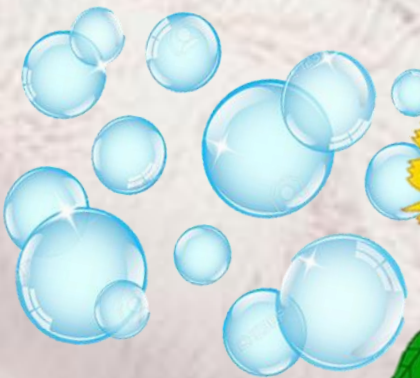


The LAC Mental Health Team Presents...

Self- Soothing Group

Resource Pack



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Introduction to Self-Soothing

Children who have experienced adverse life events often struggle to understand or manage difficult and overwhelming emotions. This resource pack aims to equip you with the skills and confidence to help combat stress that your children may be experiencing.

In this pack we will explain what we mean by 'emotion regulation' and will explore different self-soothing strategies based on our five senses: sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch.

We also address how caring for traumatised children can over-stretch our own emotional resilience and reinforce the importance of needing to look after ourselves too!



What is 'Emotion Regulation'?

Emotion regulation in its simplest form is the ability to manage emotions. We respond to emotions in both a conscious and unconscious manner and children will learn to manage and understand their emotions from their caregivers.

For example, when a baby cries the caregiver will pick up the baby to soothe them, this helps regulate the baby's distress. Even at this early age caregivers will begin labelling the child's emotions, such as 'oh you must be hungry/tired...' etc.

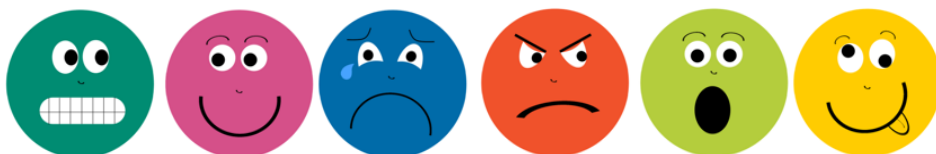
Where children haven't received 'good enough' care in their early years its likely they weren't given explanations for emotions, taught how to regulate these and how to develop coping skills for difficult emotions. The way these children have learnt to regulate tends to be in the form of anger outbursts, self-harming, or isolating behaviours. These could be described as 'unhealthy' coping skills; however these behaviours are often what children have learnt to use in order to survive. It is important to recognise that when altering an already established coping skill (unhealthy or otherwise), that we offer an alternative skill. Hopefully the below example will help highlight this:

Have a think about what gets you through a stressful day...

Is it that call to a friend you will make later? Is it that large glass of red wine waiting for you at home? A long bubble bath? A Chinese takeaway for tea? Going for a run? Your favourite book? Seeing your pet?

Now imagine that you are unable to do this thing you desperately need to help you cope and de-stress and there are no other options or alternative things you can do to release that pent up stress and energy inside you.

This must be how it feels for our children when they are expected to stop behaving a certain way but aren't given something else to do instead!



It is important to understand the function of the child's behaviour and the emotions which underpin this, in order to show them alternative ways they can respond in certain situations.

For example, if a child has a physically aggressive outburst at school, it would be easy to label this child as "bad" or "angry". However, this aggressive outburst may have been in response to feelings of anxiety about an upcoming test or sadness about having no one to play with at lunchtime. Due to the child's lack of awareness of their own feelings and responses, they react in a physically aggressive way as this is easier than to address the underlying emotion and deeper feelings. This then results in the attention being diverted to the aggressive outburst instead of the original source of these difficult emotions. A child like this may benefit from support around anxiety and how to manage these feelings as opposed to working solely on managing the angry outburst.

Understanding Emotions

In order for someone to regulate their emotions, they need to first be able to understand what emotions are. This can be tricky for young people (and adults!) as lots of emotions feel the same in our bodies. For example, when we're excited about something we might feel butterflies in our tummy but we might also feel this way when we find something scary or frightening. We might feel hot and sweaty when we're angry and also when we're embarrassed.

Ways we can help our children to get to know their bodies and understand the emotions they're experiencing include:

Role-modelling (i.e. naming our own emotions aloud)

This might feel unnatural as it's not something we usually tend to do but it can be really helpful for young people to identify how emotions look in other people. For example, if you're feeling tired or stressed after work you could say "wow what a long day that was. Now I'm feeling all tired and sleepy." Or if a car cuts in front of

you while driving: “Wow them doing that has made me feel really cross now”. After doing a nice activity we might say: “I’ve had such a lovely time today and now feel really happy”, or if plans don’t go ahead “I feel sad when our plans have to change”.

Role play with toys

In the same way we described labelling your own emotions, you could also do this with the child’s toys, e.g. “Aw I bet teddy is feeling really pleased you’ve given him a cuddle this morning”, or “Wow teddy must be happy you’ve brought him shopping with us today”, or “Aw I bet Dolly is feeling sad that the tea party has now finished. Maybe she needs a cuddle”.

You can also find creative ways to discriminate between different emotions for example by completing an emotion alphabet (e.g. A is for angry, J is for jealous) or through the use of emoji cards by asking children and young people to label the emotions they see. Emoji cards could also be helpful to use with your children if they are struggling to find the words for how they might be feeling; instead they can point to the emoji which bests fits their emotion. (Please find example emoji cards and additional resources at the end of this pack).

Other ideas include an emotion barometer (see images below). This could be something in the child’s room or on the kitchen fridge for the child to move the arrow for how they feel. You could also use this to rate how you are feeling too which would make this feel more collaborative (plus you are also role-modelling for them (see below!)



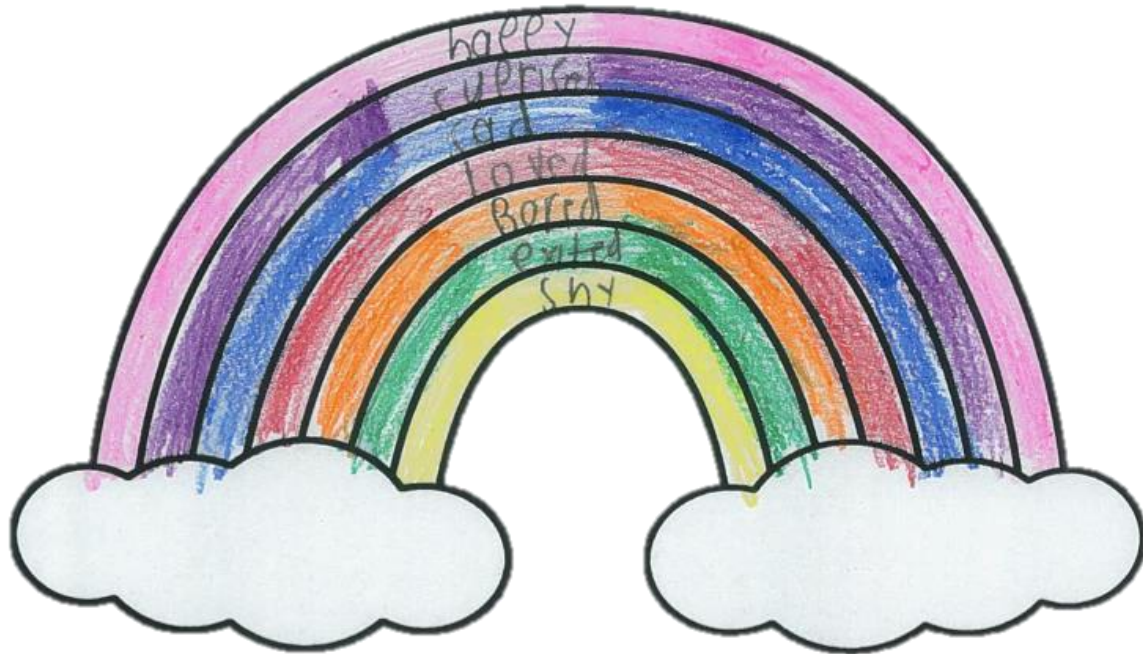
Metaphors can be a helpful tool for children to describe their emotions. This will also help to externalise the child's experience and lessen any feeling of blame/shame connected to feeling a certain way. Examples include:

Having to leave the party when we're having so much fun can make us feel angry, like there's a volcano in our tummy that's about to explode!

 <p><i>A volcano eruption!</i></p>	 <p><i>A tidal wave of emotion!</i></p>	 <p><i>The stomper!</i></p>
 <p><i>A fizzy drink explosion!</i></p>	 <p><i>A very heavy load!</i></p>	 <p><i>A wibbly-wobbly jelly!</i></p>
 <p><i>A bouncy ball!</i></p>	 <p><i>A very cuddly koala!</i></p>	 <p><i>A rain cloud which won't go away!</i></p>

It is important to remember that all emotions are acceptable.

“Emotions are like colours of a rainbow; you need all of them to make up an entire spectrum”



If we expect our children to feel/behave the same way all the time, we will only see one colour of their rainbow! It is important for them to express a whole range of emotions and we need to guide them on how to do this safely.

When exploring and gently challenging our children’s unhelpful or unhealthy coping strategies for big feelings and emotions, it is important for us to use Dan Hugh’s PLACE model. This is discussed more in the LAC team’s Managing Behaviour with Attachment in Mind (MBAM) programme.



Being **playful** can be achieved by keeping the tone light and upbeat, smiling, ruffling a child’s hair when walking past, playing hide’n’s seek when they get in from school, or giving a quick hug for no specific reason.

Loving/liking- Adults should show the child that they love or like them *especially* when the child misbehaves. This helps to move the child from the damaging effects of shame to the healthy development of guilt. If you do lose your temper, apologise and reconnect with the child quickly afterwards.

Accepting the child for who they are, not what they achieve is important for children who have experienced developmental trauma. This does not mean that their behaviour has to be accepted! Remain calm and say something like, 'I can see you are upset about this. That doesn't mean you are allowed to hurt people.'

Being **curious** - wondering aloud why the child is behaving in a certain way - can be helpful. 'I wonder why you are shouting so much today' can help a child reflect on their actions and is usually more effective in raising awareness than asking directly what's wrong (we should try moving away from asking 'why' questions as these are often interpreted as judgements or criticisms, rather than as genuine curiosity). A child who has 'switched off' their feelings may not know what is bothering them, they may say something trivial, or withhold the information through lack of trust. Being curious, or making an educated guess (not assuming you know for sure), 'I'm thinking you might be worried about the spelling gala on Friday' can be an excellent way to open a discussion. Try to listen attentively and not interrupt.

Empathy is **the** most important quality we can have when working with traumatised children. To understand the child's needs we must put ourselves into the child's shoes. It is important not only to feel empathy but to convey it to the child, i.e. 'I can see that this is hard for you' or 'Your knee is really red, I bet it hurts.' Empathy allows the child to feel their feelings, not suppress them. It encourages the release of grief and rage which, if buried, can continue to cause emotional and behavioural problems. Adults should empathise with the child before putting disciplinary measures in place and while employing those measures (e.g. giving consequences for unsafe behaviours). The adult must be genuinely empathic, not flippant or sarcastic.

Understanding Emotional Arousal

Children who have experienced early life trauma and neglect often have a baseline arousal that is already much higher than others. This is because these children have been exposed to environments in which they have had to live in 'survival mode', a heightened state where the child is ready to fight, flight, freeze or flop in order to survive.



The brain has 3 different states: survival, emotional and cognitive. These parts of the brain work together in order to help us process the world around us. For example if you were to walk into a busy road and a car was coming the survival part of the brain would kick in and you would likely jump out of the way; our emotional brain would process the event as a scary event that should be avoided in future; our cognitive brain would develop a plan about how to cross the road more safely in the future (i.e. remind us to be cautious).

When a child with attachment difficulties becomes dysregulated it is likely to trigger the survival state of their brain and at this point it literally disconnects from the other states which help in rationalising and explaining the threat. Instead the child is acting purely on their basic survival instincts. At this point they are likely unable to listen and respond to instructions, and may be described as 'out of control'. Dan Siegel refers to this as "flipping the lid".



Children need support in regulating and calming their emotions and we can make use of the body and its various senses to do this. These same strategies can also be applied to ourselves to help keep our own emotions in check and take time to prioritise our own wellbeing. Later we will go into how we can utilise each of our senses to support us, but first let's think about the body more generally.

The Body



There are many different ways we can use our bodies to help with regulation. For example:

- Movement and exercise
- Relaxation
- Breathing and Mindfulness
- Sleep

Movement and Exercise

There are a wealth of benefits associated with keeping active. These include: reduced stress levels, reduced anxiety, improved sleep, increased self-esteem and improved wellbeing.

Take some time to think about ways you enjoy being active.... this could be anything from walking to the shops to going to the gym twice a week.

Now think about the ways your children enjoy to be active? Is this similar or vastly different?

Being active doesn't necessarily mean going to the gym or taking part in sports. You can get creative with this and be active in many ways! Some ideas might be:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ○ Bouncing on a trampoline | ○ Pillow fights |
| ○ Keeping up a balloon | ○ Popping bubble wrap |
| ○ Hula-hoop dance | ○ Climbing trees/rock climbing |
| ○ Running up stairs | ○ Basketball |
| ○ Superhero-in-training | ○ Geocaching/Pokemon Go/Rocks |
| ○ Taking photos whilst out walking | ○ Dancing |
| ○ Playing twister | ○ Bike riding |
| ○ Wii | |

Relaxation

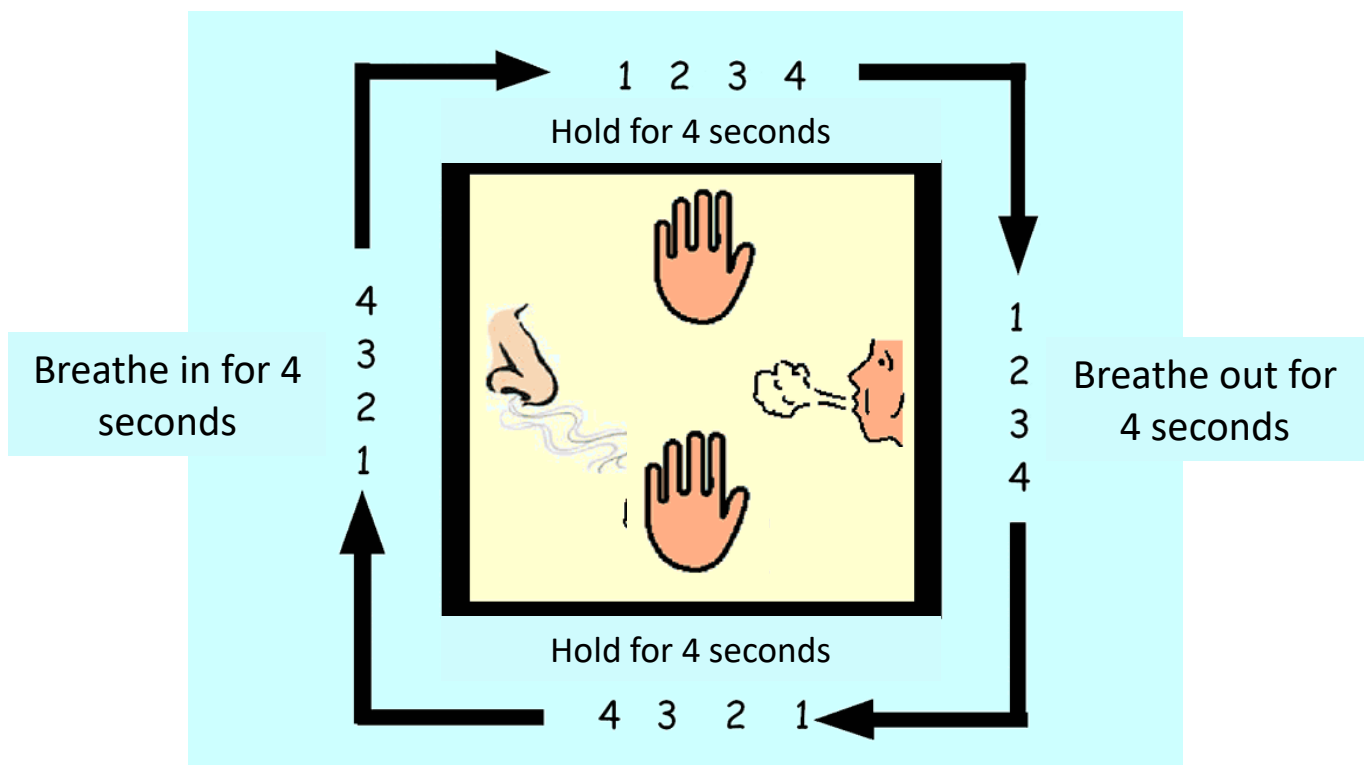
Relaxing is just as important for wellbeing as moving and exercising. Long deep breathing is associated with: lowering heart rate, lowering blood pressure, increasing oxygen supplies to the body and lowering the production of stress hormones.

Relaxation can be especially difficult for children with adverse early life experiences as they may present as hypervigilant and always 'on guard'. You may notice that as your children feel increasingly more safe with you they are able to feel more relaxed and calm.

Try this exercise and see if you can feel the tension release from your muscles:



You can also try square breathing to help relax:



Try to adapt strategies based on the age or the interests of your children!

Breathing Buddies Exercise

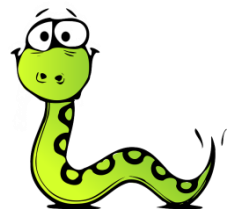
If room allows, have the children lie down on the floor and place their favourite toy on their bellies. Tell them to breathe in silence for one minute and notice how their Breathing Buddy moves up and down, and any other sensations that they notice.



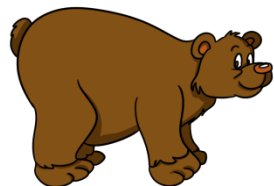
Animal Breaths Exercise

This is a simple way to connect kids to their breath and how it helps them to feel. Set the scene and tell a story for each breathing type:

Snake Breath: Breathe in the nose, long deep inhale, and out the mouth on a hissing sound, slow and long. Extending the exhale will allow kids to slow down their inner speed. It's helpful to connect kids to their exhale to help them learn to slow themselves down, mentally and physically.



Bear Breath: On the count of 1, inhale through the nose, pause; exhale out the nose, pause. Breathe in to a count of 3 or 4, pause for a count of 1 or 2; breathe out for a count of 3 or 4, pause for a count of 1 or 2. Repeat a few times. This will help ground and settle kids. Wonderful for restful, reflective time. Imagine a bear hibernating. Helpful before nap time, story time or any creative activity.



Bunny Breath: Just 3 quick sniffs in the nose and one long exhale out the nose. Invite kids to pretend to be bunnies, sniffing the air for other bunnies, carrots to eat, or safety. It can be a lovely cleansing breath when you use it in this way. You can also use it when kids are very upset and can't find their breath, because it will help them connect to their exhale, so that they breathe instead of spin out.



Flower Breath: Imagine being in a garden full of different flowers. Imagine smelling a beautiful flower; breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth, releasing any tension. Stop and smell the roses, daffodils, daisies or any other flower they like.



Sitting like a Frog Exercise:

Practicing with the attention of a frog is an accessible way of tuning into breathing.

Example script: 'A frog is a remarkable creature, it is capable of enormous leaps, but it can also sit very, very still. Although it is aware of everything that happens around it, the frog tends to not react straight away. The frog sits and breathes, preserving its energy instead of getting carried away with all the thoughts in its head. The frog sits still while it breathes watching its tummy rise and fall again.'



Bubbles Exercise:

Using bubbles is a great way for children to control their breathing and focus on visual stimuli. Try to encourage them to breathe in for two then out, blowing bubbles for as long as they can.



Mindfulness

- Mindfulness means paying attention on purpose, in the present moment
- It is a practical way to notice thoughts, physical sensations, sights, sounds, smells - anything we might not normally notice. The actual skills might be simple, but can take a lot of practice.

There are a range of benefits associated with mindfulness including:

- Lowered anxiety and stress levels
- Lowered blood pressure and heart rate
- Increased awareness, attention and focus
- Increased clarity in thinking and perception
- Increased energy and motivation
- Increased tolerance to manage difficult emotions



Often we are unaware of the tensions we hold in our bodies until there is a pain or ache. An ache or a pain in your body is a message to you, and often a sign of stored up tension or anxiety. Paying attention and understanding these messages our body is sending us is important.

Body Scan Exercise: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QS2yDmWk0vs>

Body Scan Meditation

- 1 Set aside a time and place in your day where you can sit comfortably and you won't be distracted or disturbed.
- 2 Find a comfortable but attentive seated position, close your eyes, and bring your attention to your toes.
- 3 Working up from your toes, bring awareness to each body part in turn: your feet, ankles, calves, knees, etc. up to your head.



Health Benefits:

- Reduced stress
- Decreased muscle tension
- Increased pain tolerance

Why it works to reduce stress:

Body scan meditations encourage self-awareness of sensations we might otherwise be ignoring.

Leaves on a stream exercise: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1C8hwj5LXw>



This exercise will help you notice your thoughts and then let them go. The primary goal is a calm, non-judging awareness, allowing thoughts and feelings to come and go without getting caught up in them.

When thoughts, emotions, physical feelings or external sounds occur, simply accept them, giving them the space to come and go without judging or getting involved with them.

When you notice that your attention has drifted off and is becoming caught up in thoughts or feelings, simply note that your attention has drifted, and then gently bring your attention back to your breathing.

Sleep

Good sleep is vital for physical and emotional health as it restores the body and mind and consolidates what we have experienced during the day. Stress has a major impact on sleep. Being deprived of sleep can make us more vulnerable to stress, leading to a vicious cycle.

Tips to promote sleep:

- Turn your bedroom into a sleep-friendly environment (this could be by limiting the amount of electronics you are using late at night, spritzing soothing scents on your pillows, investing in blackout curtains or blinds)
- Establish a soothing pre-sleep routine
 - Take a bath (the rise, then fall in body temperature induces sleepiness)

- Have a hot drink
- Tumble dry bed clothes and linen before bed
- Try using weighted blankets
- Eat early and allow your body to digest sufficiently before bedtime
- Try relaxation and visualisation exercises. Lots of these are available on YouTube and apps such as Calm and Headspace. You can pay for a full membership to access all the resources but there are also lots of great free options!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mGifCwig8I>

Beditation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5ut2NYdAEQ>

<https://app.www.calm.com/sleep>

<https://www.headspace.com/meditation/sleep>



On the following pages we will think more specifically about each of our senses and how we can make use of these to help soothe our children and ourselves.

Touch

Touch is the first of the senses to develop in the human infant, and it remains perhaps the most emotionally central throughout the lifespan. Touch is necessary for our health as it improves blood pressure and heart rate. Being deprived of touch or experiencing painful/ inappropriate touch raises our stress hormones



Many studies have provided evidence of our need for touch and comfort. An example is Harlow's Monkey Study in the 1950s:

Harlow separated infant rhesus monkeys from their biological mothers and placed these baby monkeys in a nursery with inanimate 'surrogate' mothers – one who is made of heavy wire mesh with a bottle of milk attached and the other made of wood that was covered in terry cloth, making it appear soft to the touch and cuddly but without milk. The baby monkeys were then placed with these 'mother' monkeys and given a choice of which to go to. Harlow found that even though the baby monkeys received nourishment from the wire mesh mother, they consistently spent more time cuddling and showing affection towards the terry cloth mother and would only move to the wire mother when they were hungry. This showed that the bond between mother and infant was not solely based on whether the mother is able to provide the infant with physiological needs and emphasises the need for touch and comfort.





Different ways we can use 'touch' to relieve stress and promote comfort:

- Receiving or giving a hugs – when we do this our bodies release oxytocin and lower cortisol. You can also mimic the feeling of a hug on yourself for the same effect!
- Holding hands with someone else reduces stress levels (if it is a loved one, the calming effect is much greater)
- Stroking a pet
- Hold onto something comforting (i.e. blanket/old stuffed toy) or hold a small object (e.g. marble/keys) and roll this around in your hand and between your fingers
- Use weighted blankets
- Chewable jewellery
- Hand massages with creams and lotions
- Finger knitting
- Make slime and fizzy bath bombs
- Play weather reports (ask your child to turn around and guess what weather you are tracing on their back with your finger – e.g. windy could be making swooshing 's' shapes, rain could be gently prodding them to mimic raindrops etc. and take turns at this)
- Popping bubble wrap
- Tearing up newspapers – this could be made into a race with your child, who can tear up the pages fastest!
- Play games such as hand-stacks and hand-clapping games
- Trace your hands over the outline of your body and place your hand on your heart to feel your heart beat – this can help ground ourselves and bring us into the present moment
- Sand Tray – hide different sensory objects e.g. feathers and stones and ask your child to close their eyes and feel for these in the sand and describe how this feels aloud
- Fill balloons with different items e.g. water, rice, flour and feel the different sensations
- Blow bubbles and try to catch these
- Other great sensory materials include: crazy foam, fidget toys, twiddlemuffs, aprons and busy boards!

Many of these items you can buy online or are available in toy shops, or shops such as B&M and The Works. Or get creative and make your own!

As with all of the strategies we suggest in this pack, please make adjustments and tailor them accordingly to your children. It is important to hold in mind your child's early experiences and understand that not all children and young people will be able to tolerate touch in these ways.



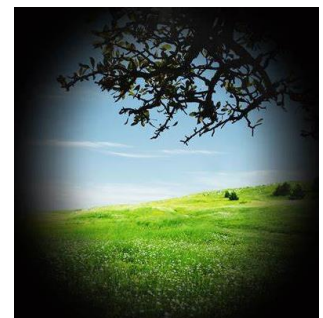
Sight



Our brains are pre-programmed to have a preference for visual information over our other senses. Our sight helps us to make sense of the world and identify what's going on around us. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) impact a child's brain development, how they see themselves, how they see others and how they see the world around them.

This can lead to many day to day difficulties, for example:

- Struggling to interpret facial expressions of others
- Experiencing flashbacks/time holes. Things that we cannot see but are very real for the young person
- Experiencing light sensitivity, blurry or tunnel vision, seeing flashes or 'visual snow' are all natural responses to high levels of stress and anxiety



Lowering the light levels may help to ease some of our child's anxieties to do this we can:

- Use dimmer switches
- Encourage them to wear sunglasses
- Use lamps/desk lights instead of main lights
- Light candles
- Use sensory lamps e.g. lava lamps and colour changing lights

Darkness may also be triggering for some young people, especially those who are hypervigilant as they may be comforted by seeing what is around them. Again, it is important that you tailor these strategies based on your child's individual needs.

Different ways we can use 'sight' to relieve stress and promote comfort:

Mindful colouring is a calming activity to help lower stress levels and improve wellbeing. It is simple and relaxing and helps to focus our attention. See 'additional resources' at the back of this pack for some mindful colouring sheets to have a go at completing with your children.



Guided Visualisation can be used to enhance relaxation. Visualisation involves picturing certain images and actions in your mind. It works best when the visualisations are detailed and practised regularly. Often visualisations involve stories or descriptions of natural scenes. Different things work for different people so it is helpful to experiment with different types of visualisations and find what works best for you. Have a go at reading the below script to your child! You will also find more scripts at the back of this pack to try out together.



Floating on a Cloud



Begin by finding a comfortable position sitting or lying down. Allow your body to begin to relax as you begin to create a picture in your mind. Imagine that you are floating on a soft, fluffy white cloud. If you like, close your eyes.

Feel the surface beneath you becoming softer... Feel the cloud rising out of the surface you are on, surrounding you in its protective support... soon you are floating on just the cloud...

Let it rise a little further, taking you with it... see the walls and ceiling around you disappearing as you float into the sunny sky... Drifting on the cloud.

Feel the cloud beneath you. It is soft but supportive. Feel it supporting your whole body.

Notice each place where your body is touching the cloud. Feel how soft and comfortable the cloud is. It is almost like floating in the air.

Notice how the cloud feels. It might be a little bit cool, and moist, like fog. Your body is warm, very warm and heavy, and sinking into the cloud. It is a wonderful feeling.

Start to create an image in your mind of where you are. You might be floating just barely above the ground. You can choose to float wherever you like. The sky above you is bright blue, sunny, and inviting. You are warm and comfortable, warmed by the sun's rays shining down peacefully.

There are some other clouds in the sky, floating gently. Imagine them lazily passing by, far above.

Your cloud can float wherever you choose. If you enjoy being up high, you can let your cloud rise into the sky. It is very safe. Very calming. Very relaxing.

Imagine the sights around you as you are floating on a cloud. Imagine the green grass below, gently blowing in the wind. The grass recedes further away as you rise into the sky. From here, the grass looks like a soft carpet, the wind creating gentle waves in the grass as if it were water.

What else do you see? Perhaps some trees, their leaves whispering in the gentle breeze. You can gaze down on housetops, country roads, hills. The ground below you looks like a patchwork quilt. Green grass. Golden fields. Yellow. Brown. Blue patches of water... rivers and lakes.

How does it feel to be floating on a cloud? Does it sway gently, like a boat on almost-smooth water? Does it drift in the breeze? Can you feel the movement as you gently float on the cloud? You feel so comfortable and so relaxed.

You can even rise higher still, and pass right through the clouds above. Feel the mist on your cheeks as you rise through the clouds. Around you it is a glorious white, like fog... the sun shines through just enough that the white all around you glows vibrantly.

You can look down on the cloud you just passed, and see the white, fluffy peaks and valleys of this cloud below. It looks like perfect snow. Looking around below you it is as if you are above a land of snow. The sun shines brightly.

Lay back on your cloud, floating... Relaxing... Floating on a cloud. Take your cloud wherever you wish... Higher, lower, side to side... Drift wherever you want to go.

Maybe you want to float above the mountains, drifting above their rocky peaks.

Perhaps you would like to drift along the coast of the ocean, watching the waves crashing to shore.

Maybe you would like to float through the city, drifting in and out among buildings and watching the cars below.

(Pause)

Now it is time to return to your day. Let your cloud take you there. Feel your cloud flying through the sky, back to where you need to go. Let your cloud lower you down, back toward the ground. Float back to where you were when you started this visualisation. Feel the cloud slowly disappear as you are safely sat or lying where we began.

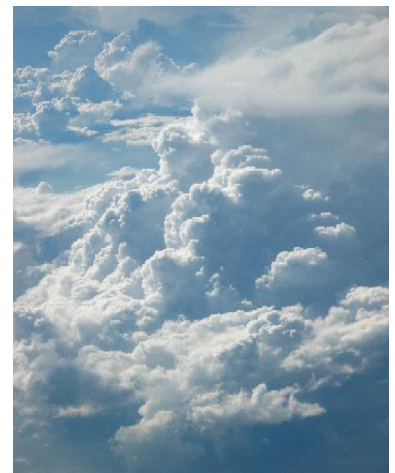
Notice now your surroundings. Gradually come back to the present. Feel the surface beneath you. Hear the sounds around you. Become more and more aware and alert. Continue to rest for a few moments longer, but open your eyes slowly and look around. See your surroundings. You feel awake, alert and refreshed.

Safe Place

Mindfulness practice can help regain a sense of safety and control. It can also be helpful for us or our children to visualise our own safe place when we might be feeling anxious or fearful. Bring an image to mind that is connected to feeling safe, calm, relaxed and comfortable. This might be a real place, perhaps somewhere you have been before. It might be a person who you associate with feeling calm, safe and relaxed. It might be somewhere imaginary that you have created. It might be abstract, like a colour. Select a visual image so you picture this in your mind's eye.



See the images below for some inspiration:



Reading/Writing Stories

“Stories are an ancient way of soothing and calming...”

- When children connect to characters in the story they also connect to their own feelings at a safe distance, and so they can explore these without running away or hiding
- Therapeutic stories promote empathy and trust as the child feels understood by the reader
- They can also help the child to normalise and make sense of their experiences

See the ‘Therapeutic Stories Resource Pack’ for more information and guidance on writing therapeutic stories



An interesting watch! Please note that this includes strong language and themes appropriate for older children.

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Superkids: Breaking Away from Care

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Home

About the programme

Lemn Sissay meets seven young people who are in the care of their council and sets out to help them express their experiences through words and perform them to a packed theatre of decision-makers

First shown: 28 Nov 2018

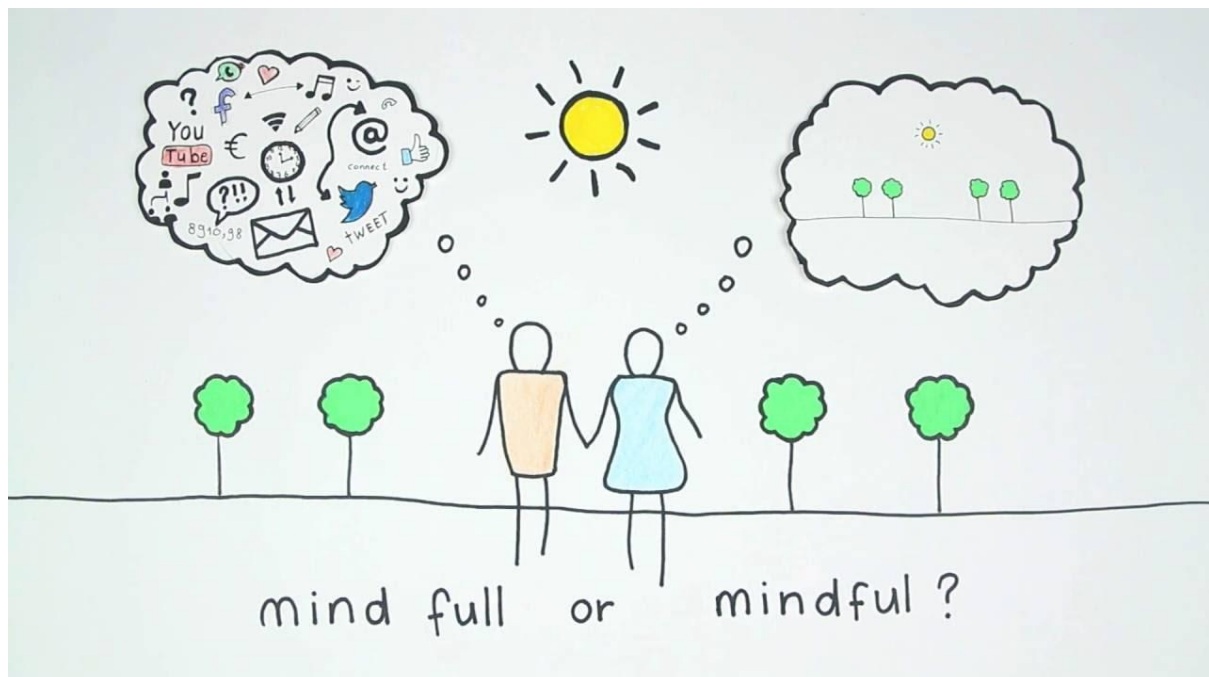
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Going for a Mindful Walk

Mindful walks can be fun exercises to do on the way to school. There are many different variations of mindful walks you can try so see what works best for you and your child:

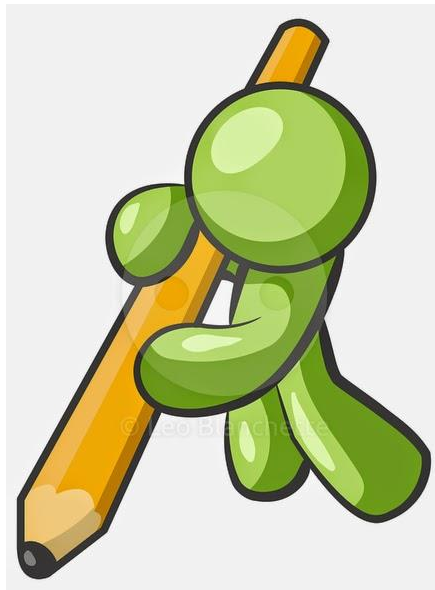
- Before you head outside you could think of 5 things that you're likely to see (e.g. traffic lights, a red car, a dog) and make this a game who spots them first
- Have a game of 'I Spy'
- Really look at your surroundings and think about the different colours, textures and patterns you notice. By training yourself to see more properties of the trees or signs you will see more of the world around you in general
- Ask your child to imagine walking on different terrains and textures e.g. leaving deep footprints in the snow, walking on thin ice, a rocky trail, across stepping stones or on a tightrope. Ask them to explore walking in long strides, then tiny steps or bunny hops and think about the difference this makes to their breathing and heart rate
- Spot the different colour front doors, or different flowers on people's lawns or decorations in windows

Try to enjoy being in the moment as much as possible!



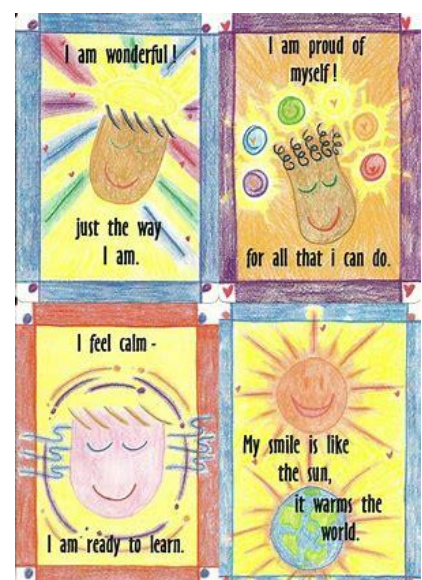
Mindful Drawing

- Ask your child to draw the same object every day for four days. Notice how each day they spot new things about the object in their drawings. They will see more and more and become more accurate.
- Try the sketchbook challenge: <http://www.magenta-sky.com/online-courses/30-day-sketchbook-challenge/>



Positive affirmation cards/coloured flash cards

Displaying cards with positive messages can help boost our mood and lift our spirits. We may also find quotes which we particularly connect with. You may choose to have these around the house or tucked away somewhere and spend time looking through them when you choose to. There are lots of positive affirmation cards available online or you could get creative and write out your own!





Sound

Sound travels through the air as waves and our bodies feel these vibrations. Our ears then convert this into a signal for our brains to interpret. Babies in the womb are able to hear sounds and can respond to these at around 16 weeks. Evidence shows that the rhythm and pitch of sounds outside the womb can impact the baby's heartrate and these effects can last up to an hour.

Sounds and Trauma: Watson's 'Little Albert' study, 1920

Watson tested little Albert (who was 8 months old at the time) to see if he showed a fear response to a loud noise. Initially the child was startled, but not afraid, but by the time he heard the loud noise for the third time, he was extremely frightened.

Watson introduced a white rat to the child. Initially he was happy to play with the rat and showed no fear, but in subsequent tests, each time the child reached out to touch the rat, he heard the same loud noise.

Before long the child exhibited a fear response and became extremely distressed whenever he was exposed to the white rat and was seen crying and attempting to crawl away as he now associated the rat with hearing the loud noise he was frightened of. Over time, Little Albert also showed fear when exposed to a wide range of similar furry objects, including a rabbit, a fluffy dog, a seal skin coat and a Santa beard made of white cotton wool balls.



***Sounds can be
traumatising and evoke
powerful emotional
responses in us***

Take some time to think about the sounds your child might have heard if they were exposed to stressful and unsafe environments.

The Power of Sound

Every day we are surrounded by noisy traffic, chattering people, music and more! Just hearing a single voice can have a calming effect, especially if it is the voice of a loved one. It is worth remembering that age plays a role in pitch frequencies we can hear - some security companies have used this to their advantage by installing gadgets which emit an ultra-high-pitched noise which can only be heard by teenagers to avoid them from hanging around certain areas – a frequency that adults are completely immune to!

Have a go at this hearing test to notice where your range of hearing starts and stops:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-iCZElJ8m0>



Good Vibrations

Musical instruments are often used to promote healing, e.g. the gong has been used for this purpose for many years. It is thought to clear energy pathways and induce feelings of relaxation as it covers the full spectrum of sounds, allowing your whole body to hear it.

Singing bowls are designed to be struck on the edge by a mallet or using the mallet to trace around the outside of the bowl to produce a sound which can be felt:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OW7TH2U4hps>



Improve your Mood with Sound

- Identify sounds that frustrate, annoy, or stress you out and take steps to minimize these e.g. If you hate the noise of your phone ringing, put it on vibrate, if chatting co-workers are bothering you, use ear plugs or listen to music
- Identify the different sounds that make you happy and relaxed. Examples might include falling rain, a crackling fire, or bird song. Aim to surround yourself with these sounds either in real life, or through a recording
- Find music that puts you in a good mood and listen to this when you need uplifting



<https://www.calmsound.com>

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3FYynRLz6Qk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Um-wKj8lwz4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vd-FC0jc0os>

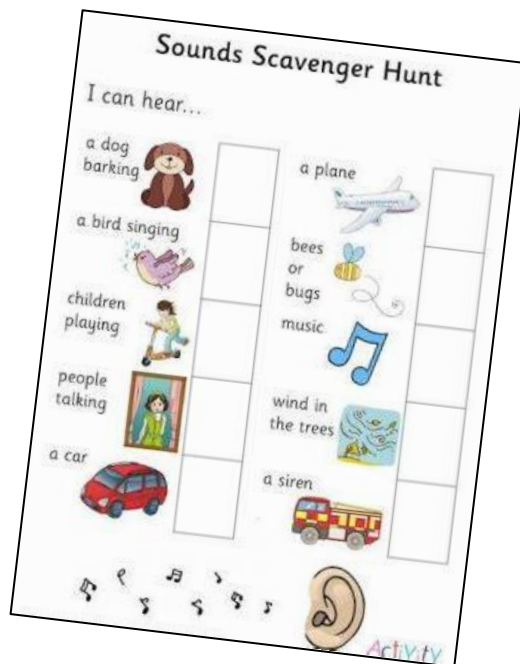
Have a think about sounds you or your child might find soothing and consider putting together a music playlist to support with emotional regulation. Depending on your child's need this may be soothing/relaxing music or sounds or uplifting and energising songs.

Other ways to explore sound

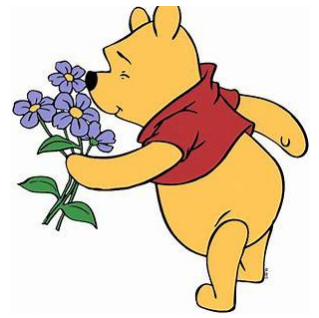
- Play 'fish and chips' – you say 'fish' and your child replies saying 'chips'. Say 'fish' at various volumes, pitch and intensity and your child tries to match this with their reply. This can be used to regulate by starting very loud and gradually becoming quieter.



- Sing! This combines both sound and breath control – a very powerful combination for well-being
- Listen through a shell
- Make DIY musical instruments
- Listening like a frog - When frogs are sitting still they are able to listen clearly. With your child, spend a few minutes sitting like a frog and focusing on your breathing. Begin listening for sounds. What can you hear? Are they high or low-pitched? Is there a rhythm? Where are the sounds coming from? Are they far away or close? Can you hear any sounds inside yourself
- Sound Hunt



Smell



Smell is one of our most powerful senses. Our bodies contain far more receptors for smell than for other senses. Smell is used when forming attachments - mothers and babies are able to identify each other by smell alone!

Smells can evoke powerful emotional responses in us and often will have strong connections to our memories. The younger we are when smells are introduced, the stronger the connection and memory.

'Smells Ring Bells'

- The olfactory bulb is the part of our brain which analyses smell. This has direct connections to our brain regions that handle memory and emotion, the amygdala and hippocampus
- Visual (sight), auditory (sound), and tactile (touch) information does not have these same connections
- This may be why smell, more so than other senses, can be so successful at triggering powerful emotional responses and memories
- A number of studies have demonstrated that smells trigger more vivid emotional memories and are better at inducing that feeling of "being brought back in time" than images

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vY-HbcPlnXw>

Take a moment to think of smells which bring back nice memories for you...



Unfortunately, certain smells can also be potent triggers of **negative** emotions for us too...

- Children who have experienced trauma and abuse may be hyper-aroused and anticipate danger when a particular smell is around
- If a smell is associated with a traumatic experience then it can activate the fight, flight or freeze response.
- For example, children can react to 'Christmas smells' or the smell of alcohol with flashbacks (i.e. Time Holes)

Vermetten and Bremner conducted clinical case studies of individuals diagnosed with PTSD who experience this phenomenon:

One patient frequently experienced disturbing memories, feelings of guilt, and nausea when smelling diesel. He had been involved in a car accident in Vietnam where only he survived and he was unable to save his fellow soldiers. The smell of diesel would instantly conjure memories of the accident and in his mind he could vividly see the burning vehicle, doors ajar, and billows of fire and smoke. This smell of diesel frequently caused him to re-experience the overwhelming feelings of guilt and helplessness that he initially experienced more than 30 years ago.

These are examples of some smells our children might associate bad memories with, but remember, these could be anything depending on their experience!



Exploring Our Sense of Smell

Aromatherapy is a recommended natural treatment for people dealing with stress, anxiety, depression, and problems with sleep. Softer smells (e.g. lavender, rose, vanilla) are typically associated with calmer behaviour and are proven to reduce stress. Stronger smells (e.g. lemon, peppermint) are typically associated with more alert behaviour



- Cooking and baking with children is a great way to experiment with different smells
- Another way you can take advantage of soothing scents include browsing a flower shop or garden and literally "smelling the roses" to brighten your mood
- Likewise, stepping outside taking a deep breath of fresh air can provide instant stress relief



Other ideas include:

- Scratch n Sniff books
- Scented toys/bubbles
- Scented playdough
- Scented stamps/pens



Use of Transitional Objects

- Children may have a particular item which provides them with psychological comfort, especially at bedtime or in unusual or unique situations
- Spraying the item with a particular perfume/scent which the child associates with good memories or which has a calming effect on them may make this extra effective in soothing and comforting them



Taste

- Taste is another powerful sense and is directly linked to our sense of smell
- Our tongue has distinct regions of taste buds on it to differentiate flavours and these sensations can also trigger memories and feelings
- Many of us have favourite foods or foods that soothe our souls, even in a small way. We might call these 'comfort foods'



Food and Early Life

A mother's diet during pregnancy has a direct impact on the health of her baby and malnutrition during pregnancy may contribute to various physical and mental health concerns for our children.

You might also notice different behaviour patterns in your child when around food.

These may include:

- Overeating/cramming
- Hoarding food
- Repeatedly checking the fridge and food cupboards
- Selective eating

For many children, food may be one of the only elements in their life they are able to exert any form of control over. Therefore it is very common for children to have habits we may consider to be 'picky' (e.g. only wanting to eat certain colours, textures, flavours). This may be your child's attempt to create some form of order in a world which has otherwise been disorderly or chaotic for them.

A child's flavour preferences are influenced by the mother's diet and so if the mother consistently ate unhealthily; it is likely the child may also want to. Your child will also have emotional connections to certain food types and although we might view these as unhealthy or unsuitable, they may be comforting for your child. Equally there are certain foods which may be triggering for your child as they are associated with past traumatic events.

Hoarding, overeating, cramming and repeatedly checking cupboards are all behaviours that make sense in the context of adverse early experiences. If your child was subject to a neglectful environment these are likely to be strategies they have learnt in order to survive. Even if your child has lived with you for a while and they know that food will be available for them, they may still experience impulses to check the kitchen or to hoard food in their bedrooms.

It is important not to try to challenge these behaviours. Instead make your child feel safe by allowing them to check the cupboards or to come shopping with you to see the food you're buying and to help put this away afterwards. Your child may also benefit from having a snack box in their room which you can fill with them. Having this oversight will mean you can check the contents of the box and your child won't feel the need to 'sneak' food into their room which may then potentially perish or

become unhygienic. The safer and more accepted your child feels with you, the more they will be able to manage these urges and control them.

Using Taste to Self-Soothe

- Eating your favourite meal/foods that are comforting to us if we feel anxious or low in mood
- Chewing gum or sucking on a boiled sweet can help to ground us because they give us something consistent to focus on. Studies have shown that chewing gum can help us to reduce anxiety levels at times of high-stress
- Drink something soothing, such as tea, coffee, or hot chocolate.
- Suck on an ice cube or an ice pop, especially if you're feeling warm, and enjoy the taste as it melts in your mouth
- Salty snacks be used to calm us, and sugary ones help lift our mood. Having a snack at the end of the school day or immediately post contact might help children to regulate after a tough day.
- Silicone trays can make ice-cubes more fun, and can be filled with other food stuffs (chocolate, peppermint favours etc.)
- Drinking through curly straws
- Eating foods with different textures on the tongue eg. crisps that crunch or fizzle



Mindful Eating



- In our fast-paced society, distractions have shifted our attention away from the actual act of eating, and onto other things (tv/smartphones etc.)
- Eating is often mindless and done quickly. This can be problematic, since it actually takes the brain up to 20 minutes to realise you're full
- Eating mindfully makes eating an intentional act instead of an automatic one

Choose a piece of food and try the below mindful eating script with your child (strawberries or something with an interesting shape works well for this!)

Bring your attention to the item in your hand and imagine that you are seeing it for the first time. Observe with curiosity as you pay attention and notice the colour, shape, texture, and size. Is there anything else that you notice, sense or feel? (Pause)

Imagine what it took for this item to get to your hands: sunshine, water, time, processing, and shipping. You may choose to be aware of gratitude for everyone involved in the cultivation and preparation of this item of food. (Pause)

Now feel the texture of the item, it's temperature and it's ridges. You may notice smoothness or stickiness. Again, notice if you have any thoughts, sensations or emotions at this time. Continue to breathe and be fully present in this moment. (Pause)

Take the piece of food and bring it toward your nose and smell with your full awareness. Notice if you have any memories, sensations or reactions in your body. Even before you eat it, you may notice that you begin to have a digestive response in your body just by noticing and smelling. (Pause)

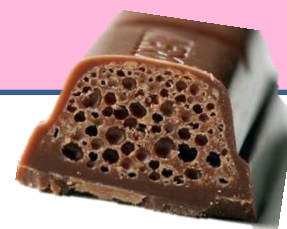
Place the food into your mouth without chewing or swallowing it. Just allow it to be in your mouth, roll it around to different parts of your mouth and tongue. Notice the flavour and texture. Notice the physical sensations within your body, especially your mouth and your gut. Continue to breathe as you explore the sensation of having this item in your mouth. (Pause)

Next take just one bite and notice the flavour, notice the change of texture. Then very slowly begin to chew this piece of food, and notice the parts of your mouth that are involved in chewing. Notice the sound and movement of chewing, as you continue to notice the sensations and flavour. (Pause)

When you are ready, swallow this item and notice the path that it follows from your mouth and throat into your stomach. Notice the sensation and taste that may linger in your mouth.

Connect again to your body and your breath and notice your experience in this moment. (Pause)

Now pick up another food item, and eat it however you wish. Noticing your choice and your experience. Notice how this is similar or different.



Layering the Senses

As we know, our senses are great tools to help us self-soothe. As well as utilising these individually, the benefits can be maximised by using them simultaneously!

Eg. If the safe/happy place you like to visualise is relaxing on a beach, you could also listen to sounds of the waves, feel grains of sand or hold shells...



Make a Self-Soothing Box!

When we are very distressed, it is difficult to think rationally and to decide how to help ourselves. It may be helpful to keep a number of sensory items in a specific box or place which your child can utilise when they are feeling particularly stressed, anxious or frustrated. Self-soothing boxes are made up of a variety of items to distract and soothe, the use of tangible objects helps to ground us and give immediate comfort. Collect together items that are meaningful, or those you know will be helpful in times of need.

Self-soothing boxes can be just as helpful for us as adults too and having your own self-soothing box can be a great opportunity to role model and normalise how to use this to help regulate your emotions and soothe!



The following are some examples of items which could be included in a self-soothing box and some examples of completed boxes. This is an opportunity to be creative so tailor your box to whatever you or your child needs!

- A stuffed animal to hug
- A Stress Ball/fidget toys
- A bottle of bubbles to blow out frustration and “lighten up”
- A pencil to write yourself healthy reminders
- Joke books, Sudoku or Crossword Puzzle books
- Scented candle
- Playing cards
- Notebook, journal or notecards to write out feelings
- Cards given to you from friends and family
- Calming oils to touch and smell
- Play dough
- Photographs/old ticket stubs
- Favourite quotes/song lyrics/mantra



Additional Resources + Links

Information sources and helpful links:

<https://www.blurtitout.org/>

<https://www.blurtitout.org/2019/01/03/self-soothing-means-9-ways/>

<https://pro.psychcentral.com/psychoeducation/2017/05/using-a-calming-box-for-self-soothing-and-emotional-regulation/>

<https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/emergency.htm>

<https://www.verywellmind.com/coping-with-stress-using-self-soothing-skills-2797579#the-tastes-that-can-soothe>

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-health-development/childhood-trauma-brain-development/>

Laughter is the best de-stressor:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wU4DgHHwVCc>

Relaxation:

<http://kidsrelaxation.com/?cat=15> - free guided visualisation scripts e.g. “still pond”, “frosty’s happy paintbrush” and “relaxing with otters”

<https://kumarahyoga.com/how-to-use-easy-and-calming-guided-imagery-with-kids/> - explains benefits of guided visualisation for children and young people, shorter example scripts

Square breathing:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b09jdc7s> (start at 21mins 30 secs)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgzhKW08bMQ>

Slime recipes:

<https://www.thebestideasforkids.com/fluffy-slime-recipe/>

<https://littlebinsforlittlehands.com/homemade-slime-recipe/>

DIY Bath bombs:

<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/how-make-bath-bomb>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4OSM7M0Zm48>

Beginner's guide to finger knitting:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCcD4LOsr7U>

Mindful colouring sheets:

<http://getcolorings.com/mindfulness-coloring-pages>

<https://mycoloring-pages.com/adult-coloring-pages/mindfulness-coloring-pages>

If you feel...

angry



worried



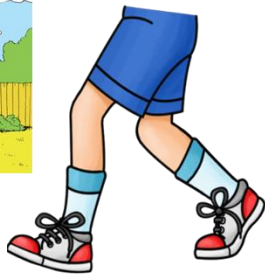
upset



scared



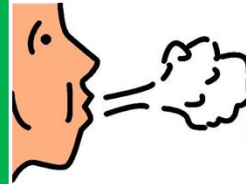
Sit by an open window to
feel the cool breeze



Go for a **walk around the garden**
and see all the things you can
find there

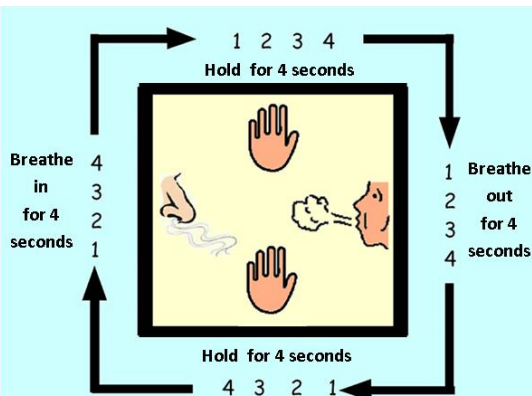


Close your
eyes



Take 10
deep breaths

Try some **square breathing**



Sit and listen **like a frog**

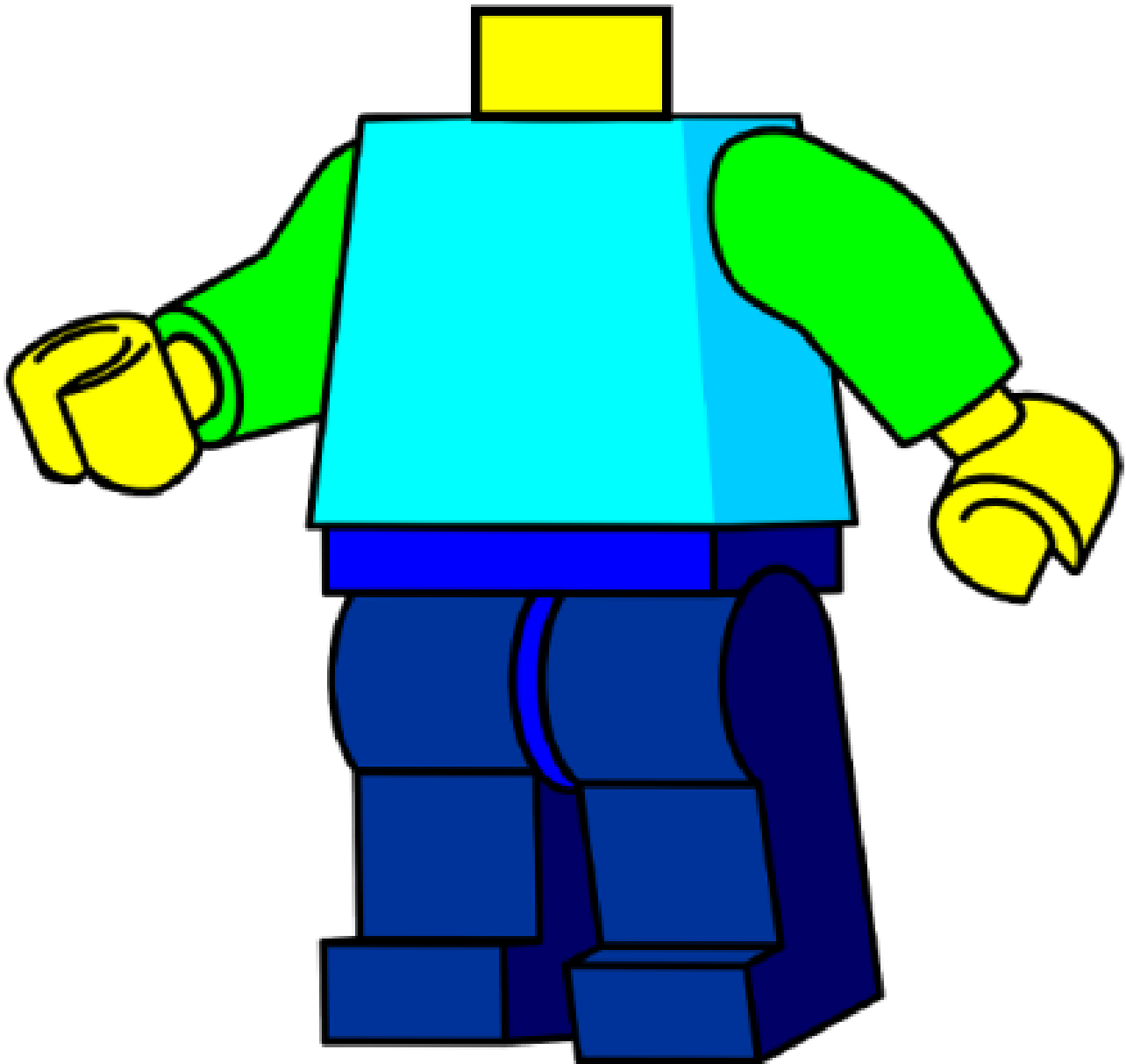


Think of a **happy and safe place**

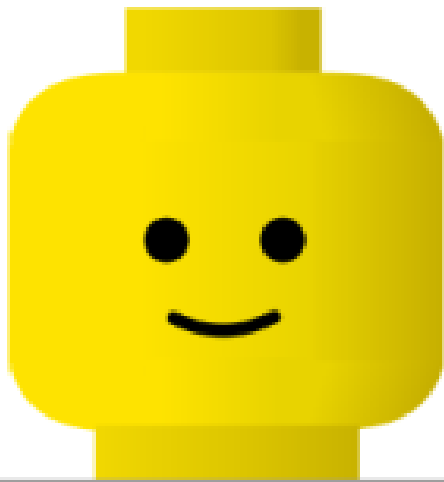


Bounce as high as you can
on a trampoline!

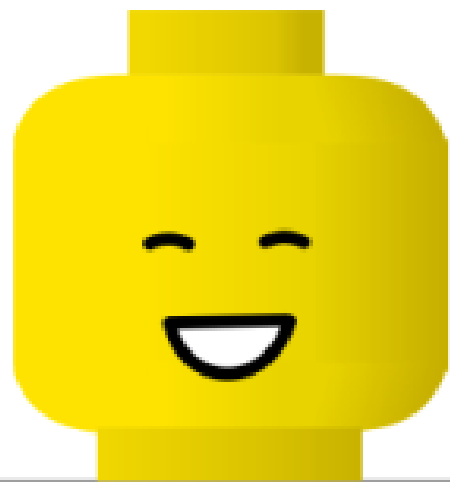
I AM FEELING...



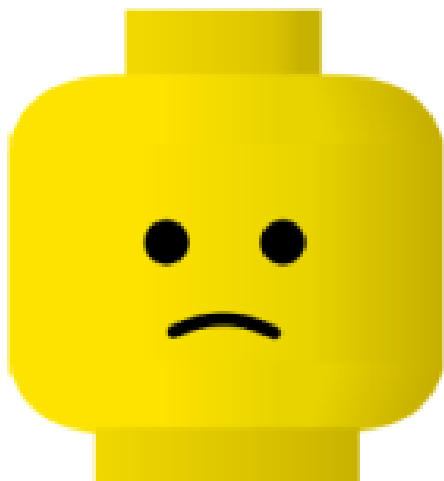
HAPPY



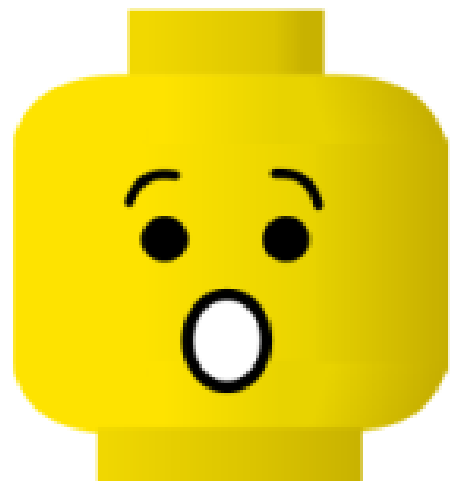
EXCITED



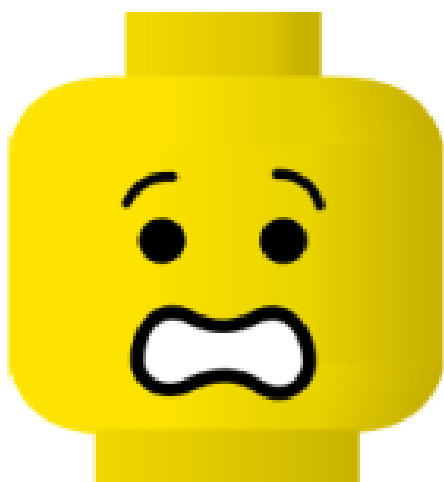
SAD



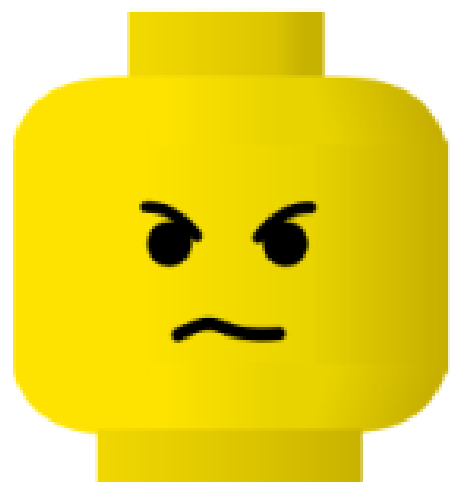
SURPRISED



SCARED



ANGRY



TIRED



FRUSTRATED



EMBARRASSED



SHY



WORRIED



'Punching' a pillow



Touching fluffy/velvety fabric



Stretch/shaking body



Yoga



Washing hands



Drinking milkshake



Slow deep breaths



Hot water bottle



Drinking a coffee/tea



Eating chocolate



Rubbing clothes or skin gently



Swimming



Cracking hard sweets in teeth



Eating an ice-lolly or ice cream



Aromatherapy products



Freshly baked cookies



Eating crisps and spicy dip



Warm sunlight while sleeping



Roast cooking



Perfume/aftershave



Stroking an animal



Roll neck and head slowly



Listening to dance/pop



Singing or talking while walking



<p>Dancing</p> 	<p>Washing the car</p> 
<p>Working in a quiet room</p> 	<p>'Doodle' While Listening</p> 
<p>Pushing chair back on two legs</p> 	<p>Sitting with crossed leg and jiggling one leg</p> 

<p>Sway, Swing or jiggle</p> 	<p>Ride bike</p> 
<p>Bubble Bath</p> 	<p>Warm shower</p> 
<p>Cool shower</p> 	<p>Crunching or sucking ice</p> 

<p>Chewing gum</p> 	<p>Chewing toffee/chewy sweet</p> 
<p>Plants-lavender or roses</p> 	<p>Salt sea air</p> 
<p>Newly mown grass</p> 	<p>Rain on tar</p> 