

A parent's guide to creative expression of emotion at home



Often, when a big feeling happens for children and young people, it pops up with no warning. These helpful tips on how to use arts and creativity alongside your children and young people at home will help you find ways to safely express and manage emotions, create 'feel good' brain chemicals, help reduce stressful feelings and develop thinking skills.

These activities are designed for you to do together. This is important as it helps build a strong, supportive relationship, enabling you to explore emotion and develop a shared language for communicating feelings.

Many favourite memories relate to one or more of our senses. For example, during a walk through the woods, the smell of a campfire might stimulate your brain to bring back a memory of a similar time, maybe a cub camp or toasting marshmallows on the fire, in turn this could make you smile or have a warm feeling. All of the activities below will engage different senses and help to develop expressive, emotional language during the activity.

Activities

Key phrases to try out during the activities are: "Show me", "I'm curious about...", "Let's try it together"

Sensory words to try:

bright, shiny, dim, sparkly, scary, crunchy, squelchy, hard, soft, cold, warm, slimy, mushy, rough, scaly, sour, sweet, bitter, spicy, fruity. Feel free to add your own words to this list.

Sensory exploration

From birth through childhood and beyond, sensory exploration helps to make sense of the world around us by using our senses of tasting, smelling, seeing, touching and hearing. Engaging our senses will help us to learn and retain information well, it is crucial for brain development.

Activities to try: Baking using store cupboard ingredients, kneading bread dough, making a calm bottle, creating a sensory garden/tub, for older children and young people they enjoy making slime, creating new culinary dishes or natural fruity facemasks to invigorate the senses.

Music and movement

Helps to increase body awareness, spatial awareness and co-ordination. This allows children freedom to communicate all sorts of emotions without judgment or expectation. Music can offer us the opportunity to experience loudness, quietness, energy, calm and everything in between.

Activities to try: Dance, percussion, creating playlists linked to a feeling, rough and tumble play, tai chi, yoga, silly walks, silly faces, follow my leader. Music is one of the most fundamental ways we can express emotion, older children and young people could be supported to compile playlists to reflect a range of feelings and emotions. Music has a fundamental impact on the reward pathways of the brain and can trigger "feel happy" chemicals which can help to calm and regulate.

Animals and nature

Nature exists as a free, magical and endless source of calming and soothing. Within nature and in our homes, animals offer an instant source of joy, unconditional love and increase our levels of oxytocin, the love hormone.

Activities to try: Spending time looking, listening, foraging, smelling and touching the things that nature offers us. Just remember to wash hands, remove your rubbish and forage safely. Try sand play, mud play, water play, mini beasts, hugging/stroking pets, cloud watching, star gazing, rain drop races, dancing in the rain, running along a beach, walking through the woods. For teenagers, they enjoy seeking out risk taking behaviour and trying new things. The outdoors is great way to enable teens to take calculated risks and push their boundaries to the limits. Fishing, hiking, rock climbing are some great ways to support them in this way.

Drawing and painting

Getting messy is a great way to engage the senses and helps children to create shapes and images for fun and to explore emotion.

Activities to try: Painting rocks, mandala colouring, painting an image to show a feeling, hand or foot painting, landscapes, self portraits.

Our adolescents too need to have a creative outlet to explore emotions. Journaling is an excellent way to allow them to express emotions through drawing, scribbling or even painting.

Story telling, writing and drama

Using a puppet to tell a story or act out an event that has happened will help with sequencing, order sorting and problem solving.

Activities to try: Puppet theatre, comfy corner for reading together, writing stories together, telling funny stories.

Make and model

Encouraging children to make something out of nothing will help them to explore sensation, switch on their imagination and feel pride in what they have created.

Activities to try: Junk modelling, play dough, clay, shaving foam shapes.

"It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self."

Donald Woods Winnicott