

PUPPET PLAYTIME

SEW-ARTS FRAMEWORK

CAREGIVER RESOURCE

Spare Parts Puppet Theatre

Respectfully acknowledges the Whadjuk Noongar people as the traditional owners and custodians of the unceded land on which we work. As we tour our work across these vast lands, we pay our respect to all First Nations elders, past and present. We celebrate their continuing connection and contribution to culture, country and community, and thank all First Nations peoples for their wisdom in caring for the land, the sky, the rivers and the sea.

INTRODUCTION

Puppet Playtime is an interactive experience specially crafted for children aged 3 to 5. Designed to nurture their creativity and love for storytelling, each session brings a beloved children's book to life, using the rich creative potential of puppetry to support the development of the whole child in their early years.

Developed in close partnership with The Kids Research Institute (formerly Telethon Kids Institute), we were guided closely by their Social and Emotional Wellbeing Through the Arts (SEW-Arts) framework. With the social and emotional wellbeing of children aged 3 to 5 at the core of the program, we collaborate with The Kids on the design of session content, parent resources and evaluation.

This document brings together the social and emotional learnings from individual Puppet Playtime sessions, creating a resource that encourages deeper engagement with each featured children's book and its relevant wellbeing factor.

We hope that caregivers use this resource to spark deeper conversations about social and emotional wellbeing with the young children in their lives. Connecting these conversations to some of the wonderful books children already know and love makes them feel natural and accessible. This is not a resource to read once, but to return to often as these conversations grow and evolve.



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TEN TINY THINGS

BY: MEG MCKINLAY

WELLBEING FACTOR: MINDFULNESS

Next time you are sitting in traffic or feeling overwhelmed by your to-do-list, try to spot ten tiny things around you or out the window. Reflect on the tiny things with thankfulness in mind.

A hair belonging to your dog might remind you of their unconditional love. A pelican perched on a street light might remind you of nature's resilience and healing qualities.



A piece of food on the car floor might make you feel stress at the thought of needing to clean it up - that's ok. Let that thought float by without judging it as good or bad, and then return to thankfulness. You might be thankful for the little person who dropped that food and all the mess and joy they bring.

As new thoughts come in, witness them, and then return to the task of noticing ten things and finding a way to be thankful for them.

The key steps to this process are making time to stop and notice, to practice witnessing but not judging our thoughts, and reframing what you see with gratitude. Doing this habitually will do a lot for your mental health and resilience.

The tiny act of looking, noticing and appreciating primes us to be reflective and calm. Spending time in this state then rebuilds our energy to be productive and focused. We can't achieve one without the other!



BITE -SIZED MINDFULNESS



Here are some simple ways to practice mindfulness as a family:

Tiny Things Walks

Go on walks in nature and set a challenge for your child to find a number of tiny, interesting things. Bring their magnifying glass so they can closely observe the tiny things. With each tiny thing, ask your child to use their senses to observe it - how does it feel? What colours can you see? How does it smell?

Kids can choose one favourite natural thing to keep, and leave the rest where they were found, as animals and insects and plants all need these things to live. Bring gloves and a bag to collect non-natural things like plastic.

Sensory Jars

Find an empty jar or bottle and fill it with some intriguing tiny things. Then fill the jar with either a clear oil like coconut or baby oil, or a fine grain like rice or millet. Don't fill it all the way up to ensure that the contents can move around. Glue the jar lid shut with a permanent adhesive or glue gun. Now your child has a soothing sensory jar they can tip, shake and roll to reveal the tiny treasures inside. Add mica powder or shimmer makeup powder to oil jars for magic sparkle!

Sorting

Gather a range of objects from around the house or from your Tiny Things walks - a mixed bag of beads, Lego pieces or safe kitchen utensils are great options. Now give your child different characteristics to sort them by, like shape, size, colour, texture, purpose, or material they're made of. This can be a really soothing, calming task for small people, and builds skills for pattern recognition and descriptive vocabulary.

LITTLELIGHT

BY: KELLY CANBY

WELLBEING FACTOR: TRYING SOMETHING NEW

The town of Littlelight is grey and surrounded by high walls, built to keep out anything and anyone "different." When a brave little girl starts taking bricks from the walls, the Mayor is furious! But as the townspeople peek through the gaps, they discover wonderful new smells, sounds, and sights from their neighbours. They learn that what seemed "strange" is actually wonderful, and that breaking down walls (both real and imaginary) can fill their world with colour, light, and friendship.



Trying Something New:

The ages of 3 to 5 are full of growing curiosity. For a young child, "something new" is an everyday event. It might look like:

Food: Taking one bite of a new vegetable or a dish from a different culture.

Play: Using a toy in a different way, attempting a new puzzle, or joining a new game on the playground.

Skills: Putting on a coat by themselves, attempting to write a letter, or swinging their legs on a swing for the first time.

Social: Saying "hello" to a new child, asking to join in play, or participating in a new group activity.

Emotional: Using a new word to describe their feeling (e.g. "I'm frustrated!").

Children learn empathy and understanding when they step into new experiences and notice how others feel or think.



BRINGING LITTLELIGHT HOME



“I Tried It!” Chart

Create a chart with your child. Add a sticker or smiley face whenever they try something new - like a new food, game or music. Celebrate the effort, not just success!

How Would You Feel? Role Play

Act out simple scenarios together (e.g. someone can't find their toy, or a friend falls down). After each scenario, ask your child: “How do you think they felt?” and “What could we do to help?” This helps them practice seeing situations from another's perspective and responding with kindness.

Build Bridges, Not Walls

Build a wall from blocks or pillows. Then, remove bricks to make “windows” and “doors”. Finally, turn your wall into a “bridge” that connects two areas of your room. Talk About It: “Walls keep us apart, but bridges help us come together. Should we build a wall to keep your toys away, or a bridge to share them?”

My Turn To Be Brave - A Parent's Reflection

Gently reflect on a time you hesitated to let your child try something new. Was it your own fear of mess, the unknown, or something unfamiliar? Acknowledge that fear without judgement. The next time, try saying, “This is new for me too, but let's be brave together.” By understanding your own reactions, you become a bridge to a wider world for your child.



THELMA THE UNICORN

BY: AARON BLABEY

WELLBEING FACTOR: POSITIVE BODY IMAGE

Thelma is undoubtedly the star of Thelma the Unicorn, but Otis shines as the hero of this story. Otis loves Thelma whether she's sparkling or not, the same way we love our children - unconditionally. But making sure our children know we love them without conditions is not all that easy! Here are some tips to help your child feel accepted exactly as they are:

Show positive self regard.

It's easy to fall into a habit of speaking negatively about ourselves and our bodies in front of our kids - we're surrounded by media and people who tell us we're not good enough all the time. To combat this, talk about how amazing and capable your body is around them, even if you don't feel that way deep down. Saying these words can help us eventually believe them! Make a deal with your partner and friends to compliment each other in front of the kids frequently, and accept the compliments with thanks, without denying any part of it. Tricky!

Model positive failure.

Let your kids see you make mistakes and learn from them. Talk through the process as it happens. Finding it difficult to work a new piece of tech? Talk through your frustration and problem solving attempts! Celebrate finding answers for yourself as well as asking others for help. If kids see their favourite people be ok with making mistakes, they're less likely start thinking that being loved only comes from succeeding.

Tell them - especially when they're being difficult!

When your child is expressing behaviours that stress you out, like hitting, tantrum-ing or struggling to treat others how they'd like to be treated, always affirm that you love them after setting a boundary around acceptable behaviour. Even if they're not ready to hear it from you, still say it. When they're ready, you can show it with affection and some words about how you love them when they're feeling good AND when they're feeling terrible, and you're here to help them learn how to feel terrible without hurting others.



Scan for more practical tips!



Showing unconditional love will help protect your child when they inevitably have times where they feel insecure. It will also help them choose friends who show it to them, just like you have.

AARON BLABEY

HOW TO BE AN OTIS FOR OUR OURSELVES.



Modelling positive self esteem is one thing, but actually feeling it is another. This gets extra difficult when we are under-slept, stressed and feeling the pressure of being the best parent we can be. It's important to remember that exhaustion and perfectionism will make our minds start lying to us about our self worth and self image.

Stress and exhaustion easily morph into self destructive thoughts, and it's really helpful to be able to spot them in ourselves so we can catch our minds in a lie. Mostly commonly, these lies centre around body image. For anyone who needs to hear it: **your body is amazing and worthy of love, no matter your shape, size or abilities.** You achieve incredible things with your body just by existing, let alone parenting, working, creating, feeling and sensing each day.

If you ever find yourself feeling truly terrible about your body, exhaustion and stress are likely to be intensifying that feeling. If you find yourself feeling that way all the time, that in itself is exhausting! This is a sign you may benefit from outside help surrounding things like early experiences of rejection and trauma. They are common culprits for chronically low self image and perceiving our bodies in negative ways that only we see.

It can be really helpful to remind yourself that feeling deeply negative about our own bodies is not natural or normal, and we shouldn't accept it as such. It's a valuable sign our minds are giving us to indicate that we're struggling and need rest. We should pursue that rest at any cost so that we can heal and show up as our best, strongest selves for our families.

Your mind may also put up distress signals at the thought of asking for the help you may need in order to get rest. When you face the fear of asking for help, try and remind yourself: the people who love us gain so much from helping us. **Offering others the opportunity to help is a GIFT.** Think about how it makes you feel to help others - when you need help, gift that feeling to someone else by asking.

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

BY: MAURICE SENDAK

WELLBEING FACTOR: EXPRESSING EMOTIONS

Every kid has wild moments - even the gentlest little souls brim over with energy sometimes. Some parents will be thinking "Wild moments? Try wild always-es!"

While some kids have extroverted and energetic temperaments naturally, all kids experience the feeling of bursting with energy. This is in part because they go through massive hormonal fluctuations as their brains develop between the age of 3 and 5 - even more than pubescent teenagers experience!

Finding positive outlets for little ones is a great way to encourage all that energy to go toward their healthy development. One outlet that often falls to one parent is wrestling, play-fighting or rough-housing. But did you know that it's really good for kids if both parents rough-house with them? Even more so if each parent sets different boundaries and rules around rough play.

Each parent asking for different levels of gentleness, but still engaging in some rough-and-tumble play is great for teaching kids to be mindful of the needs of others, and that doing so doesn't stop fun - it enables it.

Play that involves tumbling around, being turned upside-down, using lots of muscles and joints, being thrown gently onto soft surfaces, or being squished is effective at burning energy while also regulating the nervous system. Just running and jumping with no focus can end up increasing energy instead of burning it.

If a parent has limited ability to do these things, getting a small person to show how strong they are by lifting or pushing a laundry basket full of clothes, or carrying buckets of water in the garden still contributes to this aspect of development.

See the other side of this flyer for more activity ideas that both burn energy and regulate the nervous system.



WILD-CHILD ACTIVITIES



Use these activities based on the concept of "heavy work" from occupational therapy when your child has energy to burn.

Play-Fighting

Always pause before play-fights to establish rules to keep bodies safe, like no hands touching faces, no yelling right next to ears, and always stop when someone says "stop." Setting and respecting these boundaries is a vital developmental lesson that play-fighting imparts.

Did you know its important for a child's development to let them win at play fights sometimes? A parent winning most games like these shows kids who is in control and who is there to protect them, while letting them win sometimes lets them feel empowered to meet challenges head-on.

A Roaring Good Time

Kids let out their energy and their feelings with a really good yell sometimes. But this can be really painful for our ears, and may be a sign that they're overstimulated. You may find ways to channel yelling, like asking kids to take it outside and get it all out, building a pillow fort just for absorbing yells, or lining a cardboard box with the bumpy side of egg cartons to make a sound-absorbing loudness booth!

Another option is to prevent kids getting into the yelling zone in the first place. Observe what is happening right before your kid gets jelly and scan the QR code below to find more soothing ways to meet the sensory needs they may be trying to address.

You're pushing it, kid!

Grasp hands with your kid and stand in a lunge position facing them, then get them to push with all their strength against you. Similar to pushing and lifting heavy things, this game helps regulate emotions by expending energy while helping kids sense how their body feels (interception) and where it is in space (proprioception).



Scan for more info
and activity ideas



THE HEARTBEAT OF THE LAND

BY: CATHY FREEMAN AND CORAL VASS

WELLBEING FACTOR: SENSORY AWARENESS

Second breath and Extended exhales.

Breathe all the way in. Then take another, short, inward breath. Breathe out slowly, for longer than you breathed in. Repeat this 4 or more times. Purse your lips like you're blowing through a straw to engage your diaphragm even more. This is calming for anxiety, anger, frustration and fear.

Butterfly tapping

Place your left hand over the right side of your chest. Hook your right hand's thumb under the thumb on your chest, and place your right hand over the left side of your chest. Pat your chest on one side, then the other with each hand as you close your eyes. Breathe in through your nose, and out through your mouth. This bilateral rhythm brings feelings of safety and is great for overwhelm, panic and anxiety.

Push

Stand at arm's length from a wall. Lean your body forward, with your arms outstretched, and place your palms flat on the wall. Push the wall as hard as you can for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 3 or more times. This muscle tensing exercise is great for processing anger, frustration, and helplessness. It is great for kids who are having trouble communicating their feelings.

Stomp

There's a good reason we often stomp instinctively when angry - if we're not feeling heard or understood, this is one way for our body to expend pent up energy from anger and fear. If you and your child are getting frustrated with each other, suggest a stomping break! It can break up tension and make us laugh together.

Have a cuddle or hold hands to reconnect after doing these exercises. You can then begin explaining each other's feelings. Your child will likely now be ready to hear how they could have made better decisions while upset.

RETURN TO CALM

Staying calm when a small person is having big emotions can be one of the hardest things for our nervous systems to handle. It's also the key ingredient to showing our children how to process their big feelings.

We often respond to big feelings, whether in children or adults, by jumping into problem solving mode. This is rooted in good intentions, as we think this is how to end their discomfort as soon as possible. Unfortunately, this is often counter-productive, as humans cannot listen or learn while in a state of distress.

Our understanding of how our nervous systems and emotions work together has changed dramatically in the last 20 years.

We now understand that we need to help our nervous systems get back to a calm state before we can think clearly, respond thoughtfully, and teach or learn effectively.

To show kids it's safe to experience and express difficult emotions, we must model how we calm our bodies down, and that a calm mind will follow.

Turn over and find some exercises you and your family can use to ease your nervous systems out of distress and into calm.

THE BUNYIP OF BERKELEY'S CREEK

BY: JENNY WAGNER

WELLBEING FACTOR: COPING WITH CRITICISM

The bunyip of Berkeley's Creek received a lot of un-constructive criticism from those around him, but he remained firm in his knowledge that he is handsome and deserving of love. This takes a strong sense of self!

How do you build a strong sense of self in children so that they are equipped to handle criticism, both constructive and negative, as they grow?

One answer is choices. Giving your child as many choices as possible each day shows them that their opinions matter. It helps them feel more in control and demonstrates that you care about what they think.

Getting to choose between even very simple options each day will help your child develop an unshakeable sense that they matter, and their thoughts and feelings are important.

With this knowledge, they will be able to take on constructive feedback without feeling that their whole self is being put down. If we have a strong sense of self, we can recognise when someone else's behaviours and criticisms come from insecurity or a desire for control, and shrug off what doesn't serve us.

Choices can be an effective way to ward off tantrums - especially the kinds that start brewing with a lot of "no!" 's.

These tantrums often come from a feeling of lack of control. Work in an opportunity to choose between two options and the tantrum may be averted!



DAY-TO-DAY CHOICES



They can be as simple as:

Would you like this fork, or this fork to eat your dinner? See this bowl of sugar-snap peas? You can choose which ones you would like on your lunch plate today while I finish preparing the rest.

"I know you want to take out more books at the Library, it must be hard to put them back when you want to take them home. Which trolley should these books go in so we can come back and get them out next time? Blue or green?"

Would you like to shake hands or hug granddad when you say goodbye? Line up two outfits worth of clothes each morning and allow your child to select which outfit they want to wear.

Make it easy!

Too many options overwhelms even adults, so sticking to two is usually best.

Ask your child why they have chosen certain things when you're interested to know. This shows them you care and increases connection. Use "wonder what made you choose that?" if they feel put on the spot or criticised by a direct "why" question.

When options are - well - not an option, feel confident in letting your child know that **you get to choose for them sometimes as part of your role in keeping them healthy and safe.** This is a boundary, so you don't have to argue or explain further. Doing so may make the issue seem negotiable when it isn't.

MAYBE



WELLBEING FACTOR: MINDFULNESS



Does your child understand what anxiety is, and what it feels like?

Here's a great explanation from Mind UK: "Anxiety is what we feel when we are worried, tense or afraid - particularly about things that are about to happen, or which we think could happen in the future. It can be experienced through our thoughts, feelings and bodies."

At times, both adults and kids can spiral so far into worry-mode that we start worrying that there's something we've forgotten to worry about! Many psychologists recommend allowing ourselves a timed, five to ten minute "worry time" each day to ease this meta-anxiety (worrying about worrying.)

Similarly, you can **make time each day to discuss everything that kids are feeling anxious about. It's important to set a time limit on this to prevent overwhelm.** Once the time's up, ask if they can think of reasons that they might not have to worry so much, for example "My parent is here to keep me safe and help me."

After taking this step, ask your child if they can **imagine the best possible way that the situation could turn out** for each worry. Can they be like the farmer in the story "Maybe?" Maybe something will go poorly - but they can do hard things and learn from them. And maybe something will surprise us and go well!

You can then ask if your kid has ideas for solutions or actions you can take together to decrease their worry. Asking them for problem-solving ideas before offering them yourself empowers them and shows you believe they can do hard things.

MINDFUL WAYS TO WORRY

Our brains have evolved to remember negative experiences better than anything else as a way to protect us from repeating mistakes. This means that we need to spend time reflecting on positive things that could happen or have happened to maintain an accurate view of reality. **Yes, something bad might happen - but something good might happen, too.**

Regular practice of balancing our worries by envisioning good outcomes is essential to managing anxieties. If your anxiety gets so bad that you begin to feel helpless, there's another way you can balance this feeling - by **helping others**. This is one of the most effective ways to calm our wide-reaching anxieties about the state of the world and things we can't predict or control.

Accepting the fact that uncertainty is a part of life can ultimately be very empowering - especially when we **embrace the power we do have** in the face of the things we can't know or change.

When we **balance out our worries by imagining what positive things might come about**, we build resilience, increasing our ability to meet stressful events head-on and find light in the darkness.

It's still important to acknowledge how hard things are when they are hard - pretending otherwise has been proven to be unhealthy. Research has also shown that it's helpful to balance out our brain's negativity bias by picturing how well things might turn out, too.



Scan the code on the left for a reel on why picturing a positive future really works. Scan the code on the left for tips and activities that help kids process their anxiety.



BENEATH

BY: CORI DOERRFELD

WELLBEING FACTOR: EMPATHISING



Did you know that teaching your child to see things from someone else's viewpoint is like giving them a superpower? This awesome skill helps kids understand different opinions and experiences, making them kinder and better friends.

Why Perspective-Taking is important:

Boosts Communication Skills: Helps kids express themselves better.

Enhances Problem-Solving: Encourages creative solutions to challenges.

Fosters Teamwork: Builds cooperation and collaboration with others.

Encouraging empathy and perspective-taking is about building a foundation for healthy relationships and emotional well-being. By weaving these fun strategies into your daily routine, you're helping your child develop essential skills that will guide them through social situations with compassion and understanding.

Cultivating empathy is a journey, and every step counts! Together, we can help our children grow into caring, thoughtful members of our community. Happy exploring!



ACTIVITIES TO TRY TOGETHER



Model Empathy: Show your child how to be empathetic by sharing your feelings. Use phrases like, "I feel sad when..." or "I can see you're upset because..." This helps them learn to express their own feelings, too.

Encourage Open Discussions: Create a cosy space for heart-to-hearts! Ask open-ended questions about their day. Try prompts like, "How do you think your friend felt when that happened?"

Read Together: Snuggle up with books featuring diverse characters. Discuss what the characters are feeling and how their experiences are different from your child's. Ask fun questions like, "Why do you think they did that?" or "What would you feel in their shoes?"

Play Role-Playing Games: Dive into some imaginative play! Act out different scenarios together where your child can practise seeing things from others' perspectives. It's like being in a movie.

Encourage Kindness: Get involved in community activities together. Talk about how their actions affect others' feelings. Reinforce the idea that a little kindness can go a long way.

Use Real-Life Situations: When conflicts come up, turn them into teachable moments. Help your child think about how the other person feels and brainstorm solutions together.

Praise Empathetic Behaviour: Celebrate when your child shows empathy! A little positive reinforcement will encourage them to keep practising these wonderful behaviours.

THE BUNYIP AND THE STARS

BY: ADAM DUNCAN

WELLBEING FACTOR: SELF-AWARENESS: EMOTIONS

The Power of Positive Language

As parents, it's natural to want to protect our children. However, vague phrases like "Be careful" often leave children uncertain about what actions to take. By providing specific instructions and using positive language, we can empower our children to navigate their surroundings more confidently and reduce their worries.

Benefits of Specific Instructions:

Clarity - Specific instructions help children understand exactly what is expected of them.

Empowerment - Clear guidance allows children to make decisions and take responsibility for their actions.

Confidence - When children know how to approach a situation, their confidence grows, reducing their anxiety and fear.

Examples of Specific Instructions:

Instead of saying, "Be careful on the stairs," try, "Hold onto the railing while you walk down the stairs." Replace "Don't run" with "Please walk slowly so you don't trip."

Positive Language in Action:

Instead of expressing worry with phrases like "Don't touch that, it's dangerous," you might say, "Let's find a safe way to play with that toy." Encourage positive behaviour by saying, "I love how you used gentle hands with the puppy!" rather than just warning against rough play.

ALLEVIATING WORRIES AND MANAGING ENERGY

Alleviating Worries and Managing Energy

Worries can fill children with nervous energy, making it challenging for them to focus or relax. Helping them find constructive ways to alleviate these feelings is essential. Here are some strategies:

Preparing for School or a Holiday:

If your child is worried about school tomorrow or an upcoming holiday, encourage them to prepare the night before. Suggest that they lay out their clothes for the next day. Pack their backpack or bag with all necessary items. Create a morning checklist together to ensure they feel organised and ready.

*This preparation can help ease anxiety
and foster a sense of control.*

Channeling Energy:

Help your child channel nervous energy into positive action. Encourage them to engage in physical activity, like running or dancing, to release pent-up energy. Practise deep breathing or mindfulness exercises to calm themselves when feeling overwhelmed.

Switching from vague warnings to specific instructions and positive language can significantly impact a child's confidence and ability to manage worries. By empowering our children with clarity and constructive ways to handle their feelings, we help them grow into resilient individuals capable of tackling challenges with a positive mindset.

STICK MAN

BY: JULIA DONALDSON

WELLBEING FACTOR: DOING WHAT I VALUE



Values are the things that are important to us and guide our behaviour. They influence our choices and help us decide what actions to take in different situations. Teaching children about their values helps them understand themselves better and make positive choices.

KEY VALUES TO EXPLORE WITH YOUR CHILD

Kindness - Being friendly and considerate to others

Talk about ways to show kindness, such as sharing toys or helping a friend.

Fun - Enjoying activities that make us happy

Ask your child what activities they enjoy most and how these make them feel good.

Learning - Gaining knowledge and skills through experiences

Encourage curiosity by asking your child what they want to learn about and explore together.

Friendship - Building connections and being supportive to others

Talk about what makes a good friend and how to be one.

Creativity - Expressing oneself through imagination and art.

Explore creative activities together, like drawing, painting, or building.

TIPS FOR ENCOURAGING VALUES IN DAILY LIFE

Lead by Example

Show your child how you do what you value in your daily life. Demonstrate kindness, curiosity, and creativity in your interactions.

Celebrate Achievements

Acknowledge when your child engages in activities that reflect their values. Celebrate their efforts, whether big or small.

Encourage Expression

Provide opportunities for your child to express what they value through art, storytelling, or role-playing.

Create a Values Chart

Make a simple chart of values and discuss them regularly. You can add stickers or drawings to represent when your child engages in those values.

Keep It Fun

Learning about values should be enjoyable! Use games, stories, and songs to make the experience engaging and memorable.

By helping your child understand and engage with their values, you empower them to make choices that lead to happiness and fulfillment.

Encourage them to explore and express what matters most to them in a supportive and loving environment!



WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

BY: MAURICE SENDAK

WELLBEING FACTOR: EXPRESSING EMOTIONS

All kids have bursts of energy, especially between the ages of 3-5, when their brains undergo major hormonal changes (even more than teenagers!)

Positive outlets like wrestling, or play-fighting, help channel this energy. When parents engage in rough-and-tumble play, kids learn to respect others' needs while having fun.

Play involving tumbling, being turned upside-down, and using multiple muscles regulates the nervous system better than just running and jumping without focus, which can sometimes increase energy.

If rough play isn't an option, activities like lifting a laundry basket or pushing a wheelbarrow provide similar benefits.

Helping Kids Understand and Manage Emotions

Children need adult guidance to help navigate their emotions. Here's how you can help:

Understand Your Child's Temperament - To better support their needs, notice how your child reacts to situations or expresses their emotions.

Model Emotional Regulation - How you respond to your own emotions in front of your child influences their emotional habits. Show them healthy ways to handle frustration, excitement, and sadness.

Start Conversations About Emotions Early - Talk about emotions, yours and theirs. Instead of just cheering them up, help your child name their feelings eg. "I see you're feeling frustrated. Let's take a deep breath."

Explore the Mind-Body Connection - Help them notice physical signs of emotions: "Do you feel your heart racing when you're excited? Let's try jumping to get that energy out!"

WILD-CHILD ACTIVITIES



Here are some activities that combine physical play with emotional regulation:



Play-Fighting with Boundaries: Before play-fighting, establish rules (eg. no face-touching, no yelling near ears, stop when asked). Letting them win sometimes empowers them, while you winning reinforces security.

A Roaring Good Time: If your child feels the need to yell, channel it constructively. Head outside to “get it all out,” build a pillow fort for absorbing yells, or create a sound-absorbing booth with a box and egg cartons.

Push and Pull Games: Hold hands in a lunge position and let them push against you with all their strength. This helps them build body awareness and expend energy in a controlled way.

Heavy Work Activities: Encourage your child to lift, push, or carry heavy objects like laundry baskets, buckets of water, or grocery bags. These activities can be calming and grounding.

Dance Parties or Animal Walks: Turn on music and dance together, or imitate animal movements like bear crawls or frog jumps. These activities are fun and help regulate the nervous system.

Yoga or Stretching Simple yoga poses or stretches help calm their body and mind.

BORN TO STAND OUT

BY: NIKKI ROGERS

WELLBEING FACTOR: POSITIVE PEER COMPARISON



Harmony Week is a time to celebrate inclusivity, respect, and the beauty of diversity. It's the perfect opportunity to teach children how to embrace their own uniqueness while appreciating the differences in others. By encouraging positive peer comparison, we can help children understand that everyone has something special to contribute, and our differences make the world a more vibrant and harmonious place.

Positive Peer Comparison

Positive peer comparison is about helping children notice and appreciate the differences and similarities between themselves and others in a way that builds confidence, empathy, and a sense of belonging.

Why it Matters for 3-5 year olds

At this age, children are beginning to notice differences in abilities, appearances, and interests. Positive peer comparison helps them:

- Develop self-confidence by recognising their own strengths.
- Build empathy by appreciating others' unique qualities.
- Learn to collaborate and celebrate diversity.

How We Can Help

- Use affirming language: "You are special, and so is your friend!"
- Focus on effort and growth: "Look how hard you worked on that!"
- Celebrate diversity: "Isn't it amazing how we all have different talents?"



CELEBRATING STRENGTHS ACTIVITIES



“What Makes Us Special” Chart

Create a chart with your child and their friends or siblings. Write or draw each person’s unique talents (e.g., “I’m good at drawing,” “I’m a fast runner”). Talk about how everyone’s strengths make the group stronger.

Team Building Games

Play cooperative games like building a block tower together or completing a puzzle. Emphasise how each person’s contribution helps the team succeed.

Storytime Discussions

Read books about characters with different strengths (e.g. *Giraffes Can’t Dance* by Giles Andreae). Discuss how the characters support each other and celebrate their differences.

“I Can” and “We Can” Statements

Encourage your child to say “I can” statements about themselves (e.g. “I can share my toys”). Then, add “We can” statements about working together (e.g. “We can take turns”).

Role-Playing

Use toys or puppets to act out scenarios where characters help each other and celebrate their differences. For example, one puppet might be great at singing while another is great at jumping.

“My Parenting Journey” Reflection

A quiet, reflective activity for parents: Write down three things you’re proud of as a parent and three ways your family is unique. Remind yourself that every parenting journey is different, and comparisons don’t define your worth or success.

PIG THE PUG

BY: AARON BLABEY

WELLBEING FACTOR: EMPATHISING

Perspective-Taking: the ability to understand how someone else feels or thinks.

Empathy: the emotional response that comes from recognising another's feelings and wanting to help.

What to Expect at This Age

Children ages 3-5 are developing these skills but still need guidance. They may:

- **Recognise basic emotions** (happy, sad, angry) in others but struggle with more complex feelings (jealousy, frustration).
- **Show concern** when someone is hurt or upset but may not always know how to respond.
- **Begin to share and take turns**, though they're still learning to manage selfish impulses (just like Pig the Pug!)
- **Act out scenarios** through play, experimenting with different roles (e.g. being the "bossy" friend or the "kind" friend).

How Pig the Pug Helps

The book's humour and exaggerated characters make it easy for kids to: Notice how Pig's selfishness affects Trevor. Discuss why Pig's behaviour leads to trouble. Celebrate when Pig finally learns to share.

Tip: *At this age, kids are egocentric*

(Focused on their own needs). Gentle reminders like "How would you feel if that happened to you?" help them practice seeing others' perspectives.





TURN PLAYTIME INTO EMPATHY PRACTICE



“What’s Happening Here” Story Chat

After reading *Pig the Pug*, pause at key moments (e.g. when Pig hoards toys) and ask: “How do you think Trevor feels right now?” “What could Pig do to make things better?” Relate it to real life: “Remember when you didn’t want to share your blocks? How did your friend react?”

Feelings Charades

Take turns acting out emotions (mad, surprised, excited) and guessing them. Use prompts like: “Show me how Pig’s face looked when he had to share!” “Now show me Trevor’s happy face!”

Emotion Check-ins

Teach simple phrases like “I feel [emotion] because...” to help your child name their feelings. Use a “calm down corner” with sensory tools (stress ball, glitter jar) for when emotions feel big. Practice belly breathing together “Breathe in like you’re smelling flowers, breathe out like you’re blowing bubbles.”

Puppet Problem-solving

Use stuffed animals or socks as puppets to act out conflicts (e.g. one puppet won’t share). Ask your child: “What should this puppet say to fix the problem?”

Empathy grows with practice - it is not automatic at this age. Model patience, gently guide (“I know it’s hard, let’s think about their feelings”), and stay consistent. Skills bloom over time.



I AM JELLYFISH

BY: RUTH PAUL

WELLBEING FACTOR: COMPASSION

Self-Compassion is treating yourself with kindness, especially when things feel hard. For young children this means: Recognising and accepting their feelings without judgement. Learning to comfort themselves when things don't go as planned. Understanding that everyone has strengths and challenges.

What to Expect at This Age

Children ages 3-5 are just beginning to develop self-awareness. They may:

- Express frustration when they can't do something ("I can't draw it right!")
- Compare themselves to others (Why can't I run as fast as them?)
- Need adult guidance to name emotions and practice self-kindness.

A Note for Grown-Ups:

How we talk to kids about mistakes shapes how they talk to themselves. Try swapping: "Why did you do that?", "What can we learn here?", "Hurry up!", "You're doing your best!"

And don't forget to be kind to yourselves too! Parenting is tough. Stuck in a guilt spiral? Try: "I'm still learning, just like my child", "Today was hard, but I showed up."

Neurodiversity & I Am Jellyfish

Neurodiversity celebrates differences (e.g. Autism, ADHD). This story helps kids:

- See strengths in being "different".
- Feel less alone when things feel tricky.
- Build resilience by focusing on what makes them special.



HOME ACTIVITIES TO BUILD SELF-COMPASSION

"Glowing Strengths" craft

After reading, draw yourselves as sea creatures. Ask: "What makes YOU glow?" (e.g. "I'm great at hugging!" or "I tell funny jokes!") Write it on your art and display it proudly.

"Oops! That's Okay!" Practice

Model self-kindness during mess-ups: "Oops! Let's breathe. Even grown-ups spill things."

Sensory "Calm Like Jellyfish" Bottle

Fill a bottle with water, glitter, and blue food coloring. Shake it and say: "When things feel wobbly, we can float and breathe together."

Neurodiversity Story Time

Read books like *Too Much! An Overwhelming Day* and ask: "What might feel tricky or awesome for this character?"

"My Superpower & My Stretch" Talk

At dinner, take turns sharing:

1. A "Superpower" - Something you love about yourself (e.g. "I'm a great listener!")
2. A "Stretch" - Something tricky you're learning (e.g. "Asking for help is hard for me")





WHEN I GROW UP

BY: TIM MINCHIN

WELLBEING FACTOR: DOING WHAT I VALUE

When I Grow Up playfully explores childhood dreams of adulthood – climbing trees, eating sweets for breakfast, and staying up late. But beneath the humour lies a deeper theme: **Imagining a life filled with what we truly value.** This resource helps you use the book to spark conversations with your child about their unique interests, joys, and values while modelling how to align daily life with what matters most.

Key Messages For Parents

Values Start Early

Even young children notice what adults do (e.g., "Why do you work?" or "Why can't I have ice cream for dinner?"). Use the book's silly scenarios to talk about choices: "Grown-ups can eat sweets, but why do we usually choose fruit?"

Play = Values in Action

A child who builds block towers values creativity; one who shares toys values kindness. Name these moments: "You worked so hard on that drawing—you really care about making beautiful things!"

Model "Doing What You Love"

Share simple examples: "I love gardening because it helps our planet," or "I call Grandma because family is important to me."



ACTIVITIES TO EXPLORE VALUES

"Dream Job Puppet Show" (Imagination + Self-Expression)

Do: Make puppets of "dream jobs" (real or silly!).

Ask: "What would your puppet love about this job?"
"How would they help others?"

Value Link: Celebrates passions and empathy.

"Grown-Up Rules Collage" (Choices + Priorities)

Do: Cut out magazine pictures or draw "rules" for a perfect day (e.g., "Read 100 books!" or "Hug my dog").

Discuss: "Which 'rules' make us happy? Which keep us healthy?"

Value Link: Balances joy and responsibility.

"Tree of Dreams" (Growth + Persistence)

Do: Draw a tree with branches labelled "Things I'm Learning" (e.g., tying shoes) and "Dreams" (e.g., "ride a dragon").

Add leaves as they grow!

Value Link: Praises effort over results.



Everyday Moments Matter

Mealtime: "The children in the book want to eat sweets every day! What foods make our bodies strong AND happy?"

Bedtime: They want to stay up late. Why do we rest?
What fun things can we do tomorrow?"

Frustrations: "Grown-ups carry heavy things even when it's hard. What's something you keep trying at?"

Final Tip: Listen More Than Teach

When your child says, "When I grow up, I'll...", ask: "Tell me more!" Their answers reveal budding values whether it's "help people like firefighters" or "have a pet unicorn!"

THE BUNYIP AND THE STARS

BY: ADAM DUNCAN

WELLBEING FACTOR: SELF-AWARENESS (EMOTIONS)

Children often struggle to name big emotions. The words we use can guide them toward expressing feelings safely while building emotional intelligence.

How Positive Language Supports Emotional Growth

Clarity - "I can see you're frustrated. Let's use your words to tell me what's wrong" (Helps children identify and articulate emotions instead of acting out)

Empowerment - "You're holding the railing so well! That tells me you feel ready" (Encourages self-awareness and confidence in managing feelings)

Safety - "That loud noise scared you! Want to hold my hand while we check it out?" (Validates emotions while modelling calm problem-solving)

Phrases That Build Emotional Skills

Instead of dismissing emotions: "Don't cry, it's just a small scrape"

Say: "Ouch, that hurt! Let's take a deep breath together"

Instead of vague warnings:

"Stop whining" "You sound upset.

Say: Can you tell me what you need?"



EXPRESSING EMOTIONS CONSTRUCTIVELY

Easing Worries Through Preparation: Help your child prepare for upcoming events to reduce anxiety: Create a simple checklist Lay out clothes the night before Pack their bag together Preparation builds confidence and opens conversations about feelings

Channelling Nervous Energy: Calm or energise restless kids with:
Movement: Dancing, jumping, or running outside Mindfulness: Take slow breaths together (e.g. *"Smell the flowers, blow out the candles"*)
Affirmations: Encourage them to say, "I can handle this!" Physical movement helps kids release big feelings before they escalate.

"Feelings Detective" Game: Name emotions in everyday moments:
"Your face is scrunched up - are you feeling frustrated or stuck?"
"You're jumping so high! Is that happy energy or excited energy?"
Hang an "Emotion Wheel" on the fridge to help kids point to what they feel when words are hard.

Positive language isn't just about safety, it's a toolkit for emotional fluency. When children learn to pair actions with feelings (*"I walk slowly when I'm nervous"*), they grow into resilient communicators.



THELMA THE UNICORN

BY: AARON BLABEY

WELLBEING FACTOR: COPING WITH CRITICISM

Just like Otis loves Thelma exactly as she is, our children need to feel unconditionally accepted, especially when it comes to their bodies. In a world full of unrealistic standards, fostering safety in body image starts with us.

Celebrate What Bodies Can DO

Shift focus from appearance to ability ("Your legs are strong for running!" or "My arms are great for hugging you!")

Normalise Imperfection

Let kids see you problem-solve mistakes calmly ("Oops, I burned the toast! Let's try again together") Praise effort over results ("You worked so hard on that drawing!" vs. "It's perfect")

Love Them Through Tough Moments

After setting boundaries (e.g. "Hitting isn't okay"), reaffirm love: "Even when you're upset, I love you". Remind them: "You're always you, whether you're happy, sad, mad - and that's enough".

How to Be an "Otis" for Yourself

- **Spot the Lies:** Stress whispers, "You're not good enough". Pause and ask: "Would I say this to a friend?"
- **Rest = Resistance:** Exhaustion warps self-image. Prioritise rest - it's not selfish, it's survival.
- **Ask for Help:** Needing support isn't weakness; it's a gift to others who want to show up for you.





AT-HOME ACTIVITIES: “OTIS MOMENTS”

Body Gratitude Jar

Decorate a jar together. Each day, add notes like: “My hands helped me build a tower!” “My voice made Grandma laugh!” Read them weekly to celebrate what all bodies can do.

“Love Like Otis” Reminders

Post sticky notes in your home: “You’re loved exactly as you are” “Mistakes mean you’re learning” Include them in lunchboxes or backpacks.

Draw Your “Sparkle”

After reading *Thelma the Unicorn*, ask: “What makes YOU special - with or without sparkles” Draw/write answers and display them proudly.

Remember:

Unconditional love builds armour against insecurity. When kids feel safe in their bodies, they grow into adults who refuse to shrink themselves.



LITTLELIGHT

BY: KELLY CANBY

WELLBEING FACTOR: TRYING SOMETHING NEW

The town of Littlelight is grey and surrounded by high walls, built to keep out anything and anyone "different." When a brave little girl starts taking bricks from the walls, the Mayor is furious! But as the townspeople peek through the gaps, they discover wonderful new smells, sounds, and sights from their neighbours. They learn that what seemed "strange" is actually wonderful, and that breaking down walls (both real and imaginary) can fill their world with colour, light, and friendship.

Trying Something New:

The ages of 3 to 5 are full of growing curiosity. For a young child, "something new" is an everyday event. It might look like:

Food: Taking one bite of a new vegetable or a dish from a different culture.

Play: Using a toy in a different way, attempting a new puzzle, or joining a new game on the playground.

Skills: Putting on a coat by themselves, attempting to write a letter, or swinging their legs on a swing for the first time.

Social: Saying "hello" to a new child, asking to join in play, or participating in a new group activity.

Emotional: Using a new word to describe their feeling (e.g. "I'm frustrated!").

Children learn empathy and understanding when they step into new experiences and notice how others feel or think.



BRINGING LITTLELIGHT HOME



“I Tried It!” Chart

Create a chart with your child. Add a sticker or smiley face whenever they try something new - like a new food, game or music. Celebrate the effort, not just success!

How Would You Feel? Role Play

Act out simple scenarios together (e.g. someone can't find their toy, or a friend falls down). After each scenario, ask your child: “How do you think they felt?” and “What could we do to help?” This helps them practice seeing situations from another's perspective and responding with kindness.

Build Bridges, Not Walls

Build a wall from blocks or pillows. Then, remove bricks to make “windows” and “doors”. Finally, turn your wall into a “bridge” that connects two areas of your room. Talk About It: “Walls keep us apart, but bridges help us come together. Should we build a wall to keep your toys away, or a bridge to share them?”

My Turn To Be Brave - A Parent's Reflection

Gently reflect on a time you hesitated to let your child try something new. Was it your own fear of mess, the unknown, or something unfamiliar? Acknowledge that fear without judgement. The next time, try saying, “This is new for me too, but let's be brave together.” By understanding your own reactions, you become a bridge to a wider world for your child.



BROTHER MOON

BY: MAREE MCCARTHY YOELU

WELLBEING FACTOR: MINDFULNESS

Brother Moon shows us a deep, respectful partnership with the natural world. Great-Grandpa Liman doesn't command nature; he listens to it, learns from it, and finds comfort and guidance in its presence. This mindful connection is a powerful way to nurture a sense of calm and wonder in our children.

Why It Matters for 3-5 Year Olds

At this age, children are naturally egocentric. Teaching them to see nature as a partner helps shift their perspective from "I am the centre of the world" to "I am a part of a beautiful, living world." This builds:

Emotional Regulation: Nature's steady rhythms (like the moon's phases) model how to find inner calm.

Respectful Curiosity: Children learn to approach the unknown, like the dark or animals, with wonder instead of fear.

A Sense of Safety: Feeling connected to something larger provides deep comfort during moments of uncertainty.

Your Role as a Grown-Up:

You are the guide who helps your child "open their eyes and ears". You don't need to have all the answers.

Your role is to model a sense of wonder, to point out the moon on your drive home, to pause and listen to the wind with them, and to show that you too find peace in these simple partnerships.



BUILDING A PARTNERSHIP WITH NATURE

“Hello, Brother Moon” Observations: Once a week, go outside just after dusk and look for the moon. Wave and say “Hello, Brother Moon!” Note its shape and brightness. Ask: “Is Brother Moon big and bold tonight, or is he half here? How is his light helping the trees/toys/animals sleep?”

The “Nature Partner” Walk: On a walk, invite your child to choose one thing in nature to be their “partner” or “guide” for the journey. It could be the wind on their face, a shadow, a bird, or a cloud. Ask: “What is our partner the wind telling us today? Is it whispering or whooshing?”

“Thank You, Nature” Ritual: Inspired by Great-Grandpa’s gratitude for the moon’s light, develop a simple “thank you” habit. Before a meal, thank the sun and the rain that helped the food grow. At bedtime, thank Brother Moon for watching over the night.

Bonus for Grown-Ups: Find Your Brother Moon: Great-Grandpa’s partnership is deeply personal. What in nature makes you feel calm and supported? Is it the sound of rain? The solidness of a tree? The vastness of the ocean? Identify your own “Brother Moon” and share that connection with your child. Your authentic wonder is the most powerful teacher of all.



STICK MAN

BY: JULIA DONALDSON

WELLBEING FACTOR: DOING WHAT I VALUE



Values are the things that are important to us and guide our behaviour. They influence our choices and help us decide what actions to take in different situations. Teaching children about their values helps them understand themselves better and make positive choices.

Key Values To Explore With Your Child

Kindness - Being friendly and considerate to others Talk about ways to show kindness, such as sharing toys or helping a friend.

Fun - Enjoying activities that make us happy Ask your child what activities they enjoy most and how these make them feel good.

Learning - Gaining knowledge and skills through experiences Encourage curiosity by asking your child what they want to learn about and explore together.

Friendship - Building connections and being supportive to others Talk about what makes a good friend and how to be one.

Creativity - Expressing oneself through imagination and art Explore creative activities together, like drawing, painting, or building.

TIPS FOR ENCOURAGING VALUES IN DAILY LIFE



Lead by Example: Show your child how you do what you value in your daily life. Demonstrate kindness, curiosity, and creativity in your interactions.

Celebrate Achievements: Acknowledge when your child engages in activities that reflect their values. Celebrate their efforts, whether big or small.

Encourage Expression: Provide opportunities for your child to express what they value through art, storytelling, or role-playing.

Create a "Values Chart": Make a simple chart of values and discuss them regularly. You can add stickers or drawings to represent when your child engages in those values.

Keep It Fun: Learning about values should be enjoyable! Use games, stories, and songs to make the experience engaging and memorable.

By helping your child understand and engage with their values, you empower them to make choices that lead to happiness and fulfillment.

SPARE PARTS puppet theatre

Puppet Playtime by Spare Parts Puppet Theatre is an interactive experience specially crafted for children aged 3-5.

Fremantle (Walyalup), WA 08 9335 5044

To enquire about future productions, incursions and excursions email admin@sppt.com.au