



Supporting Your Child's Emotional Wellbeing

KidsXpress is a children's mental health charity that uses the creative arts in a therapeutic setting to support the emotional wellbeing of children aged 12 and under.

Our nationally accredited program combines music, art, drama, movement and play to empower children to express themselves without a need for words.

Use the following tips from our expressive therapists to nurture and support your child.

For more information and resources regarding children's mental health visit kidsxpress.org.au

Tip #1 Notice, acknowledge and invite your child to express how they are feeling



Verbally: Help your child name their feelings by giving them a label. Naming feelings is the first step in helping kids learn to identify them. It allows your child to develop an emotional vocabulary so they can talk about their feelings.

Visually: Help your child paint or draw their feelings with colour, shape, texture or by selecting an image that represents how they are feeling.



Musically: Help your child musically with rhythm, melody or song that represents how they are feeling. They could choose to use their voice, an instrument (including home-made instruments) or even write a song to express themselves.

Dance and Movement: Help your child depict their feelings with dance and movement. They might like to incorporate some props e.g. fabrics, scarves or hats.



Tip #2 Reframe challenging behaviours as protective behaviours



Understanding the stress responses in the brain and how they work.

Changing our view of a child from attention-seeking to connection-seeking.



Befriending your child's protective behaviours with compassion and curiosity.

Protective behaviours may present themselves in different ways e.g. angry behaviours may be protecting frightened feelings or withdrawn behaviours may be protecting sad feelings.



One creative and playful way we can learn more about how a child may be feeling is to invite them to create their own superhero. They could draw it, tell a story about it in a simple cartoon or bring their superhero to life by dressing up as their own superhero character or by using their toys to help tell their story. Some curious questions might include:

- I wonder, if you could create your own superhero, what would they look like?
- What would their name be?
- What would be their superpower?
- Who (or what) are they protecting?
- I'm curious, is there anything (or anyone) your superhero needs?

Tip #3

Create small moments of spaciousness and stillness

Throughout the day, where possible, encourage your child to notice what feelings or sensations are present in their body. Some simple suggestions:-



Take 5 breaths, in and out. A visual guide using 5 fingers on one hand can be helpful for children. Place your finger at the base of your thumb to start. Then take a deep, slow breath in as you move your finger up your thumb, hold for a moment, then breath out slowly as you move your finger down the other side of your thumb. Repeat four times with your other fingers.

Invite them to tune into their senses (outside if you can). Find a comfortable place to sit then when they are ready, ask them if they can name:

- 5 things they can see
- 4 things they can hear
- 3 things they can touch
- 2 things they can smell
- 1 thing they can taste



Where possible, take a minute or two in the evening together to gaze at the moon and stars into the night sky. In the day, step outside and feel the air e.g. breeze of the wind, warmth of the sun.

Encourage your child to connect to their body e.g. a self hug or gentle squeeze.



Tip #4

Create a regulated space

We often have to meet kids at their energy level. We don't meet them in their chaos, we just meet them at their energy level.

Consistent, rhythmic, repetitive activities could be woven into your child's day e.g. jumping on the trampoline, walking, kicking a soccer ball backwards and forward, swinging on a swing, drumming, strumming a guitar, blowing bubbles, building with lego, colouring, cooking, playdough, singing songs, drawing or dancing.



Perhaps your child would prefer creating a calm and relaxed space by themselves where they choose to go and that is a positive experience (not used as a punishment). If you have any soft materials, cushions, sheets or blankets that could be used to help create their space, let them know they can be used.

Perhaps your child might like to bring a special book, toy, drawing materials, a nightlight or gentle music that would enhance a sense of calm and relaxation for them. Suggested questions you could ask your child:

- What would make your special space feel relaxing and calm?
- Would it be inside or outside?
- Would it be big or small?
- What colour would it be?
- Does it have a name?
- Can I visit your relaxed and calm space?

Tip #5

Be present with your child

Being truly present with someone, without any agenda, is the foundation of safety and healing.

Where you can, quiet the noise around you e.g. turn off the TV, put your phone away or on silent for a while (even if it's only 5 or 10 minutes).



With open curiosity, sit with your child, notice and listen to them (even in the silences). Allow them to lead play and conversation.

You can build a positive present relationship with your child by:

- Being in the moment with your child
- Spending quality time with your child
- Creating a caring environment of trust and respect

Our time is one of the most precious gifts we can give to our children.

We hope you find these tips helpful in supporting your child.