

Regulating emotions with our children

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The mental health and wellbeing of our children and young people are everything to us as parents and carers. But we all have times when it is increasingly difficult to make sure we are feeling mentally well. Mental wellness does not mean that we should feel happy all of the time, but it also does not mean that we should be feeling high levels of anxiety, stress or fear either.

If you notice changes in the moods and emotions of your child or young person then it's worth noting them and responding appropriately. It is normal for emotions to change and for the strength of those emotions to vary. When we notice our children grappling with challenging emotions or we see they are in a mood that begins to appear overwhelming for them, it is important to remember that there are things that we can do as parents to help them to move through this.



We call this co-regulation. Co-regulation is when we respond to our children with warm and supportive interactions. It is when we coach our children by asking caring questions and it's when we model, by showing the behaviours we wish to see. Co-regulation is when we help our children understand how they are feeling, it is when we help them to express how they are feeling in appropriate ways and teach them how to modulate their thoughts, feelings and their behaviours so that they feel listened to, understood and calmer.

It is good to see our emotions as an internal climate that is always changing and to demonstrate this to our children by naming how we feel as adults. It's good to show them that it is normal to feel a range of emotions throughout the day. That feeling low, angry or sad is ok and will not last. That our feelings change as we move through the day.

Emotional Scale

Creating a simple code to help your children name their mood or feeling is a really easy and helpful way to begin to lessen the power of negative feelings. As soon as you notice that you are angry for example, your mind can start to do something about it and the power of the angry feeling begins to dissipate. You can create your own barometer or scale with your family. A simple Red, Amber, and Green rating scale of feelings can help a child to identify their mood or state of mind.

Rating Scale Example you could share with your child:

Red could be for feeling angry, or for when you feel like shouting or hitting out. It could be for when you need space and time alone.

Amber could be for feeling frustrated, anxious, nervous or over-excited.

Green could be for feeling happy, calm, settled, good to go! It might be worth adding a cool blue into this scale for feeling sad, tired, bored or unwell. For when you have little energy and feel down



A simple scale that you design together means that you have created a simple shared language.

Children can identify what colour they are, easier than having to recognise, name, then articulate their emotions to you when they may be feeling too overwhelmed to do so. Once you know where they are on the scale you are better placed to help and support them.

Now you can ask your child what they feel they need to help them. It might be time alone, it might be a long cuddle on the couch together! Encourage them to think for themselves of what they need at that moment to get them back to the green. Remind them that this emotion will change and pass and that there are things they can do to help the process, to move them from feeling stuck to feeling in control.

A great calming exercise for when your child is feeling 'Red', 'Amber' or even 'Blue' could be the mindful breathing exercises shown below in the tips for parents and children page. These are excellent activities for calming and reducing feelings of anxiety. They can be simply taught and practiced together so that they can become positive habits or resources that can be easily called upon when needed.

Getting your child to breathe the out-breath for longer than the in-breath, helps trigger the parasympathetic nervous system. The 'rest and digest' messages that will then occur will go to the brain and the body and they will begin to slowly create a sense of calm. Doing an exercise like these together and doing them regularly helps bring you all into the present moment. It reminds the brain that you are safe, in this moment. That you are allowed to relax. It is a great way to press the pause button, to be rather than do, just for a while. This pause not only has a calming effect but will re-energise and re-focus you both.

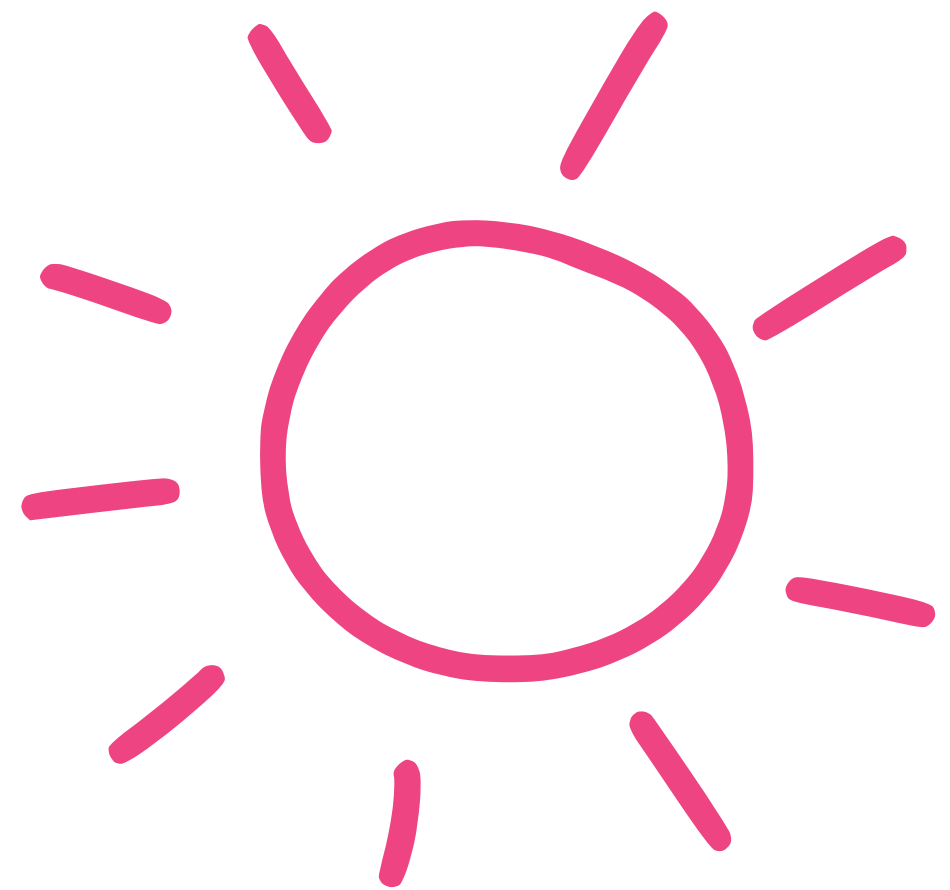
Random Acts of Kindness

Did you know that random acts of kindness can boost your child's self-esteem?

When someone has low self-esteem they may start believing negative things about themselves that are untrue or exaggerated and this is really harmful to their wellbeing. Children can have low self-esteem, often brought on by comparing themselves to others. Unfortunately, this is more common than ever with the use of social media and the way children are often compelled to compare themselves to the images they see. As a result, they may think that they are useless, worthless, or incompetent. That they are of no value to anyone and cannot seem to do anything right.

As a parent, we can try to improve our children's self-esteem by telling them that these negative thoughts are groundless, or by saying that they are truly loved, valued and can do certain things really well. This goes some way in helping to improve their ideas about themselves and create more positive self-talk. It is especially effective if we as parents, model a positive narrative about ourselves and speak aloud about the importance of noticing what we have done that has been good or successful.

On top of this, we can encourage our children to perform random acts of kindness. By doing things that are kind and appreciated by others, it challenges their belief that they are no good or worthless. If someone genuinely appreciates something that they have done and if they have made someone feel happier in some small way, then it allows them to see that they have done something nice. This shows them that they have do have the capacity to make someone's life just a little bit better. That they are actually worthy.





Simple acts such as smiling and saying good morning to someone, helping someone by picking something up for them or going upstairs for something someone has forgotten. Making a cup of tea or letting someone else in the family choose what to watch on TV. All seemingly small acts, but they will make someone feel joy. When children see that they have made someone feel joy, the feeling is projected back onto them. They feel joy too! They begin to see and believe that they are a good, capable, caring person. All of these emotions build self-positivity and enhances self-esteem. Important attributes to maintaining good mental health and wellbeing.

Breathing Exercise - Counting the Breath

This exercise helps to calm your mind and ease your mood!

As you know we breathe all the time! But try thinking carefully about your breath. Notice how you breathe. You can put a hand on your tummy and one on your chest and see how the body is moved by the breath. Next begin to breathe in and breathe out slower than you normally do, for longer than you normally do. Try breathing into your tummy and out. Then try breathing into your chest and out. Then close your eyes, and begin to count to 10 with your breath. Breath in 1, breath out 2, and so on up to 10. If your mind wanders and you forget to count, don't worry, just drift your attention back to your breath and begin at 1 again. This simple breathing exercise can be done sitting, lying down, or even walking around. Whatever feels right for you. After a short time, you will notice that you feel calmer, more at ease, and able to face any challenges that the day may have to offer.

Breathing Exercise - 4-7-8

This is another breathing exercise to help you feel relaxed and chilled!

Begin by noticing the breath. Breathe in through the nose and breathe out through the mouth. Start to slow the breath down a little bit and notice how it feels in your body. Next start to count to 4 as you breathe in. Now hold your breath and in a relaxed way count to 7. Lastly, breathe out through your mouth as you count to 8 allowing the breath to sound like the ocean as you exhale. Try sitting upright, with your back nice and long as you practice this exercise. Think about how it makes your body and your mind feel.