

The Power of Play

for children's mental health & well-being



Play is children's primary form of communication, giving them the opportunity to express their emotions in an age-appropriate way. Play helps create a safe space where children can explore their feelings at their own pace and without fear of saying something wrong.

Playing provides children with a sense of normality, giving children a sense of control during times when life feels different, challenging or unpleasant. Play encourages children to form healthy friendships. Children that have close connections with friends are more likely to have a solid sense of self and feel valued. These attributes contribute to healthy development in childhood, being connected with themselves, their emotions, and their mind.

Fantasy or imaginative play allows children to understand and "work through" distressing times in their lives. Play is naturally therapeutic, flooding our body with endorphins (happy hormones) which help to relieve stress and anxiety. Playing promotes self-regulation skills including attention, reasoning, and impulse control.

PLAY ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Risky play

Any activity that makes children feel fear, but they do it anyway! Examples include climbing trees, going down a steep slide, or attempting a balancing beam for the first time. Risky play helps children to build self-regulation skills as they move between fear or anxiety to thrill and excitement.

Drawing or painting

When children are encouraged to imagine and create what different emotions might look like, and give them a name, this helps them to gain a sense of mastery over BIG emotions that they might feel unsure about.

Messy play

Giving children the permission to explore different textures with their hands, feet, arms etc. is naturally very therapeutic, proving stimulation to both the body and brain and helping to relieve stress. Examples include finger painting, making playdough from scratch, exploring gloop, slime, rice, flour, soil, sand etc. with our fingers and toes.

Being active

Emotions are literally energy in motion. When we experience BIG emotions such as anger, fear or anxiety, there is a high volume of energy racing through our bodies making emotions feel difficult to manage and cope with. What is the best way to burn energy? We can MOVE and be active. Children need at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day for positive physical and mental health, this could be as simply as running around, rough and tumble, jumping on a trampoline, riding a scooter, dancing or even slower movements such as animal yoga.

As protective adults, it is our job to support our children's emotional well-being, at home, in our settings, and within our schools. Luckily, the answer is simple ... PLAY!

