

RELATIONAL GAMES AND CREATIVE TOOLS FOR PARENTS/CARERS

It is vital for children and young people's emotional well-being to feel connected and in tune with their family members. As such, the Resilience Project has developed a list of relational games and creative techniques or activities for you to use that can promote a closer connection with your child or young person. We have included brief instructions for each activity. Before choosing which activities you may want to use, it is important to consider the individual needs, abilities, and preferences of your child/young person.

**"EVERY
INTERACTION
CAN BE AN
INTERVENTION"**

Dr Karen Treisman
(Clinical Psychologist)

RELATIONAL GAMES

These are games and activities that are:

FUN

playful

engaging

that allow you and your child to **CONNECT AND BUILD CLOSER RELATIONSHIPS.**

The main aim of these types of games is to **enjoy being together** with a **sense of joy and playfulness**, it is not about the task itself. The activities require few (if any) resources and can be played either 1:1 between you and your child or in groups. These games can be played with children of any age, however, the activities may need to be altered to make it more age appropriate. With any relational game, you are always in charge, you set the limits and define clear boundaries in order to keep your child safe. Relational games are often very short activities, and so you may play a few different games in a row.

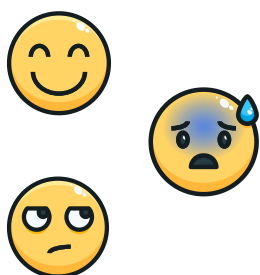
CHECK IN

A simple way to get an idea of how your child is feeling at the start of the day. This is without using a direct question asking 'how are you feeling?', but instead using a metaphor. For example; *"What animal describes how you are feeling today?"* You always model an answer first, e.g. *"I feel like a bird, because I feel free from work and relaxed"*. Other options can be weather, biscuits, a sound, a gesture, your super power pose, TV or Film character etc. Use curiosity about why your child may feel a certain way and acceptance and empathy for what that may feel like, to help them feel heard and understood.

CHECK OUT

Get an idea of how your child is feeling at end of the day. For example; *"What was one kind thing you did for someone today?"* or *"What was something interesting you learned today"*, *"What was something you enjoyed from today?"* Again you model first e.g. *"I really enjoyed it when we all sat and had dinner together tonight"*. Be prepared if your child cannot give you an answer. You may have to answer for them e.g. *"You looked like you were having fun playing football with your friends today"* or *"you were so helpful helping me tidy up at the end of the day"*.

FEELINGS HUNG

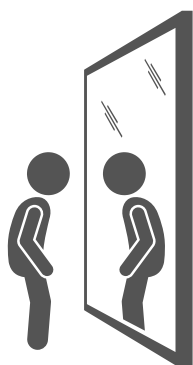


Hang feeling face pictures up all around the room, each face showing a different feeling. You can print these online, use photos of your child, yourself, or other family members making different faces. You can go around the room together looking for the different faces and seeing if your child can label the emotion they see in the face (e.g. frustrated). To make it more playful you might make up the reason why the face is feeling that emotion. You should model this first (e.g. *"I think this face is thrilled or excited about something. I think dad looks excited there because..."*). Support your child to expand his/her vocabulary around emotions e.g. instead of just 'happy', are they proud, excited, content, relaxed, grateful, delighted, carefree.

STRAIGHT FACE CHALLENGE

The child has to keep a straight face while you try to make them laugh either by making faces or telling silly jokes. If your child feels comfortable, switch places. You have to try to keep a straight face while your child tries to make you laugh.

MIRROR GAME



Start with you and your child facing each other. Your child creates gestures/movements and you copy the moves as if you were the child's mirror. For example, your child could start with holding up a hand in a high five, and slowly moving it around in a circle, you copy everything your child does. Swap so you make the movements and your child becomes a mirror. The speed can be increased to make your child more engaged, using silly movements, and then slowed down again when the child may need to feel more emotionally regulated.

DRUMMING

This activity can be done using musical percussion instruments like drums, household items such as pots/plastic bowls, or just by clapping hands or tapping thighs. You begin by drumming / clapping/tapping pots and your child copies. You may start slow and get louder / faster, then go slow and quiet again. You can stop and make quick/sudden sounds. You can then switch so your child leads.



QUIZZES

The relational part of this is making a quiz together. You can research together, come up with topics. You can be the quiz masters together and test the rest of the family (video call platforms are brilliant for this).

READING AND STORYTELLING

Books, short stories or tales. Storytelling is a great way to connect and be with one another in playful way. Afterwards you can ask questions about the story. How did the story make them feel? How did the characters feel? Have you ever felt like the character in the story?

COTTON WOOL FOOTBALL / HOCKEY / RUGBY

You will need a bag of cotton wool balls for this activity. You and child stand at a table opposite each other, or sit on the floor facing each other. You should make football / rugby posts with the hands, and your child/young person attempts to flick or blow the cotton wool balls over or into the posts. You can then switch. Relational games shouldn't be competitive, so a way to avoid this might be to phrase it as "Let's see how many we can get in total" to encourage you working together as a team rather than against each other.



COTTON BALL TOUCH

Have your child close their eyes. You touch your child gently with a cotton ball. Ask your child to open their eyes and indicate where they were touched. There is a variation of this game using feather or a leaf, instead of cotton.

FACE PAINT



You can start painting flowers and hearts on your child's cheeks or make the child up like his/her favorite character or animal. Mustaches and beards are interesting for boys and their fathers. A variation on this is to use a soft dry brush and pretend to paint your child's face, describing her/his wonderful cheeks, her lovely eyebrows, and so forth as you gently brush each part.

LOTION OR POWDER PRINTS



You can apply lotion or powder to your child's hand or foot and make a print on paper, the floor mat, a pillow, your dark clothing, or on a mirror. If you make a lotion print on dark construction paper, you can shake the powder onto it and then blow or shake it off to enhance the picture (take care to keep the powder away from your child's face).

EYE SIGNALS

You and your child/young person should stand facing each other. Use eye signals to indicate direction and number of steps to take, for example; when you wink your left eye twice, both of you should move to the left taking two steps. For older children, you can add signals for forwards and backwards also (head back for backwards, head forward for forwards).

POP CHEEKS

Inflate your cheeks with air and help your child to pop them with their hands or feet. The child inflates cheeks and you pop them in turn.

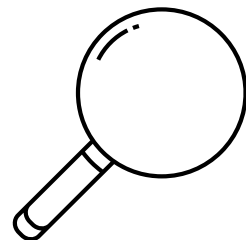
MUSICAL BUBBLES



You blow bubbles into the air while music is playing. Your child begins popping the bubbles and when the music stops he/she stops popping the bubbles. Have them pop the bubble with a particular body part, for example, finger, toe, elbow, shoulder, ear. Change up the game by having them pop them as quickly as they can.

SCAVENGER HUNT

Ask your child to find a certain object e.g. 'find something that makes you smile' or 'find something that you can eat'. Both you and your child/young person go off quickly to find something and then come back to the same spot to share it. These can be items in the house, or if you have space outdoors find natural objects (e.g. leaf, stick or something soft, something yellow, etc.). You can look at it together noticing all the different colors and shapes in it, get them to feel what textures it feels like, if it makes a sound if you listen to it, does it have a smell? You could make this into a relational activity by creating your own cards with these types of questions on, and then use those for your scavenger hunt or you can purchase packs of cards online.

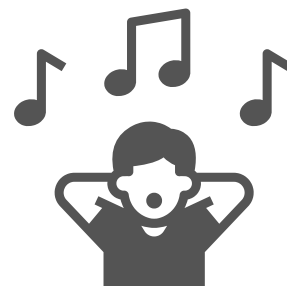


DRAWING AROUND HANDS, FEET OR BODIES

Make a picture of your child's hand or foot by drawing it on a piece of paper. Full body drawings require the child to lie still for some time and are therefore more challenging. Be sure to maintain verbal contact with your child as you draw, for example, "I'm coming to your ankle; I'm drawing around your hand."

THE HUMMING GAME

You start humming a song, and your child has to try and guess what song you are humming. You can then take it in turns.



IMAGINARY BALL TOSS

Pretend to hold a "ball" of some sort (tennis ball, rugby ball, football, beach ball, basketball etc.) and pass it to your child in the way you use the real ball. Your child catches the imaginary ball in the way you would expect and then changes the "ball" into something else and tosses it in the way you would throw such an object to another person. For example, slam dunk or dribble an imaginary basketball, or hit a tennis ball with an imaginary bat.

PIPE CLEANER ACCESSORIES

You will need a number of pipe cleaners for this activity. Both you and your child/young person create an accessory for the other person to wear. This can be glasses, a crown, a bracelet, necklace or moustache.



CREATIVE TECHNIQUES AND ACTIVITIES

Creative techniques are an excellent way to keep activities playful, fun and engaging. Creative materials or resources (such as clay, puppets, paint), work as a metaphor by being the 'third thing in the room'. This can make the interaction between you and your child/young person less intense while there's something else to focus on. Exploring emotions and thoughts through a metaphor may help to keep a distance between your child and difficult feelings, and can often be an easier way for him/her to explore experiences, alongside you as a supportive parent.

There is an endless amount of tools that can be used for creative techniques and activities, including:



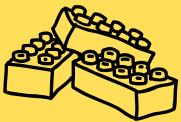
ARTS AND CRAFTS:

paint, paper, pencils, chalk, collages with old magazines,



SENSORY MATERIALS:

rice, sand, sand tray, playdough, clay, music



TOYS:

Lego or build blocks, Lego people, small world miniatures, puppets, Hamma beads



OTHER HOUSEHOLD ITEMS:

buttons, ribbons, beads, toilet roll, cotton balls



OUTDOOR / NATURE:

shells, pebbles, sticks, leaves, flowers

Any work using creative materials, will need careful consideration of the individual child. For example, does your child have any sensory needs? Are there materials that may trigger memories of a difficult event? Does your child have particular interests or preferences you can utilise?

Different ways you may use creative activities:

CHECKINS / CHECK OUTS

Earlier in the resource, you can find information on ways to check-in and check out. This activity can be adapted by introducing materials e.g. "Show me what weather* you feel like today, using playdough/drawing/tin foil "or "Choose an animal puppet, that shows how you feel today. Give them a name!"

*Weather can be changed to anything such as chocolate bar/animal etc.



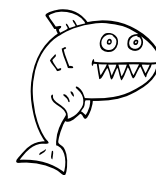
CONNECTING WITH EACH OTHER

- Make a collage of all their favourite things e.g. hobbies / food / tv shows
- Build each other's names out of Lego
- Use buttons or small miniatures to create together your family members

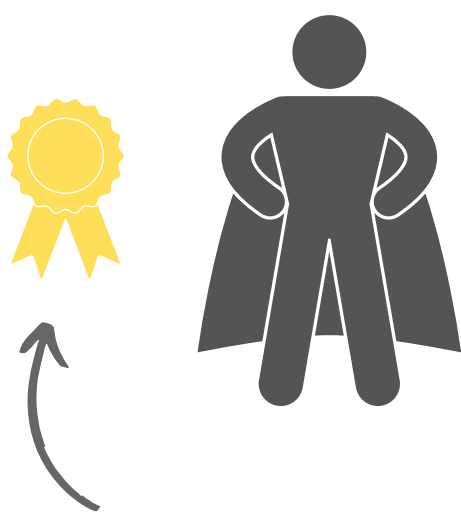


EXPLORING FEELINGS

If your child struggles to talk about a certain emotion, externalising it by drawing or building something to represent it can be helpful. For example, what would your anger look like? Your child may draw a character (e.g. the hulk), an object (e.g. firework), and an animal (e.g. shark), or weather (e.g. storm). Once you've created the metaphor for anger, you can have conversations around it. For example, you may say, if the storm had a name, what would it be? What makes the storm get bigger and stronger? If the storm had a voice, what would it say?



EXPLORING STRENGTHS AND BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM



BADGE OF KINDNESS

For some children, praise or positive reinforcement can be difficult to accept. You can use creative ways to help your child identify strengths in manageable pieces. For example, you may help your child create themselves as a superhero and add different character traits over time. You may go and add a badge of kindness on the superhero's chest, and thank them for being kind because they helped you put the rubbish in the bin. "Create" can again be interpreted in a number of ways e.g. drawing or painting, mould it out of clay, etc.

Another way of exploring strengths might be to make a collage of positive moments. This may be added to over the weeks or months. You can use scraps of magazines or objects you find to represent happy and positive moments e.g. a picture of a football for having fun on sports day, or a leaf they found on your walk.

REFLECTING ON THEIR EXPERIENCE OR SITUATION

There may be occasions where you want to understand better your child's experience, and help them to reflect. Direct questions such as "What happened?" don't always work. Being curious, asking your child to show you what happened, or what's going on for them is often more helpful. For example, "Can you help me understand what is going on for you? How about you show me?" - This may be by using any of the above tools and techniques. Here are a couple of examples:

SAND AND MINIATURES:

Using miniatures (you may have a range of small animals, people, vehicles, objects, etc.), you can ask your child to create a scene in the sand to show you what is going on for them. Your child may explain what they've created, or you may need to wonder aloud. Sticking with the metaphor is the safest way to explore. For example, you may say "I wonder how little tiger is feelings over here is by himself in the corner?" rather than "Is this little tiger you, do you feel alone at school?"



DRAWING:

As a parent, you might have a good idea of how your child is feeling. However, sometimes it might be harder to guess. So you may create a really simple drawing with your ideas whilst talking through it as you go. This doesn't need to be artistic, basic is fine. For example, you may draw a sad face in the middle labelled with the child's name ("I get the sense you're feeling sad and upset about something today", and a few ideas around him about why you think he may be sad: a rain cloud ("The weather is a bit rubbish today, which meant you couldn't ride your bike to school"), maths symbols ("I know you had maths first thing which isn't your favourite" etc. You can then pass the pen/pencil to your child, and ask them to make it right, with permission to cross things off and add to it. This can help you understand your child's experience, in ways that don't require words.



TRANSITIONS

Creative tools can be a helpful way of signifying transitions. For example, you could create sand jars together, keeping a small bit of sand in a small bottle, with a label attached. On the label, you may write or a short encouraging quote that your child can look back at. 'Transitional objects' are particularly helpful for children and young people that find it difficult to be apart from their parents. You could give a small object to your child, such as a bracelet, a shell, a pen, a button. They can keep this while you are separated so they still feel connected. This could also be made into an activity where you make your own for example, making a bracelet, painting a shell or pebble.



On the [Resilience Project CAVUHB website](#), you can find more resources, training and videos for education staff, parents/carers, and children and young people.

If you have any other questions you can contact the Resilience Project by email; [**resilienceproject.CAV@wales.nhs.uk**](mailto:resilienceproject.CAV@wales.nhs.uk)

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg