

RELATIONAL GAMES AND CREATIVE TOOLS FOR EDUCATION STAFF

It is vital for children and young people's (CYP) emotional wellbeing, to feel connected and in tune with key adults around them. For some children and young people, their key adults and caregivers in their early years were not able to be in tune with them. This can happen for many reasons, which can include Adverse Childhood Experiences such as abuse or neglect, but also as a result of experiences that are out of the parents' control, such as mental or physical ill health, bereavement. As such, the Resilience Project has developed a list of relational games and creative techniques or activities for education staff to use that may promote connection with a child or young person, support the child to build trust and to feel comfortable in the relationship with the adult. 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 the child/young person you are working with.

"EVERY
INTERACTION
CAN BE AN
INTERVENTION"

Dr Karen Treisman
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RELATIONAL GAMES

These are games and activities that are:

FUN

playful

engaging

allows adults and children and young people to **CONNECT AND BUILD 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 adult and CYP or in groups. These can be played with CYP of any age, however the activities may need to be altered to make it more age appropriate. It is important to consider that for some CYP, their emotional age is often younger than their chronological age (e.g. 14 years old, with an emotional age of 8-9), so some activities will still bring enjoyment, even if they do appear to be emotionally young for some CYP. With any relational game, the adult is always in charge, they set the limits and define clear boundaries in order to keep the CYP 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 a CYP is feeling at the start of the day/session. This is without using a direct question asking "how are you feeling?", instead using a metaphor. For example; "What animal describes how you are feeling today". The adult always models an answer first, e.g. "I feel like a bird, because I feel free 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 they may feel a certain way and acceptance and empathy for what that may feel like for them to help the child feel heard and understood.

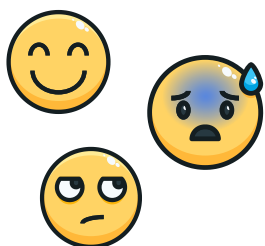
CHECK OUT

To use at the end of the day or session to bring it to a positive close. For example; "What was one kind thing you did for someone today?" or "What was something interesting you learnt today", "What was something you enjoyed from today?". Again the adults models first e.g. "I really enjoyed it when we all sat and had lunch together today". Be prepared for a CYP who cannot give you an answer. You may have to answer for them e.g. "You looked like you were having fun playing football outside" or "you were so helpful helping me tidy up at the end of the day".

POSITIVE INTERACTIONS

Spend a couple of minutes creating a positive relationship between the CYP and teacher by finding out their interests. This can be made playful by tossing an object back and forth while you ask questions. E.g. (favourite film, hobbies after school or weekends, TV programme, game, sports team, music). The adult's job is to listen more than you talk (think active listening). As the adult, take time to reflect after. How did the young person respond to your efforts to get to know them? Has your opinion/view of the young person shifted after doing this?

FEELINGS HUNG



Hang feeling face pictures up all around the room. You can print these online, use photos of the children (if consent has been given) or adults making different faces, or have a previous activity when children / young people draw their own. Provide magnifying glasses (if possible) and partners walk around looking for different faces. When they find one, they label the emotion they see in the face (e.g. frustrated) and be playful in making up the reason why the face is feeling that emotion. Adults should model this first (e.g. "I think this face is thrilled or excited about something. I think he's excited because..."). Support them in expanding their vocabulary around emotions e.g. instead of just 'happy', are they proud, excited, content, relaxed, grateful, delighted, carefree.

STRAIGHT FACE CHALLENGE

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

MIRROR GAME

Start with the adult and CYP facing each other. The child creates gestures/movements and the adult copies the moves as if they were the child's mirror. For example, the child could start with holding up a hand in a high five, and slowly moving it around in a circle, the adult copies everything the child does. Swap so the adult makes the movements and the child becomes a mirror. The speed can be increased, or silly movements used, to up-regulate and help the child become more engaged, and then slowed down again to instigate down-regulation to help the child feel more calm.

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. The adult begins by drumming / clapping / tapping pots and the child/young person or group 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 the child leads. Rhythmic and repetitive sounds can help a child to feel more regulated, especially if timed at a resting heartbeat pace.



SPECIAL 'HANDSHAKE'

Make up a special handshake together, taking turns adding new gestures E.g. air high five, fist pump, wiggle. A new gesture can be added each day. Some children may not be comfortable with physical touch, so the actions can be made touch-free e.g. a wave, a spin, a clap.

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 other staff members or 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?

ZOOM-ERK



Sitting in a circle the word "zoom" is passed around the circle quickly. One person can stop the action by making the sound "Erk" (like a braking noise or screeching to a halt). The direction of the word "zoom" reverses and is sent back the way it came. The "zoom" continues to be sent around the group until an "erk" sound is made, and the game continues. The adult should model the "zoom" and "erk" first.

EYE SIGNALS

The adult and 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).

COTTON WOOL FOOTBALL / HOCKEY / RUGBY

You will need a bag of cotton wool balls for this activity. The adult and child stand at a table opposite each other, or sit on the floor facing each other. The adult should make football / rugby posts with the hands, and the 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.



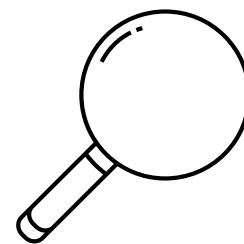
MUSICAL BUBBLES



Adult blows bubbles into the air while music is playing. The CYP begins popping the bubbles and when the music stops the CYP 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

The adult says to find a certain object e.g. 'find something that makes you smile' or 'find something that you can eat'. Both adult and child/young person go off quickly to find something, and then come back to the same spot to share it. This can be items in the classroom, 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



FIND THE COLOUR

Find a space in the room. The leader calls out a colour and the other person or people have to find something that colour in the room and put their finger on it. They have to keep their finger on it until everyone in the room finds the colour. You can make this easier with colours such as red, yellow, or more challenging by saying 'find something the same colour as Jake's hair' or 'find something the same colour as a kiwi'.

THE HUMMING GAME

The adult hums a song, and the 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 the other person in the way you use the real ball. That person 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 adult and child/young person create an accessory for the other person to wear. This can be; glasses, a crown, bracelet, necklace, moustache.

CREATIVE TECHNIQUES AND ACTIVITIES

Creative techniques are an excellent way to keep sessions or 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 adult and 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 the child and difficult feelings, and can often be a safer way for them to explore experiences, alongside a supportive and emotionally available adult.

There are 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, do they have any sensory needs? Are there materials that may trigger memories of a distressing event? Do they have particular interests or preferences you can utilise?

Different ways you may use creative activities:

CHECK INS / 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/tinfoil" 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.



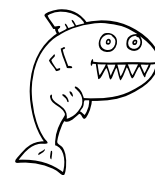
GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

- 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 help you understand who is in their family

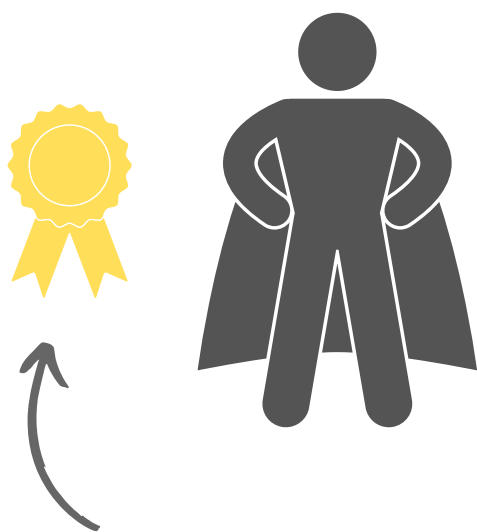


EXPLORING FEELINGS

If a 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? The child may draw a character (e.g. the hulk), an object (e.g. firework), 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 them identify strengths in manageable pieces. For example, you may help them create themselves as a superhero and add different character traits over time. The adult 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 in sports day, or a leaf they found on your walk.

UNDERSTANDING OR REFLECTING ON THEIR STORY, EXPERIENCE OR SITUATION

There may be occasions where you want to understand the child's experience, and help them to reflect. Direct questions such as *"What happened?"* don't always work. Being curious, asking the 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:

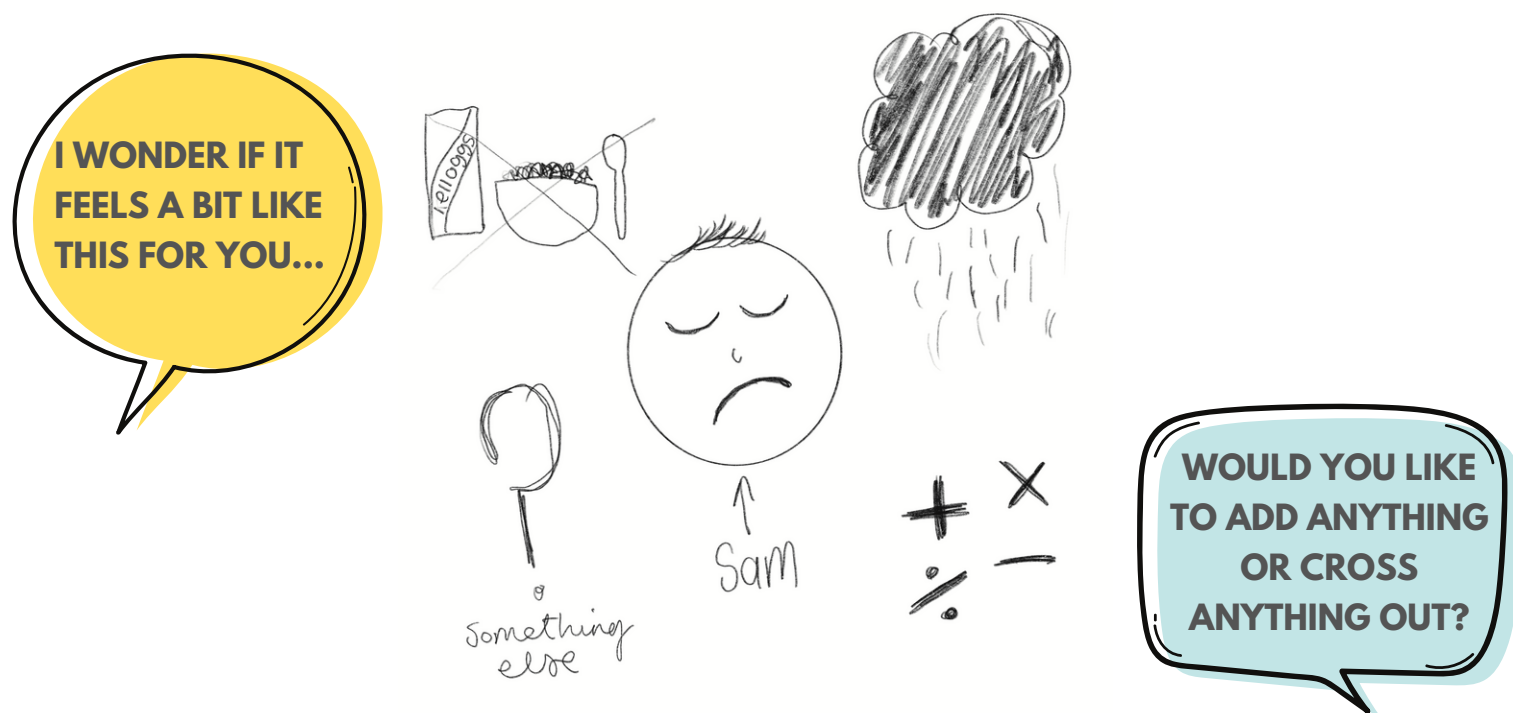
SAND AND MINIATURES:

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



DRAWING:

Based on your knowledge of the child, you may have an idea what might be going on for them, 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 box of cereal with a cross through it *"Hmm maybe you've not had breakfast"*, a rain cloud *"The weather is a bit rubbish today, which meant you couldn't ride your scooter to school"*, subject related symbols *"I know you had maths first thing which isn't your favourite"* etc. You can then pass the pen/pencil to the child, and ask them to make it right, with permission to cross things off and add to it. This can help you understand their experience, in ways that doesn't require words.



ENDINGS OR TRANSITIONS

Creative tools can be a helpful way of signifying the end of an intervention, or during 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 your favourite memory from sessions or from school, or a short encouraging quote that the young person can look back at.



'Transitional objects' are helpful for children and young people that find it difficult to be apart from a key adult in their life. The key adult (parent or education staff) could give a small object to the child they work with, such as a bracelet, a shell, a pen, a button. They keep this while they 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. The adult could draw a small red heart on the child's hand, as well as theirs.



This resource has been developed using a range of ideas and sources. Below are additional training, resources and reading that expand on the above ideas in more detail:

- Trauma Informed Schools <https://www.traumainformedschools.co.uk/>
- Thrive Approach <https://www.thriveapproach.com/>
- Theraplay <https://theraplay.org/>
- Relationship Based Play
- Draw on Your Emotions (2018) / Draw on Your Relationships (2019) – Margot Sunderland
- A Therapeutic Treasure Box for Working with Children and Adolescents with Developmental Trauma (2018) – Dr Karen Treisman
- Conversations that Matter. Talking with children and teenagers in ways that help (2015) – Margot Sunderland

On the **Cardiff and Vale Health board Children Young People and Family webpage**, you can find more resources, training and videos for education staff, parents/carers, and children and young people.

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