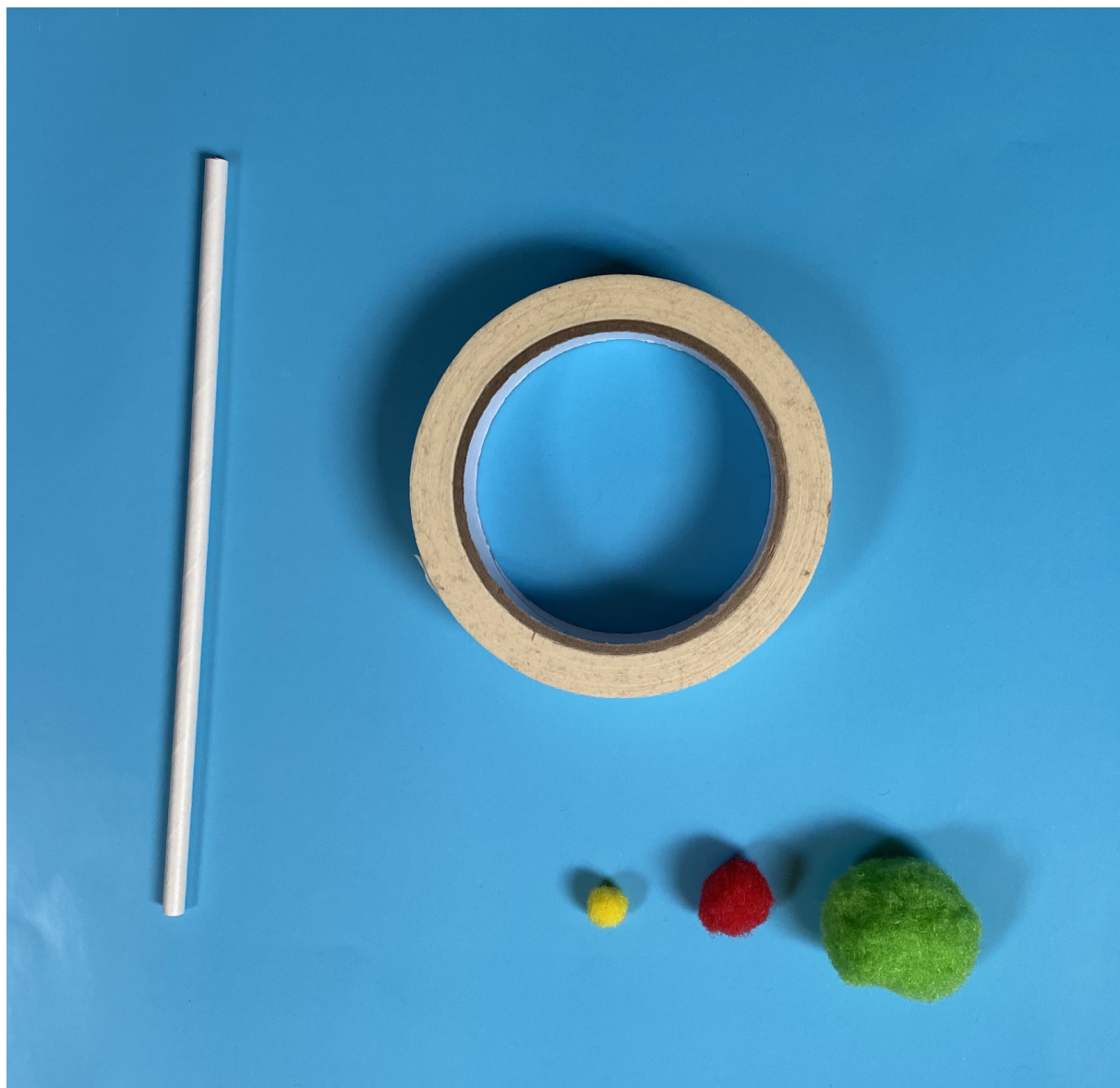
Follow our step-by-step guide below to find out how to make your own pom pom maze.

The good stuff

- Concentration & focus
- Determination
- Self-regulation
- Self-esteem

Fun in 5, with things from around the home

All you need is a roll of masking tape (or electrical tape), a straw and a pom pom ball.



Firstly, use the tape to create a pattern on the floor. The wider you keep the two lines of tape, the easier the game is to achieve. Younger children will likely need a wider tape barrier.



The aim is then to use a straw to blow a pom pom around the maze, without it leaving the masking tape barrier.



Fun in 5, with things from around the home

Top tip: Practice a breathing exercise before playing!

When playing this game, you'll likely find that to move the pom pom and keep it between the tape barrier, you need to blow through the straw really slowly. This can be hard to master. One way to support your children to do this is by practicing a breathing exercise before hand. Here's one that we like.

Hand breathing

- Hold your hand out like a star
- Place your index finger of the opposite hand at the bottom of your thumb
- Breathe in as you track your finger up to the top of your thumb
- Then, breathe out as your index fingers moves down the thumb, and in again as it moves up the next finger
- Continue until you reach the bottom of the little finger

If your child needs support in slowing down their breathing, you could encourage the in/ out breath to continue as their index fingers traces both sides of 1 or 2 fingers!

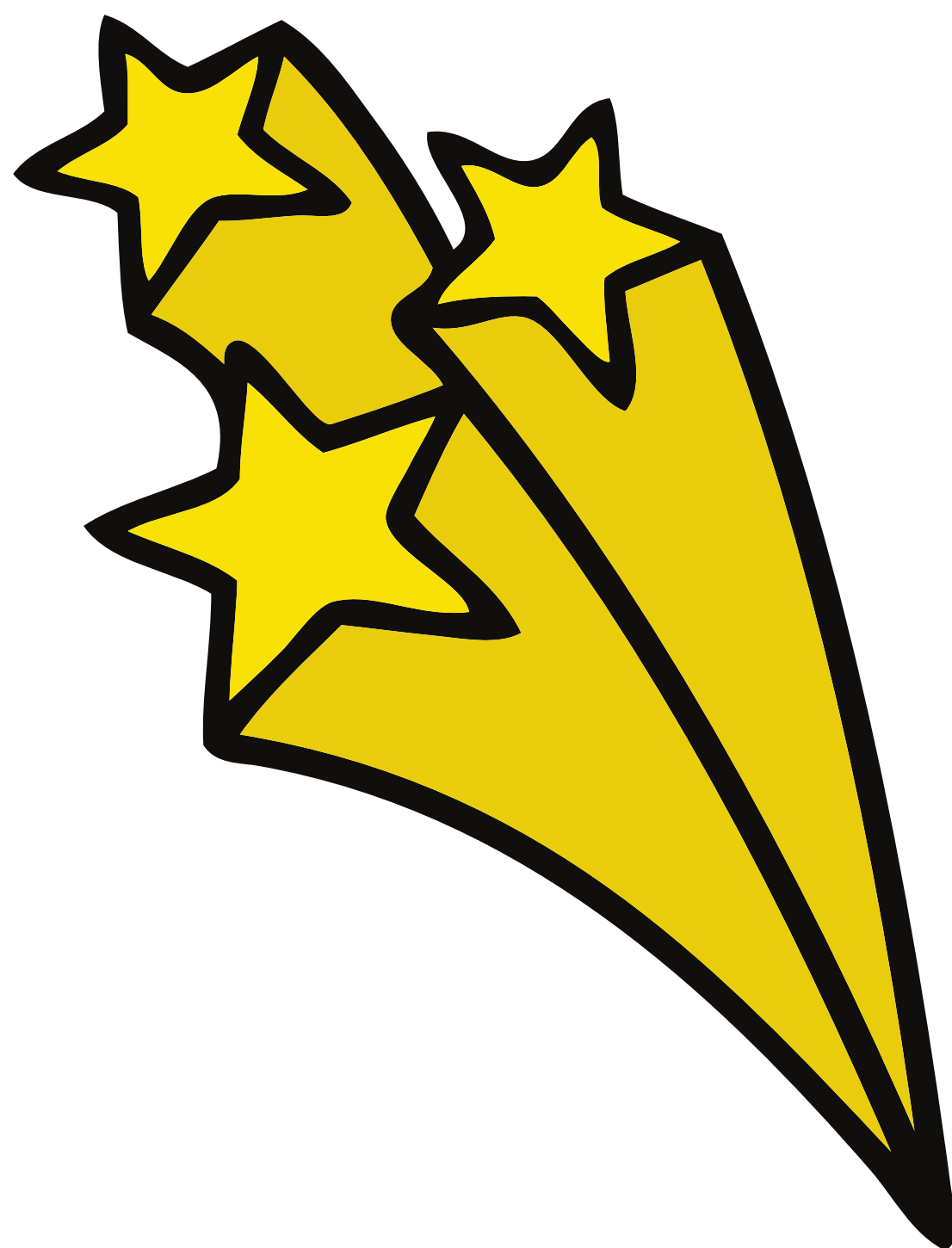
Fun in 5, with things from around the home

Adding a bit of competition

You might have children of similar ages who enjoy a bit of competition in their play. Or, your children might enjoy playing competitive games with you (this is often helpful, as as adults, we can let our little ones win over and over again to build up their self esteem.)

All you need to do is create two of the same pom pom mazes, travelling across the floor. Each player must aim to get their pom pom to the maze finish line. If their pom pom leaves the tape barrier, they take their pom pom back to the start and try again!

Adding competition might not be right for every child. For some, it might cause distress or arguments. If your child would like to add a bit of competition, you or another adult could play against them and kindly allow them to win!



Fun in 5,
with things from around the home

Let's Play!

Let's make a ring toss!



Follow our step-by-step guide below or watch the [video](#) on our Facebook page to find out how to make your own ring toss in just 5 minutes!

The good stuff

- Concentration and focus
- Determination
- Self-regulation
- Self-esteem

Fun in 5, with things from around the home

Step 1: you'll need a few paper plates, a kitchen roll tube, masking tape, scissors and some pens or paint to decorate.



Step 2: cut the kitchen roll tube and stick it to a paper plate using masking tape.



Step 3: cut the paper plates and then let your little ones enjoy decorating.



Step 4: enjoy playing!



Fun in 5, with things from around the home

Let's play!

The ring toss game can support the development of hand eye coordination and balance, as well as social skills such as turn-taking. It can also be a great game to develop self-esteem through a sense of achievement and not giving up when it is difficult.

Children with high self-esteem feel confident within themselves, allowing them to try new things. Self-esteem helps children to cope with mistakes, allowing them to try again, even if at first, they didn't succeed. As a result, high self-esteem has a positive impact on a child's achievements in all areas of life.

Our self-esteem develops throughout life. There are lots of things that we can do to support our children to develop their self-esteem. Keep reading for a few ideas.

"A child with a healthy dose of self-esteem has the best defence against life's challenges."

Ariadne Brill



Fun in 5, with things from around the home

Recognising the emotion

Sometimes it can be really challenging to get the ring onto the target, giving rise to feelings of frustration, making us want to give up. Adults can support children with these difficult feelings by recognising the emotion. Quite often, our gut response can be to take the difficult feeling away, we might quickly change games for example to protect our children from feeling as though they have failed. When we recognise the difficult feeling, we can help them to tolerate it, allowing them to build some resilience against challenging emotions. Over time, when they build up enough resilience to tolerate the difficult feeling, they can keep trying until they succeed, giving them a real sense of achievement and helping them to know that they can get through challenges.

Here are a few things we can say or do to help children manage if difficult feelings arise:

"It's really difficult isn't it. You are trying so hard and it's taking quite a while to master it. Frustrating hey!"

"I know it's hard, I've seen you achieve hard things before." You could even give an example.

You could also reflect back their facial expression or a sound to show you understand.

Fun in 5, with things from around the home

Giving credit

Giving a child credit for the effort they put in helps to increase self-esteem.

A few example sentences of giving credit might sound like:

- "You haven't given up, even though it's hard, amazing!"
- "You're really concentrating on trying to get the ring onto the stick! You are very determined"
- "What a great effort, it was so close."
- "You did it!"
- "Wow! You've really mastered it now. Look how proud you are."

When we use this type of language we start to support the development of an internal dialogue for children that might sound a bit like "I haven't given up, even though it's hard. I am determined and amazing," or "I did it, i'm really proud of myself. Next time I try something difficult, I'll know that if I keep trying, I'll be able to do that too!"



Experiencing Anxiety

Anxiety can affect us all differently. When we feel anxious, it can affect our thoughts and feelings, as well as our bodies.

We might experience:

- An increased heartbeat
- Feeling nervous, overwhelmed, worried
- Pain somewhere in the body
- Feeling tense
- Struggles to sleep
- A lack of focus when learning or playing

Our sympathetic nervous system functions like a gas pedal in a car. When we are anxious, it triggers our fight or flight response, providing the body with a burst of energy so that it can fight off perceived threats. At times, this can make children (and adults too) feel as though they've lost control. If you are dealing with more upset or angry outbursts at the moment, your child might be experiencing anxiety.

Anxious thoughts are often predictions about what could go wrong in the future. Our minds make this prediction because it feels as though we have some control over the uncertainty we are experiencing. In times of uncertainty, anxiety is likely to increase for some people.

Our worst fears rarely materialise. With this thought in mind, it's worth practicing ways to help ourselves calm intrusive thoughts. Mindfulness and meditation can help us to make some of these big and difficult feelings a bit smaller.



Practicing Mindfulness

Mindfulness helps us to focus on the present moment which gives our mind a little break from being preoccupied by worries. It can take quite some time to master mindfulness and meditation, the important thing is to keep trying. Over time, it will support your little one to feel more in control of the feelings and impulses felt in the body, allowing them to be less reactive and anxious.

There are lots of different ways that you can practice mindfulness and meditation with your little ones. If they are new to it, it is usually helpful to start small and be playful with your approach. Have a look through the following ideas and see if there are any you think your little one would enjoy.

The mindful minute

Sitting (or walking) quietly for 1 minute, notice the different sounds around you. You can try this anywhere - at the dinner table, on a walk or in the garden.

Variation: listen to the sound around you. With your child, name what you can hear, 'the wind blowing, a bird singing, cars passing by, a lawnmower...' and choose one to focus on for 1 minute. Let your child know that if they get distracted by any other sounds or thoughts, to just notice them, and refocus on the sound when they are ready.

Smell the flower

This is a nice and simple activity that you can practice either using your imagination, or by using images. Ask your child to take a breath in through their nose as they smell the flower. Then, to take a long and slow breath out as they imagine blowing the seeds off of the dandelion.

Positive Affirmations

Positive thinking can be powerful in helping us to overcome challenges and to manage stress. Positive affirmations are positive statements that you say to yourself. They're like little presents you give to yourself each day! They can help us to challenge and overcome negative thoughts towards ourselves, helping us to feel in control of our feelings. When we repeat them often, it can help us to start believing them and then positive changes can happen. Research shows that when practiced regularly, they can change the brain and reduce stress levels, amongst other things.

A few examples could be:

"I deserve to be happy"

"My worries do not control my life, I do"

"Whatever difficulties come my way, I can overcome them"

"Good things come my way"

"I am brave"

"I am going to have an amazing day"

"I deserve to be heard"

"I can do this!"

"I am a quick and capable learner"

"I am confident"

"I'll always help others"

"I am a good friend"

"I am safe and healthy"

Positive Affirmations

Writing positive affirmations

We can let children know that when they write affirmations, they can write something that they already believe about themselves such as "I am playful and fun" or "I am kind." Or, it could be something that they want to achieve or experience like "I can get across the monkey bars" or "this feeling will pass, I can overcome this feeling."

Using positive affirmations

There are many ways to practice positive affirmations. In their simplest form, affirmations can be practiced after taking a few deep breaths and repeating your positive phrases to yourself. We have found that children often find creative activities and focussing on affirmations fun and engaging.

A few ideas could be:

- Create a journal of positivity that your child writes/ draws in each morning.
- Writing positive affirmations on post it notes and sticking them to the mirror.
- Painting a poster on canvas of positive affirmations and ambitions.

Our favourite playful activity follows on the next page...



Positive Affirmations

Build a treasure chest of positivity

Materials needed

- Empty tissue box or other cardboard box
- Cardboard to cut into coins
- Pens/ other craft materials to decorate

What to do

- Explain that they are going to make a treasure chest that they will fill full of positive thoughts, feelings and goals.
- Invite your child to decorate their treasure box however they like.
- Cut circles out of the cardboard to represent coins (big enough to write on).
- Invite your children to write an affirmation on the coin.
- If the affirmation is a belief they have about themselves, for example, "I am caring" ask them to think of an example and to draw it on the flip side of the coin. If they struggle to remember an example, it is okay to give them one!
- If they are writing something that is a goal or something they want to achieve, ask them to draw themselves on the back, having achieved their goal, so that they can visualise this accomplishment.
- Post the coin into the treasure box and repeat every day.
- If your child is having a day that feels difficult, invite them to open their treasure box to receive reminders of their positive thoughts - it's okay if they don't feel like it though!
- At the end of each week, open the treasure box and spend some time looking through all of the positive messages.



Positive Affirmations

Messages of love to our little ones

You could write affirmation cards for your child and leave them around the house for them to find. You could stick them on their bedroom wall or send one in their school lunch box.

A few examples are:

You are SO
loveable

You shine
brighter
than the sun

You can
achieve
anything!

You are
important

You always
try your best

Your smiles
makes everyone
else smile

Positive Affirmations

Messages of love to parents and carers

And of course, it is so important that parents and carers take some time to recognise the amazing job they are doing in supporting their child's development.

You will see below a few affirmations from us. You can print these and stick them to your fridge, or perhaps write your own. Whether it be something you already do well, or something you are aiming to achieve, remind yourself everyday of the amazing job you are doing.

I am
exactly what my
child needs

I encourage my
children to be
themselves

I deserve to
take time for
myself!

I am playful
and we have lots
of fun in our home

I do what is
right for me and
my children

I am calm and
patient

Sensory Play

Sensory play is the type of play that stimulates the senses: sight, sound, touch, smell and taste.

A few benefits of sensory play:

- It encourages the development of motor skills
- It supports language development
- It encourages scientific thinking and problem solving
- It can help children to feel calm, and so can be a good tool to draw upon if your child is experiencing anxiety

And we'd better not forget, sensory play is fun!



Fun in 5, with things from around the home

Let's play! Let's make moon sand!



Follow our step-by-step guide below or watch the [video](#) on our Facebook page to find out how to make your own moon sand in just 5 minutes!

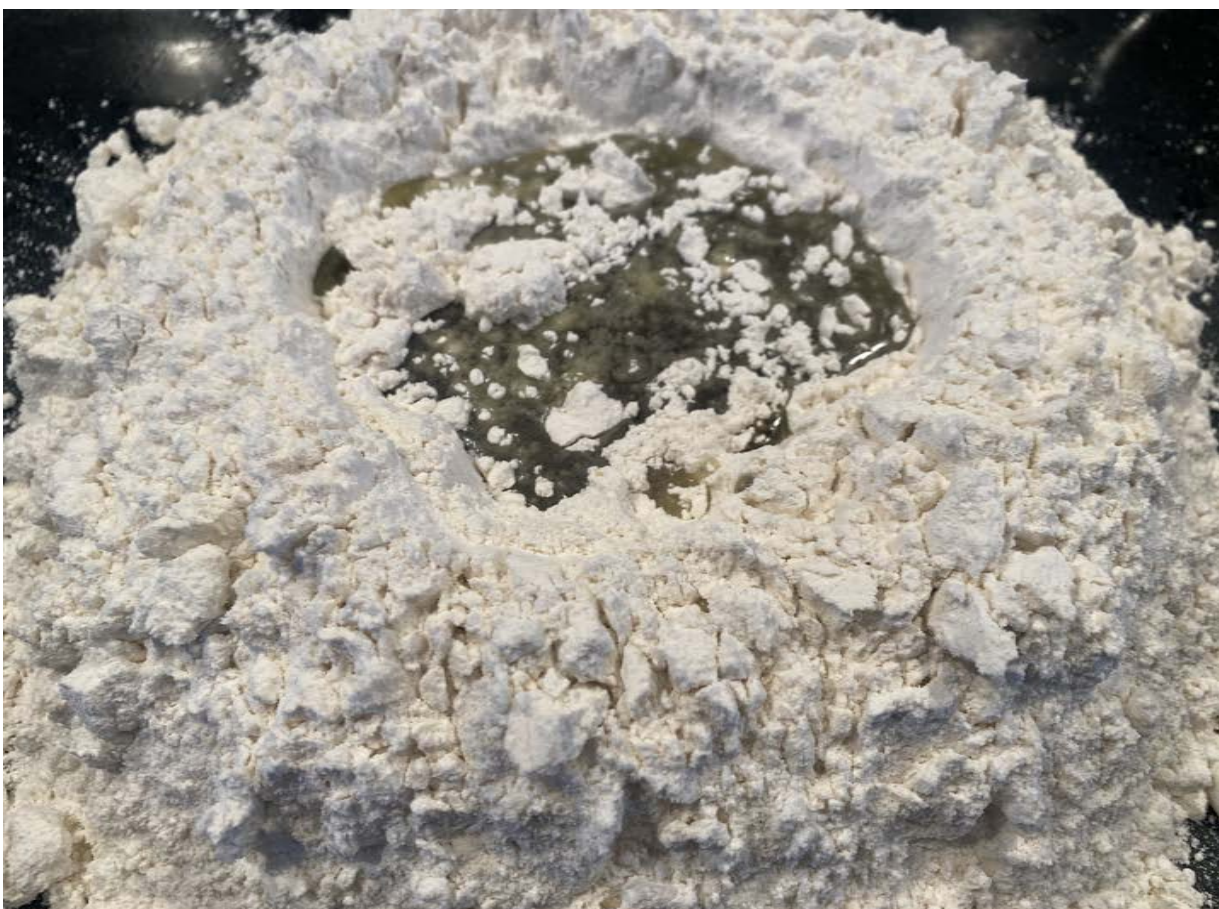
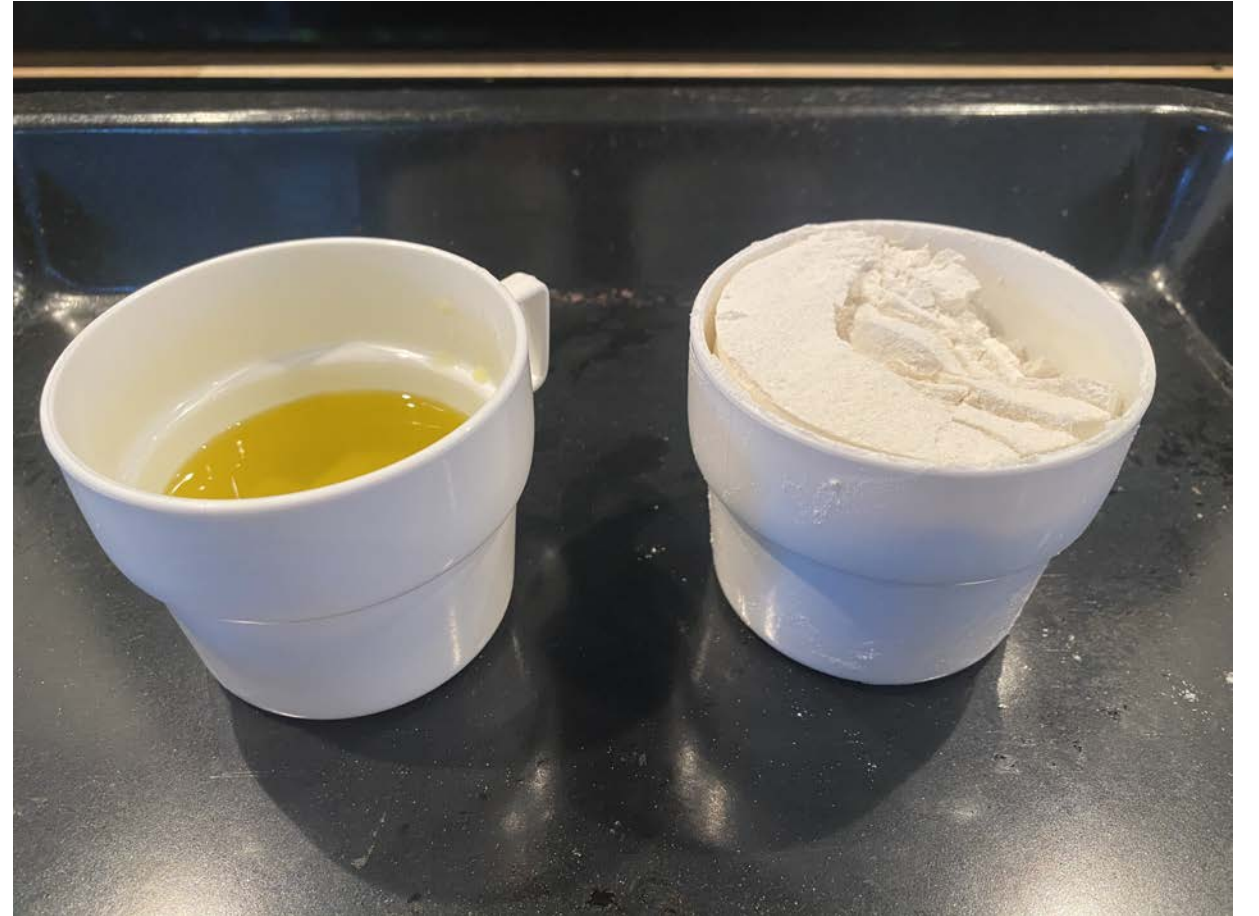
The good stuff

- Problem solving
- Relaxation
- Fine and gross motor skills
- Creativity

Fun in 5, with things from around the home

For the moon sand, all you'll need is:

- 4 cups of flour
- Half a cup of baby oil or a cooking oil
- A tray to mix it in
- A few different pots to fill and make castles and shapes with.
- You can also colour the sand with food colouring (add this to the oil mix) and add a yummy scent with essential oils, to really heighten the sensory experience.



Add your flour and oil to the tray and get mixing! Keep mixing it together until it resembles a soft sand. If you want to add scents, add your essential oil to the baby oil. If using colours, powdered paint should go into the flour, or oil based colourings (such as food colouring) should be mixed into the oil.

Play, build and mould
castles & volcanoes,
add toys & make
stories.

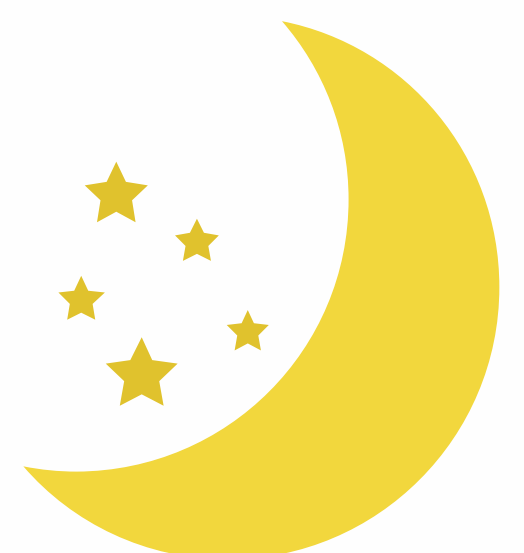


Fun in 5, with things from around the home

Making mess

Moon sand isn't gritty like normal sand, however, it can of course make a mess. One way to contain the mess as much as possible, is to put the moon sand in a tray that is placed on top of a plastic splash mat. Let your little ones know that the moon sand is only allowed in the tray and on the splash mat, of course some children will find this easier than others. Once they are finished playing, you can box up your moon sand in an airtight container and sweep off the splash mat.

We hope you enjoy playing!



**Potential mess
factor 10/10
We have a few
ideas to help
with that.**



Fun in 5, with things from around the home

Let's play!
Let's make playdough!



Follow our step-by-step guide below or watch the [video](#) to find out how to make your own playdough in just 5 minutes!

The good stuff

- Problem solving
- Relaxation
- Fine and gross motor skills
- Creativity

Fun in 5, with things from around the home

Ingredients per playdough ball

- 8 tablespoons of plain flour
- 2 tablespoons salt
- 60ml water (or 4 tablespoons)
- 1 tablespoon of cooking oil
- Food colouring (optional)



Then add the food colouring and oil to the water and stir.



And then to stir it all together until it's fully combined and begins to form a ball.



Invite your little one to add the flour and salt to a bowl and stir together.



Ask them to add the water mix to the flour mix.



Lightly flour a surface and knead the mix until it forms a smooth pliable dough.



Fun in 5, with things from around the home

As soon as the playdough is made, it is ready to be played with instantly! Children can get hours of fun (and learning) out of playdough. Alongside your homemade playdough, all you need is a clear surface and if you like, a few additional household items like those listed below.

- Bottle caps
- Laces
- Pipe cleaners
- Shape cutters
- Buttons, gems or other art materials
- Rolling pin
- Miniature toys
- Garlic press
- Comb
- Sticks
- Child friendly cutlery

Watch as your child's imagination takes flight. You might see your child:

- Make creatures or monsters by sticking googly eyes and pipe cleaners into the dough.
- Squeeze, pull or press into the playdough.
- Make prints with leaves, sticks or cutters.
- Roll the dough into shapes like snakes.
- Engage in imaginary play and make pizzas or ice creams. You might even watch as they open their own imaginary shop!

Fun in 5, with things from around the home

And what's really great is it's all good for your child's learning and development.

Whilst playing with playdough, children can:

- Be curious - they can analyse and solve problems. "Cutting didn't work, so I'm going to try to scrape it."
- Develop their self-esteem - "I am good at using the cutters to make shapes," and recognise their accomplishments "look, I made the bridge stand strong."
- Positively release energy through pressing, flattening and pounding the dough.

When making the playdough, children can practice maths whilst measuring the ingredients out. They can explore cause and effect through playing - for example, adding more water to the mix and seeing what happens.

Playdough has many learning benefits and can be used in so many ways, but most importantly it's great fun!



Separation Anxiety

Separation anxiety can be described as an excessive fear or anxiety experienced by a child when being faced with being separated from their attachment figure or their main caregiver. Children suffering from separation anxiety will likely experience many overwhelming feelings, that usually relate to them feeling as though there is a threat to their safety. They might experience physical symptoms such as stomach aches, headaches and sickness when preparing to leave their attachment figure or upon separation.

It is normal to experience separation anxiety, and lots of children will find their first few weeks of nursery or school challenging. If this fear continues more consistently, it is likely that the child is suffering from ongoing separation anxiety.

Your child might have never had separation anxiety before, or they might have overcome it once before and be re-experiencing it again now. Either way, if your child is experiencing separation anxiety, remember that they are adaptable and resilient and that they will in time, overcome these difficult feelings.

Evolutionarily, children are programmed to seek close contact with the adults who keep them safe. Their brains are programmed to seek close proximity to their adults. When we are in times of uncertainty or have experienced high levels of stress, our brains might recognise danger when we are actually safe. Therefore, we have to support our children to recognise when there is actually danger, and when there is not.

Separation Anxiety

There are several things you can do to support your child to manage separation anxiety.

Talk about your child's anxious feelings with them

As we explored earlier in this book, a listening ear can be a powerful healing tool. When you talk to your child about their anxious feelings, be empathic, let them know you understand how scary and uncomfortable their feelings must be. Reassuring them that they will be safe and that their feelings won't last forever can also be helpful - yet this must be done without belittling them or taking away from their fears:

"I know you feel anxious, it's okay. I promise I will be here when school finishes, just like I am every day."

Let your child know about what is happening to their brain when they experience anxiety. You can then use this same language when they are experiencing the stress of anxiety. Let's imagine again you are saying goodbye at the school gate and your little one has let you know they don't want you to leave.

"You are feeling scared for me to leave. Remember that brain stuff we talked about, where your brain is saying you aren't safe? Well, let's have a look around, I can see Mr Potts, he is your teacher this year isn't he? He has been nice so far. There are Arlo and Siannah over there and lots of other children playing. Can you see any danger? It's okay, I can't see any either, and I still understand that you feel anxious, it isn't nice is it. I believe you can do this. I will be here at the end of the day as I always am. Shall we take a few deep breaths together?"

A lovely book called 'The Invisible String' by Patrice Karst is a great story book to read with your little ones, particularly if they are suffering with separation anxiety. It's all about the unbreakable connection between loved ones.

Separation Anxiety

Make plans

Prepare for things that make your child anxious, for example - going to school. Talk to them about what is in their lunch box, ask them to help you prepare their school bag, talk to them about what they will be doing at school - you're creating as little surprises as possible. Let them know that you will drop them off and pick them up as usual.

Practice separation

Short bursts of time away from you e.g. pop to the shops whilst they stay with a trusted and familiar friend of yours/ family member.

Things that remind them of you

Giving your child an object of your own, perhaps something soft that smells like you, can act as a comforter when you are separated. If you give your child something of your own (such as your scarf or a special stone), you can ask them to look after it for the day and let them know you will get it back from them when you pick them up from school. This lets the child know that you are returning. Make sure it is an object that doesn't hold any sentimental value so that if the child accidentally loses it you do not become upset with them.

In a parent group, one mum shared that she draws a heart on her daughter's wrist and her daughter draws one back on her's. The hearts were a reminder that when they weren't together, they were thinking about each other. Her daughter found it comforting and would often rub the heart with her finger during the school day if she became stressed. It allowed her to feel connected to her mum.

Fun in 5, with things from around the home

Let's play!

Let's make fingerprint rocks



Follow our step-by-step guide below to find out how to make your own fingerprint rocks!

The good stuff

- Bonding
- Security
- Connection
- Stress reduction

Fun in 5, with things from around the home

Let's play!

Step 1: you'll need a pebble each, acrylic paint, washable paint for the fingertips. Pick a colour to paint your rock and then leave it to dry.
You can go to a beach to collect your rocks, the woods, or if you'd prefer, you can get them in a craft shop.



Step 2: paint a shape onto the pebble. We like to do a heart. Leave it to dry.



Step 3: Choose a colour, dip your finger in and leave your finger print on the rock.

Step 4: Let your little one take it with them to nursery or school (you can carry the one they made you too) and let them know, that if they feel worried or miss you, they can hold onto their rock.



Introduction to Attachment Games

What are attachment games?

In brief, attachment refers to how safe a child feels in their relationship with their caregiver. Sometimes, when we are experiencing scary or unpredictable situations, like lockdown for example, children can begin to feel unsafe, so taking some time to focus on their relationship with their caregiver can soothe those uncomfortable feelings, supporting the child to feel safe.

The following attachment games are activities that you can play with your child that help to explore connection and support children to feel safe.

We might practice being far away from each other and then close to each other, and wonder how the distance made us feel. We might practice copying each other, paying real close attention to each other's movements. We might spend time listening and wonder, 'how does being listened to make me feel?' The overall aim of these games is to support your child to feel safe and soothed by your presence.



Attachment games to reduce stress and build trust

Game 1 - Silent Models

The adult explains to the child, that using newspaper (with the staples removed) and masking tape, they are going to create a model. Explain to the child that they can choose what they create, it might be 2D or 3D, it might be a picture or an object, it might be made up. Explain that you are going to try to play in silence, that you are going to let the child lead, and you will try to work out what they are creating. Let them know that you will try to help and if you get it wrong, they can shake their head to let you know and that you will keep watching and wondering. Play relaxing music in the background if you would like to.

Game 2 - Partner Walks

The adult stands with hands out in front of them, palms facing up. Both agree to take care of each other in the play. Explain to the child that they are going to safely lead you around the room by tapping your hands, one tap equals one step. If they tap both of your hands it means step forwards, if they tap only your left, you turn to the left, if they tap only your right hand, you turn to the right. Play for a few minutes and then swap over. Play relaxing music in the background if you would like to.

Variation 1: if you feel safe to, have a go with your eyes closed!

Variation 2: follow the sound - this can be voices or musical instruments.

Attachment games to reduce stress and build trust

Game 3 - Break the Code

Adult and child sit next to each and agree to take care of each other during the game. Adult asks for permission to touch the child's hands. Adult explains that they are secret agents sending messages to each other. Adult and child turn away from each other a little and child offers adult back of hand. Adult taps a pattern of gentle taps on the back of the child's hand and the child tries to remember it and then tap it back on the adult's hand. Swap over.

Variation 1: write letters on the back of the hand – even spell something.

Variation 2: draw shapes on each other's backs and guess.

Game 4 - Point to my Call

Adult and child sit together and agree to take care of each other during play. Adult explains that if it's OK, the child will look down or cover their eyes (be sensitive). Adult is going to move to a different part of the room and make a call. Agree with the child what the call is going to be, it can be a word or a sound. (IMPORTANT - wherever possible allow the child to decide the call.) Child will point to the area of the room that they can hear the call coming from. Adult then moves and calls again. Make sure that the child can succeed at the level needed.

Variation 1: adult moves further away even into different rooms around the house – play with care.

Variation 2: adult calls and instead of pointing, the child has to find the adult.

Empathy with bells and whistles

We are reaching the end of this book, thank you for sticking with us, we hope it has been positive so far.

We couldn't finish the book without exploring empathy in a little more detail. Empathy can be described as the ability to understand and share someone's feeling. The metaphor of 'putting yourself in someone else's shoes' is often referred to when explaining empathy.

Being empathetic towards others, and being able to understand their experience is a great skill to have.

Researchers have discovered something called Reflective Functioning, which directly correlates with children feeling safe and secure in their relationship with adults. We like to call Reflective Functioning 'empathy with bells and whistles.'

What is empathy with bells and whistles? (Reflective Functioning)

When we practice empathy, we understand a person's experience, how they might be feeling, what they might be thinking. The bells and whistles come in when we let the person know that we understand how they are feeling. By letting them know we get it, we help a person to feel understood, and that in itself is healing.

Reflective Functioning as a 3-step process

Our friend and colleague, Debi Maskell-Graham created a 3 - step process that helps adults to practice empathy with bells and whistles. This is broken down on the next page, followed by a game to help you have a practice.

You can watch a great example of empathy with bells and whistles in a clip from the movie 'Inside Out', when sadness (the small blue emotion) soothes Bing Bong (the pink character).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QT6FdhKriB8>

Head, Heart and Hands

1

Head

Being able to think about the child and hold them in our minds.

Having the headspace to think about the child without (too much) distraction.

2

Heart

Being able to recognise how the child might be feeling.

Recognising these thoughts as separate from our own.

3

Hands

An action, word, sound or facial expression to let the child know that we really 'get it.'

Guessing is good.

Must be sensitive and at the right time.

Fun in 5, Let's play a guessing game!



Firstly, you'll need to make up a story about what is happening in this picture. There is no exact answer to these questions, so you can't get it wrong. Guessing is good!

Head: What is the dog thinking?

Heart: How is the dog feeling?

Hands: How do we let them know that we get it? What could we say? What sounds could we make? Or what could we do with our body language so that the dog feels understood?

Fun in 5, Let's play a guessing game!



We'll likely have come up with different stories, here we have an example of what might be happening.

Perhaps, the dog has just climbed a mountain with his family.

Head: What is the dog thinking?

He's thinking about how good the wind feels on his face.

Heart: How is the dog feeling?

He's feeling happy to be out for the day with his family and he feels proud to have made it to the top of the mountain. He feels free and loves the feeling of the wind blowing through his fur.

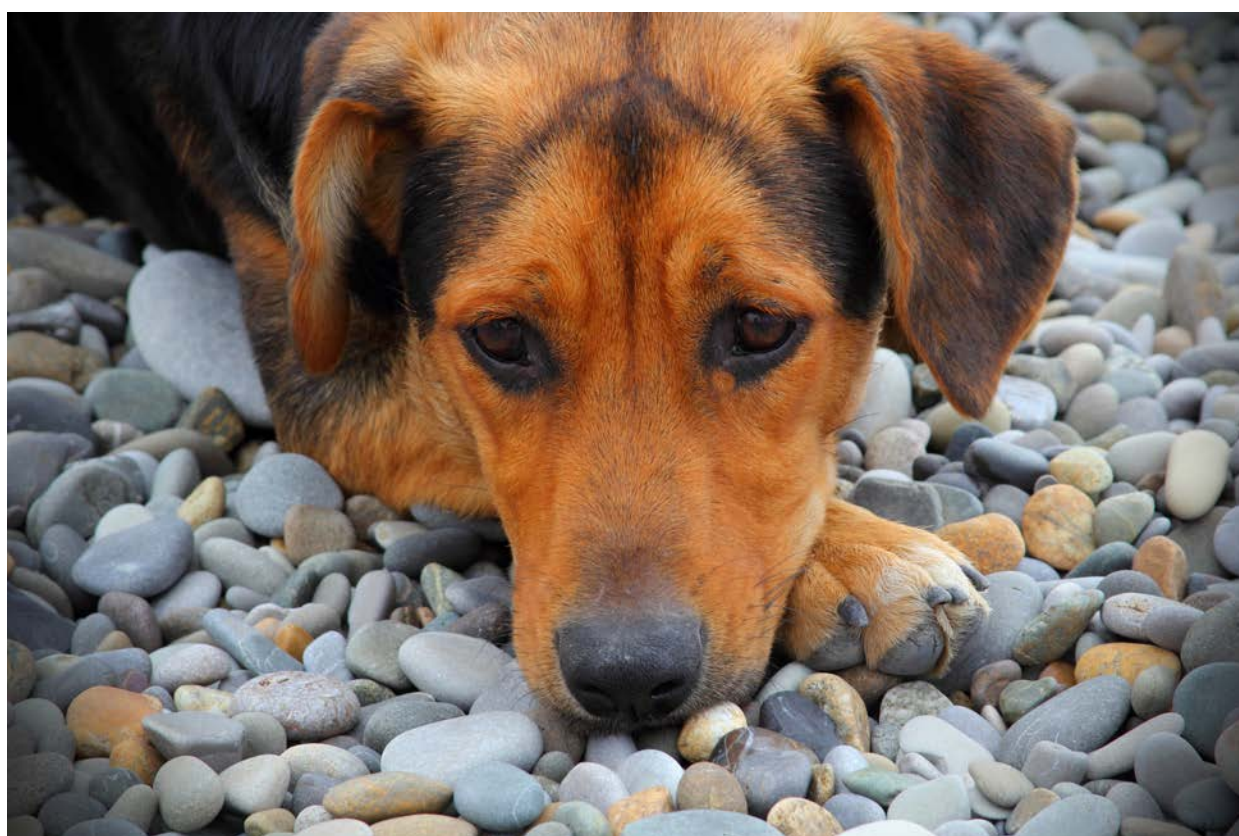
Hands: We might say -

"You are so proud to have made it up the mountain!"

"You're really loving the feeling of the wind blowing through your fur aren't you!"

We might let out a big breath, whilst reflecting a loving smile back at him, letting him know we can see how happy he is!

Fun in 5, Let's play a guessing game!



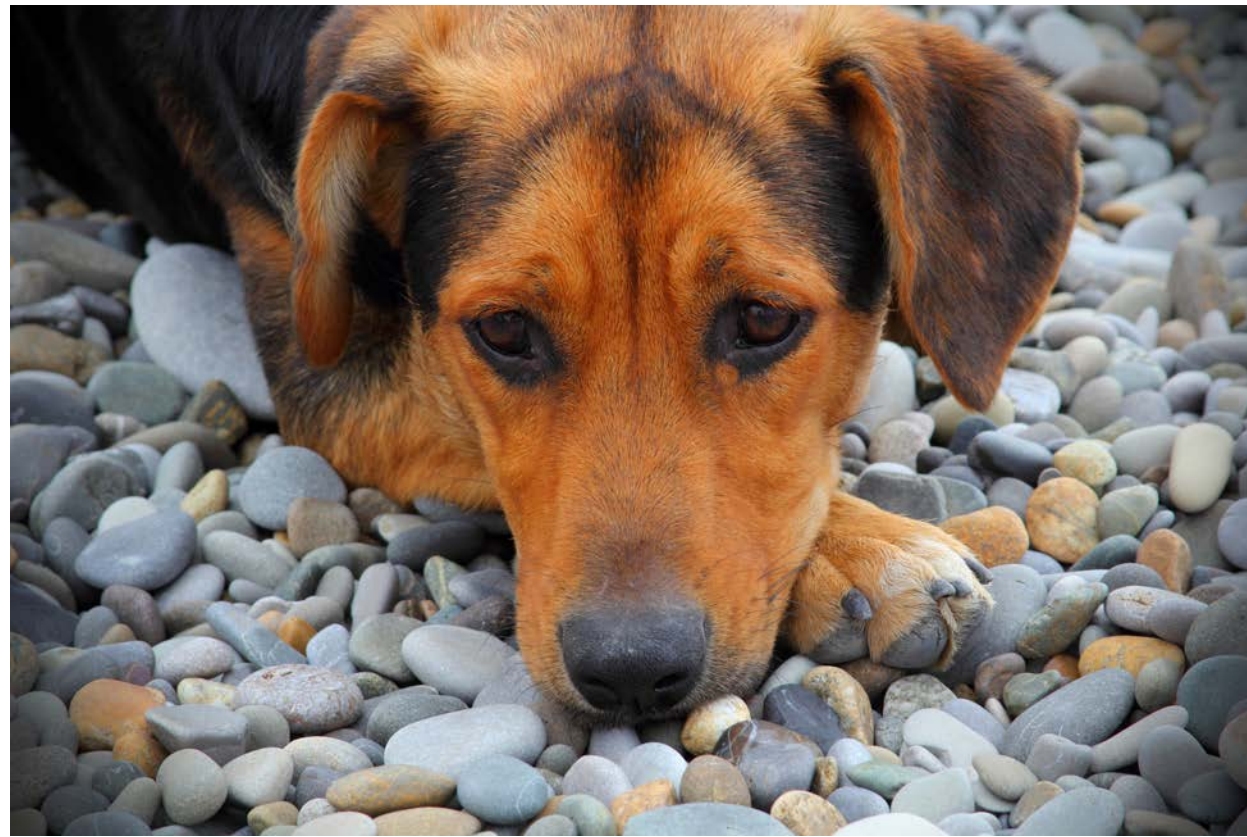
Begin by having a think about what is happening in this photo?
This one might feel a little more uncomfortable than the first.

Head: What is the dog thinking?

Heart: How is the dog feeling?

Hands: How do we let them know that we get it? What could we say? What sounds could we make? Or what could we do with our body language so that the dog feels understood?

Fun in 5, Let's play a guessing game!



Perhaps, the dog has lost his favourite ball and can't find it.

Head: What is the dog thinking?

He's wondering when he last had his ball. He's questioning if there is anyway he can get it back

Heart: How is the dog feeling?

He's feeling upset, a bit lonely, disappointed, sad, lost.

Hands: How do we help the dog know we get it?

We might say "that was your favourite ball wasn't it? Oh I know, it's horrible when your favourite things go missing. I'm so sorry it's lost."

We might let out a big sigh, reflect back the dog's sad facial expression.

You might notice, we haven't tried to 'fix' the situation for the dog, we haven't told him 'I will buy you a new ball' or 'It is okay, we'll find it.' Although hard, we've just sat with that difficult feeling.

Fun in 5, Let's play a guessing game!



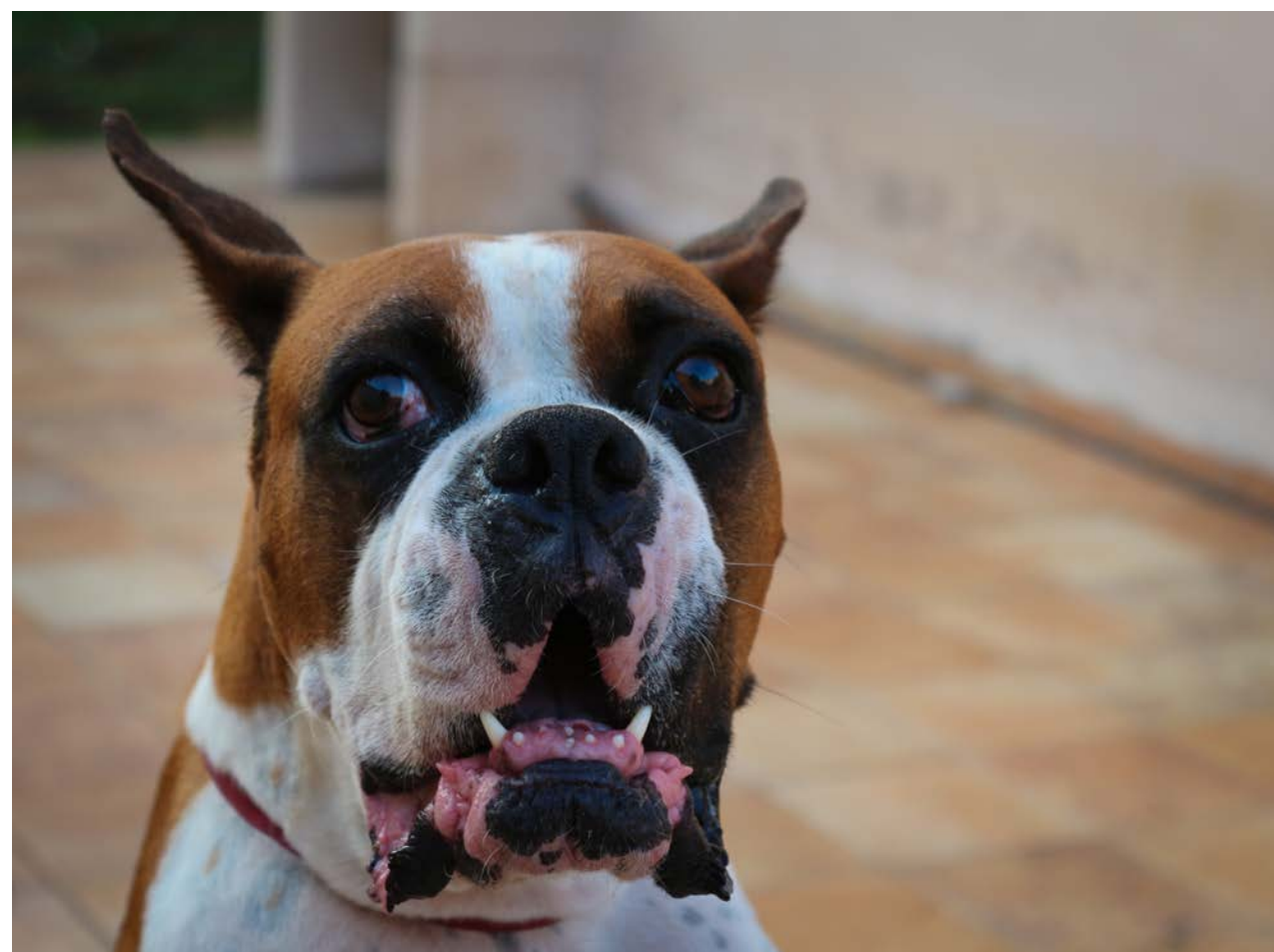
Begin by having a think about what is happening in this photo? This one might feel a little more uncomfortable than the first.

Head: What is the dog thinking?

Heart: How is the dog feeling?

Hands: How do we let them know that we get it? What could we say? What sounds could we make? Or what could we do with our body language so that the dog feels understood?

Fun in 5, Let's play a guessing game!



Perhaps, the dog has broken into the biscuit bag that was on the counter and the owners have just arrived home.

Head: What is the dog thinking?

He's thinking he might get told off and he's trying to work out if there is a way he can get out of it. He's thinking it was worth it, even if he is going to get into trouble.

Heart: How is the dog feeling?

Worried? Maybe a bit nervous?

Hands: How do we help the dog know we get it? This one might feel a bit more difficult, as our gut instinct might be to reprimand the dog. Let's first try and empathise, we might say "hmm, you look like you've been up to something you shouldn't have been! You're worried you're going to be told off."

And we might need to let him know that it wasn't okay and set a boundary, we can be firm, but kind.

"You knew you weren't allowed to eat those didn't you? If you choose to steal them again, we won't be able to give you access to the kitchen when we are out. Never mind."

Fun in 5, Let's play a guessing game!



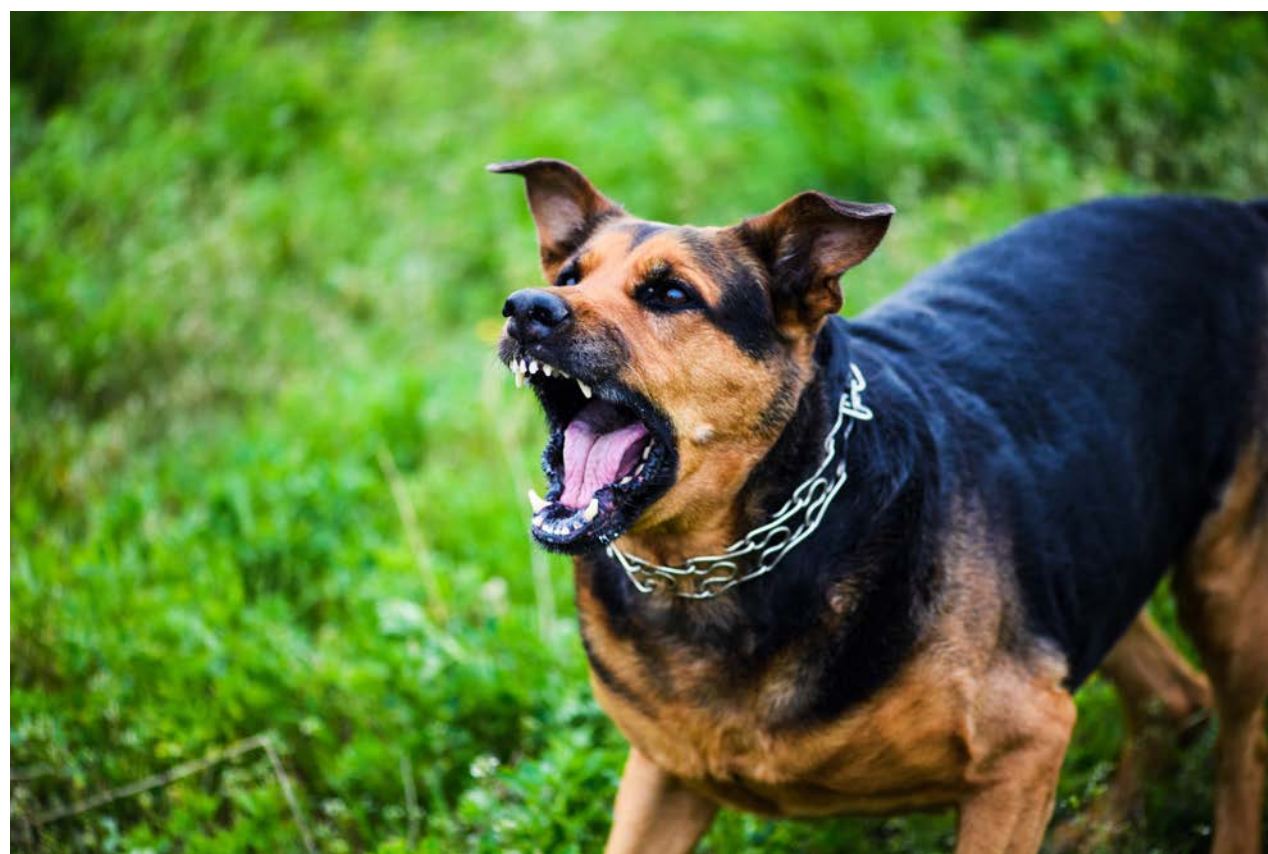
Begin by having a think about what is happening in this photo?

Head: What is the dog thinking?

Heart: How is the dog feeling?

Hands: How do we let them know that we get it? What could we say?
What sounds could we make? Or what could we do with our body language so that the dog feels understood?

Fun in 5, Let's play a guessing game!



Perhaps, a human, or a dog has come and taken his bone.

Head: What is the dog thinking?

He's thinking it's his bone and no one else is allowed it other than him!

Heart: How is the dog feeling?

Perhaps he is feeling unsafe, frightened, shocked, protective or threatened.

Hands: How do we help the dog know we get it?

We might say "how dare he take your bone. That's your bone isn't it? You didn't want to share it with anyone else. You've been enjoying it and someone has come along and taken it right out of your mouth. How angry that has made you."

Practicing empathy can become a lot harder when we are under stress. More on that on the following pages.

Let's have a go at just one more!



Begin by having a think about what is happening in this photo.

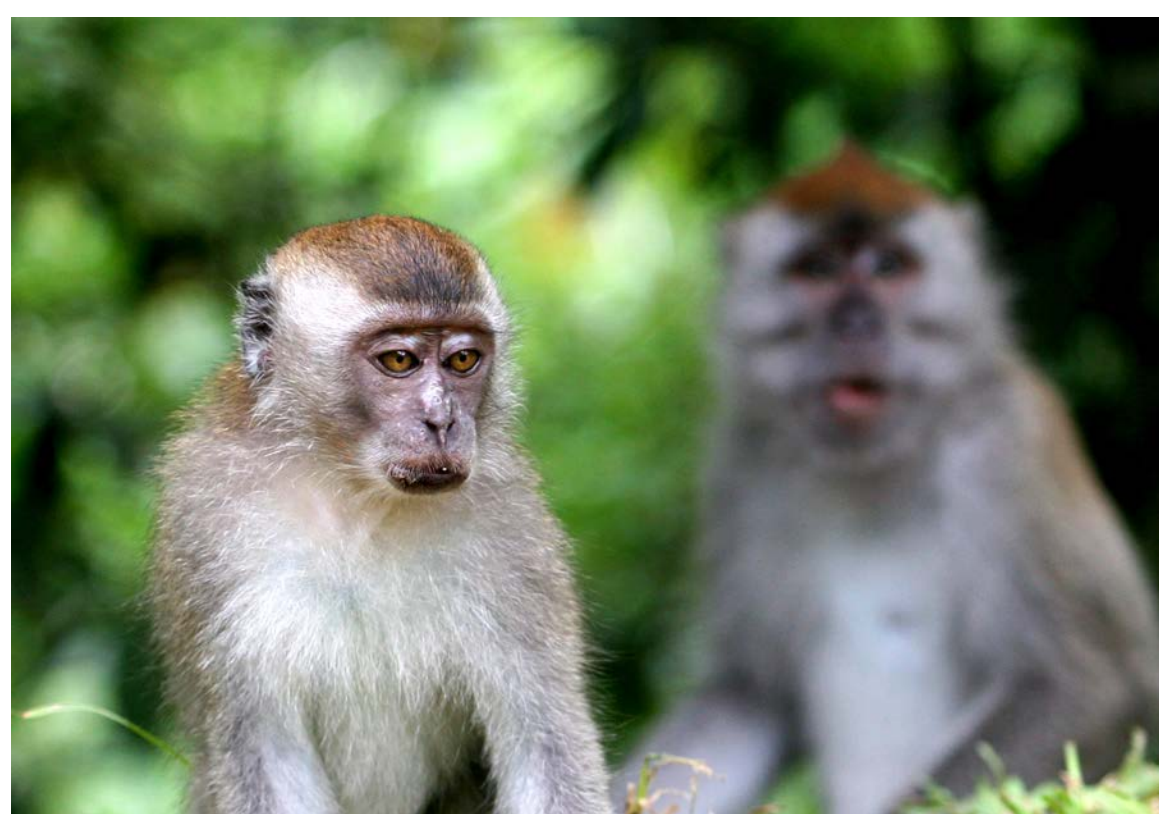
Head: What is the monkey thinking?

Heart: How is the monkey feeling?

Hands: How do we let them know that we get it? What could we say? What sounds could we make? Or what could we do with our body language so that the dog feels understood?

In our suggestion of what might be happening, we have created a bit of conflict as an opportunity to practice using this 3-step process when under stress.

Fun in 5, Let's play a guessing game!



Perhaps, the little monkey's parents have told him that it is time to clean his room.

Head: What is the monkey thinking?

He's thinking about the game, he'd much rather be playing.

Heart: How is the monkey feeling?

Perhaps he is feeling annoyed, frustrated, upset, like things are a bit unfair.

Hands: How do we help the dog know we get it?

We might say:

(Adult) "I know you don't want to clean your room, it's not something children enjoy doing and I still need you to do it."

(Child) "It's not fair, none of my friends have to clean their rooms!"

(Adult) "Well, that does sound unfair and we still have a rule that we all clean up our own mess in this house."

(Child) "Well, I DON'T WANT TO!"

(Adult) "I can see that this has really upset you and I'm sorry you are feeling sad. You do need to clean your room."

(Child) "WELL I'M NOT GOING TO"

(Adult) "The choice is, you can clean your room now and you can watch your favourite programme on after dinner. Or, you can clean your room after dinner, and there will be no TV."

A few tips...

- Practice Head, Heart and Hands in happy situations first, like when your child has accomplished something they've been trying to do. 'Look how happy you are! You've done it! You feel like a superstar.'
- Practicing Head, Heart and Hands is a lot harder when you are under stress. So, as an example, you are tired, your children have been arguing all morning, they've just calmed down and your daughter has stolen your son's toy. Your son is distraught, you are tired and your daughter is feeling accomplished. It's much harder to manage the situation calmly and instead of empathising with the feelings, we might end up taking the toy instead. Know that it is okay if things go wrong sometimes, we can make it up afterwards.
- When practicing Head, Heart and Hands, try to avoid questions when letting your little one know that you understand how they feel. Questions can suggest that we don't get it so instead, try a statement. If we get it wrong, it's okay, children will usually let us know!
- We don't always have to fix it. Sometimes, all anyone is asking for is a listening ear.



Final thoughts: The 'Good Enough' Theory

Scientists have evidence for something that most parents find very comforting, this is called the 'good enough theory'. This means that we only have to be good enough to help our children grow up happy and healthy. The good enough theory suggests that children actually benefit from imperfect parenting and being failed in tolerable ways. Tolerable ways being, not hearing them call for our attention immediately, encouraging them to share when they don't want to, or to eat broccoli because it's good for them, even if they do hate it.

Each time we fail our children in tolerable ways, we give them an opportunity to develop resilience. They become stronger and they learn that they can get through challenges.

Don't beat yourself up for forgetting to send your son in with the ingredients to make cakes at school. He'll get through it, and when you see him you can let him know you are sorry that you forgot, repairing the fault - teaching him that relationships can rebuild after ruptures.

Be kind to yourself
You are doing a fantastic job
Remind yourself of that every day



Thanks for reading!

You've made it to the end of this book! That's something to celebrate, you definitely deserve a cup of tea! Thank you so much for taking the time to delve into our world of play. We really hope you have gained something from it.

We wish you and your little one('s) a future of connection & play together.

You are doing a really great job!



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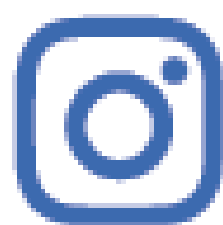
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Keep in touch

If you are interested in working with us or have any questions about this book, please contact us:

info@clear-sky.org.uk | 01865 362789 | www.clear-sky.org.uk.



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We want to make sure that this book is accessible to every child and family and so the book is offered free to download. However, we have suggested that families might make a donation to Clear Sky charity and help fund vital Play & Creative Arts Therapy. Donations can be made here - <https://www.justgiving.com/clearsky>

Thank
You!



The Power of Play

The Manor House, Little Wittenham, Oxfordshire, OX14 4RA

info@clear-sky.org.uk | 01865 362789 | www.clear-sky.org.uk

ISBN 978-1-5272-9073-0

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Version 2

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