

Supporting your Child's Emotional Wellbeing

Earlier this month, Katie from My Young Minds and her team came into school to host a parent workshop on 'Supporting your child's emotional well being'.

The session explored;

- What emotions are and why we have them
- Supporting your child with labelling their emotions
- General emotional regulation tips and regulating anger and anxiety
- Managing feeling of sadness

Here are some highlights for those of you who missed it.

What are emotions and why do we have them?

Emotions are a complex emotional state that comprises of 3 distinct components:

- 1) Subjective experience - feelings e.g. happy/sad
- 2) Physiological response - our bodies response to those feelings
- 3) Behavioural/expressive response - how we convey a particular emotion e.g. smile/cry

Emotions help us take action, survive and avoid danger and make decisions. They help us understand others, and help others understand us.

Emotions stem from arousal of the nervous system and chemical reactions in the body involving neurotransmitters. Neurotransmitters coordinate the transmission of signals between nerve cells, and have a great influence over emotions, behaviour and mood.

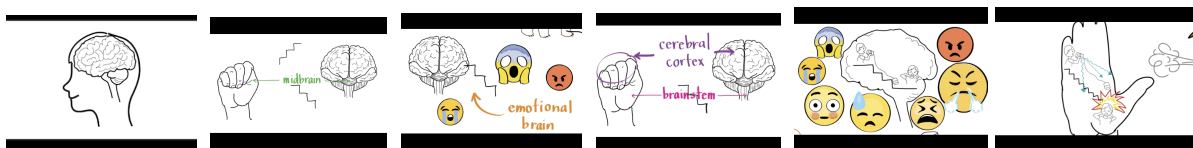
Many emotions are linked to certain hormones and neurotransmitters, some examples

- Happiness/pleasure - Dopamine, Serotonin, Endorphins
- Stress/anger - Cortisol, Adrenaline
- Fear/anger - Norepinephrine

It is the level of these hormones that determine our feelings or emotions e.g. increased or normal levels of serotonin is linked with feeling happy and calm, whereas low levels of serotonin can result in low mood, depression and anxiety.

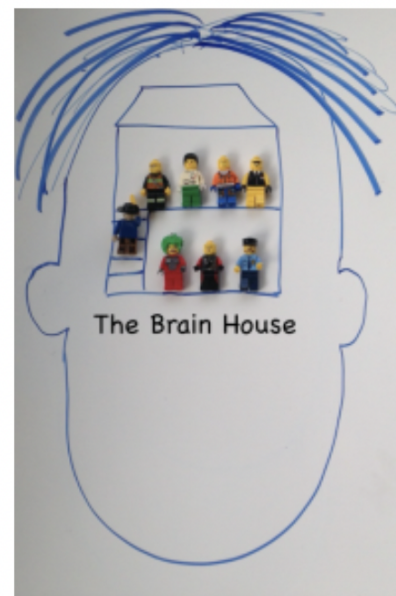
It is important to maintain emotional wellbeing, to prevent 'Flipping Your Lid'. (Siegal). Here is a [video](#) which demonstrates the concept of 'flipping your lid' (when something doesn't go quite right) to children. It explains how our brain works to help keep us safe. The video tells us to imagine that the brain is split into 3 sections - the midbrain, the upstairs and the downstairs. The midbrain is the part of the brain where our memories and emotions are created and stored. The brain stem or what is referred to as the downstairs brain is the part of the brain that controls the things our bodies do that we don't have to think about like breathing. Your downstairs brain controls our automatic reactions to certain situations, it takes charge and in a split second decides whether you are going to fight, flight or freeze. Due to the way that our downstairs brain reacts to certain situations, we can think of it as our emotional brain because it reacts instantly without having to think things through. Our

upstairs brain is called the cerebral cortex. It helps us to think logically, act with kindness and think about how others might be feeling. It is also the problem solving part of our brain. The upstairs brain is the thinking brain. They don't work alone as your brain is set up so that they can communicate with each other. However, sometimes the downstairs brain has difficulty problem solving, especially when the upstairs brain, the emotional brain, can't communicate well enough. This can be when emotions are too overwhelming and your downstairs brain decides that this situation is dangerous - even when it isn't. This triggers our fight, flight or freeze response and our emotions bubble up and everything boils over - flipping our lids. When our lids are flipped our upstairs and downstairs brain can't communicate with each other. We can't think clearly and can't solve a problem in a peaceful way. It is important to remember that the upstairs brain takes a lot longer to develop and won't fully develop until we reach adulthood, this explains why the downstairs brain is in control a lot of the time.



Explaining the 'upstairs/downstairs' brain to your child

- ▶ Draw an outline of a head, and a house within the head. Add characters to the upstairs/downstairs.
- ▶ Upstairs you may have Problem-Solving Penelope or Calm Catherine. Downstairs you may have Frightened Fred or Angry Anna.
- ▶ You can also use characters from your child's favourite books, TV shows etc., that share similar characteristics to the upstairs/downstairs brain.
- ▶ Our brains work best when the upstairs/downstairs brain is working together.



Labelling and recognising emotions

The first step in understanding emotions is recognising and labelling them. You can support your child to notice changes in their body language, speech or behaviour. You can suggest and name

feelings to help your child better understand what they are feeling. It is useful also to model and talk through how you are feeling in certain situations, helping to normalise it. You may find certain resources useful to support your child to label their emotions. See the example below.

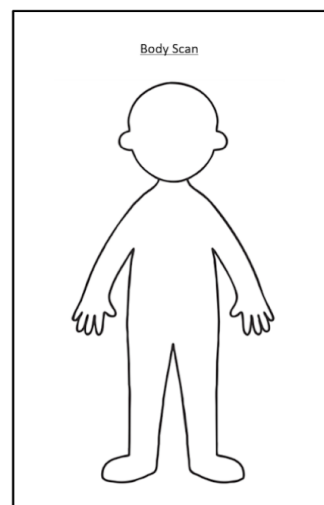
How to use feelings cards



- ▶ “Can you show me which emotion you’re feeling now?”
 - ▶ “What has made you feel this emotion?”
 - ▶ “Which of these emotions do you think (name) is feeling now?”
 - ▶ “How might teddy feel if he was left out at the party?”
- ▶ Try and ask questions that link emotions back to bodily sensations, for example “What does your body do when you feel like this?”

Emotion naming activity: Body Scan

- ▶ Use an outline of a body as a guide to support your child in recognising the link between emotions and bodily sensations
- ▶ This activity can also be useful if your child is struggling to tell you what emotion they are feeling
- ▶ If you notice your child is feeling worried/anxious for example, you can ask “What are you feeling in your body right now?”
- ▶ Ask them to shade, circle or draw an arrow to the parts of their body they are experiencing this emotion.



Normalising emotions

All emotions are valid - no emotion is 'good' or 'bad'. It is usually the behaviour that comes with the emotion that we may need to manage. Use praise and rewards to encourage talking about feelings. Listen when your child is sharing their feelings; stay present, and resist the urge to 'make it go away'.

Supporting your child's emotional regulation

Importance of sleep



Benefits of sleep	Without adequate sleep
Process information & concentration	Academic performance decreases
Social & emotional intelligence	Behavioural difficulties
Strengthens immune system	Weakens immune system
Helps regulate hormones	Affects growth and leptin hormones
Healthy mood regulation	Mood disorders
Healthy brain development	Affects brain development

Average Sleep Needs by Age		
Age	Hours Needed	May be appropriate
Newborn to 3 months old	14 – 17 hrs	11 – 19 hrs
4 to 11 months old	12 – 15 hrs	10 – 18 hrs
1 to 2 years old	11 – 14 hrs	9 – 16 hrs
3 to 5 years old	10 – 13 hrs	8 – 14 hrs
6 to 13 years old	9 – 11 hrs	7 – 12 hrs
14 to 17 years old	8 – 10 hrs	7 – 11 hrs
Young adults (18 to 25 years old)	7 – 9 hrs	6 – 11 hrs
Adults (26 to 64 years old)	7 – 9 hrs	6 – 10 hrs
Older adults (65+)	7 – 8 hrs	5 – 9 hrs

Source: National Sleep Foundation

Strategies to improve sleep

Evidence shows that the following can help improve sleep:

- ▶ Screen free time an hour before bed
- ▶ Comfortable sleep environment
- ▶ Creating a positive association
- ▶ Cut down on daytime naps
- ▶ Set a firm routine
- ▶ Self-settling



Diet

Evidence has shown that a good diet can help:

- ▶ Improve mood
- ▶ Have more energy
- ▶ Think more clearly



Quick tips for managing your child's diet to support their emotional wellbeing:

- ▶ Ensure they eat regularly (breakfast, lunch and dinner)
- ▶ Avoid foods that cause a rapid blood sugar rise and fall
- ▶ Encourage them to stay hydrated
- ▶ Encourage them to get as many of their 5 a day as possible

Keeping active

Evidence shows that physical activity can help you stay healthy, mentally and physically:

- ▶ Feel happier and less anxious
- ▶ Improves memory
- ▶ Improves sleep
- ▶ Reduces illness

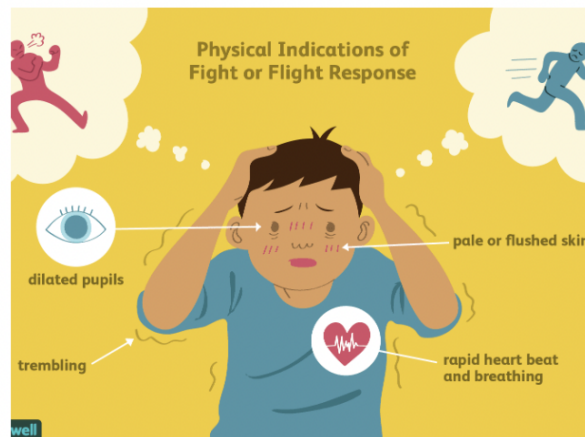
Here are some ways you can encourage your child to keep active:

- ▶ Going for a walk/run
- ▶ Dancing
- ▶ Skipping
- ▶ Going on a bike ride



Regulating anger and anxiety

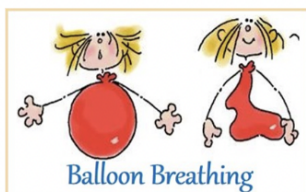
When your child is feeling angry or anxious, stopping or reducing the response in the body can be really helpful in supporting them to feel calmer and more in control.



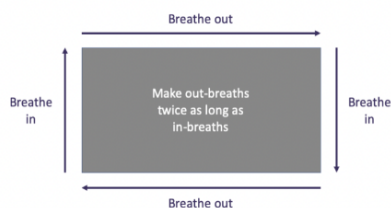
Relaxation strategies

► Breathing techniques

Balloon Breathing



Rectangle breathing



► Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- A two step process
- First, tense particular muscle groups in your body.
- Next, release the tension and notice how your muscles feel when you relax them.

Relaxation strategies

► Visualisation

Imagine your most relaxing place



- Guided imagery for children can help them unwind and relax.

► Mindfulness

- Focusing on the here and now
- Slowing down and paying attention to what you're doing



Mind Full, or Mindful?

Useful resources for guided mindfulness activities



Mindful Powers



CalmClinic

www.calmclinic.com



Grounding strategies

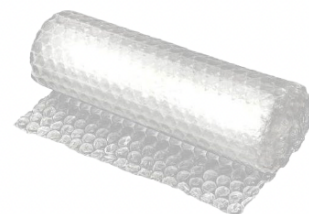
54321 Grounding Exercise



- 54321: See, touch, hear, smell, taste.
- Colours: 3 things red, green, yellow etc.
- Alphabet game

Managing emotional outbursts

- ▶ Attempt relaxation/grounding strategies to prevent an outburst
- ▶ If an outburst happens, consider doing the following:
 - ▶ Create a safe space for your child to go to where they can let out their emotions/anger safely
 - ▶ Put objects/activities in this space that will help e.g. a pillow to punch, paper to rip, playdough to squash, bubble wrap to pop
 - ▶ Stay close to ensure they are safe
 - ▶ When calm, review the situation with them and consider further relaxation techniques or problem solving



Problem solving

- There might be some things causing your child to feel angry or anxious, which have a solution.
- If this is the case, using problem-solving with your child can be useful.
- Your child can effectively problem solve with your support after they have managed to relax. It is very difficult to find a constructive solution to a problem when your child is in a fight or flight state, so consider using some relaxation strategies first.

Managing feelings of sadness - Connecting with others

- Support your child to make a list/diagram of the people they have in their life
- Think about who supports them, and how (e.g., practical support, emotional support, comfort)
- Encourage them to talk about their thoughts and feelings with people they trust



Doing activities they enjoy

- Does your child have any hobbies? Have they stopped doing any previously enjoyed? Could you encourage them to restart these, or perhaps engage in some new ones?



Encouraging your child to be kind to themselves

- It is completely normal for children to feel down at times e.g. when they fall out with a friend, or their team loses an important match.
- In these situations, it is helpful to support children to acknowledge the emotion and stay with it a while, but also to be kind to themselves.
- Ways to support your child in being kind to themselves:
 - Help them list things they are grateful for
 - Reassure them that it's ok to get things wrong and be sad sometimes
 - Encourage them to talk and think about themselves in a positive way

Useful Links and Apps

CalmClinic

www.calmclinic.com



YOUNGMINDS

fighting for young people's mental health

www.youngminds.org.uk



HEADSPACE*



childline

ONLINE, ON THE PHONE, ANYTIME
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