

NIDAS support for parents

# Supporting your child's emotional wellbeing



# How to nurture your child's mental health..



Actively listen before offering advice



Be patient



Model Healthy Behaviour



Tell the truth



Share your feelings and validate theirs



Limit electronic time for everyone



Practice relaxation exercises together



Be consistent and follow through with what you promise



Surround them with healthy adults



Have scheduled family time



Reach out and hug them



Teach them how to be safe



Use open-ended questions



Respond Calmly when their emotions are elevated



Believe them and in them



Model forgiveness

View their behaviour as window to their needs and feelings



Recognise positive choices



Make play and exercise a requirement



Set and respect boundaries



Be present

# Active Listening



1. Concentrate completely on what your child is saying.

Hearing is not listening. You should stop what you're doing. Crouch down to your child's level. Make eye contact with them. Put together, these 3 actions show your child that they have your full attention.

2. Avoid interrupting. Let your child finish their sentences at their own pace. It may be hard for them to find the correct words to use.

3. Repeat back to your child what they said. Once your child has finished speaking, say back to them what you've understood. It doesn't need to be the exact words – you can add details and suggest an emotion that they may be feeling. If you've got it right, your child will agree with you. If you're not clear whether your child is sad or angry or scared, it's okay to guess as your child may not know the correct word but you'll be able to work it out together.



# Practice Relaxation

Practice **deep breathing**. Focusing on the breath is an excellent starting point at any age. Ask your child to imagine filling his stomach and chest with air and then releasing it like a balloon. Taking five slow deep breaths will do the trick. The proper technique is to inhale and exhale deeply through your nose and out your mouth. Let your child know that deep breathing can be done anywhere when they're feeling stressed.

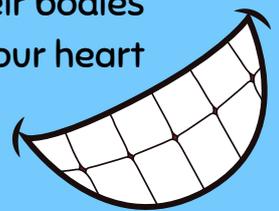
Play **music**. Does your child have some favorite songs? Take turns singing different parts or ask her to listen for specific notes. Close observation is a form of mindfulness.

Take a **walk**. You can also meditate or appreciate your surroundings while you're moving around. Go to the park together and identify as many different kinds of flowers as you can.

**Laugh**. Laughter has been proven to be an instant stress reliever. When you can, use humor so you and your child can have fun and be energized. Tell a funny joke or story, play a fun game or sing a silly song with your kids as you're driving. Watch humorous age-appropriate videos on YouTube together. Encouraging laughter in your home will create a peaceful environment you'll all enjoy.

**Smile**. Encourage your child to smile whenever possible. Smiling is proven to help relax and rejuvenate your body. Explain to your child that smiling will help to make them feel better because it releases chemicals in their bodies that make them feel good. In fact, smiling can even help to lower your heart rate and blood pressure.

Make it fun. Be sure to present relaxation practices as a helpful tool rather than punishment. Pay attention to your child's limits so they'll stay engaged.



# Ask open-ended questions



Open ended questions cannot be responded to with one word answers such as yes or no. These types of questions enables a child to provide a more detailed response and encourages a child to stimulate their thinking and develop their language skills. Open ended questions supports a child to focus and make meaning of their experiences and enables them to see various possibilities.



While engaging in conversation and you ask a child open ended questions, it shows that you are interested about what they are doing. Open ended questions encourages a child to:

- develop their language by using different words and a wider range of vocabulary to answer the question
- provide more information and details
- express their thoughts, ideas and opinions
- be creative
- develop positive relationships by engaging in meaningful conversations



Tell me about what you're doing?

Why do you think...?

How do you know...?

Why do you think this happened?

What will happen next?

How did this happen?

What can you do about it?

What do you think would work?

How do you think it could work?

Can you do it another way?

How are these the same?

How are these different?

What do you think comes next?

What else can you do? What does it remind you of?

I wonder why...

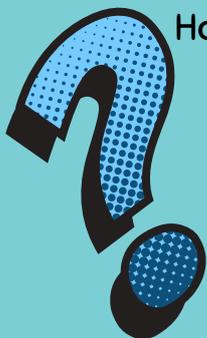
Why did you...

How did you do that? Show me how you...?

Tell me about...

Is there another way to...?

Why do you say that...





# Respond calmly

## Anger

When our children get upset and angry they aren't functioning in their thinking part of their brain, they are in their primitive emotional brain. They're literally so overwhelmed with emotions that they can't think straight.

### Stay calm

Anger builds on anger. If your child is angry and you respond to that anger with more anger, then your child's anger elevates, which elevates your anger, and then you're in a vicious angry cycle.

It's your job, as the parent to be the calming force to de-escalate the situation. Take a few cleansing breaths, remind yourself that this isn't an emergency, or walk away for a few moments until you can address the situation calmly.

Then, take steps to help your child. Whatever you do, do not discipline or punish if you're angry, it will just make it worse.

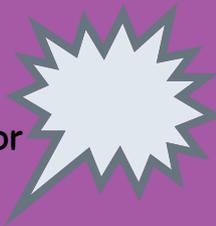
Look at what's really going on instead of focusing on the behavior of your child, take a deeper look and ask yourself a few questions: Why did my child just blow up? What does my child feel right now, and why? Were they caught off guard? Do they feel powerless? Are they hungry or tired? Take a few minutes and look at what's going on behind the behavior.

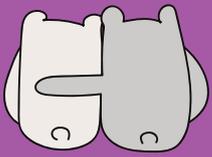
Then, once they are calm you can help them meet their needs.

When your child is upset, they can't listen to logic, and telling them to calm down won't work.

Help your child calm down by letting them know that you get it, you understand why they're upset. The best way to do this is called reflecting feelings. It's simple. Just tell your child that see how they are feeling. Wow! You are so mad right now. I know you're really upset with me. You really weren't happy with that decision. This does not mean that you agree with their feelings or their behaviors, but that you understand they're upset and you're willing to listen.

There's nothing more healing than having someone tell you "I get it." Put aside your child's behavior for a second, and see your child as hurting. Meet them in the emotional place they're already in and help them get calm.





# Acknowledge their feelings

## Anger

Take a deep breath. Remind yourself that there is no emergency. Keep yourself from moving into fight or flight. This will help calm your child, and model emotional regulation.

Remember that anger comes from our "fight, flight, or freeze" response. That means it's a defense against threat. Whatever's happening in the moment triggers old feelings, and we go into fight mode to try to stuff them down again.

Losses and disappointments can feel like the end of the world to a child, and kids will do anything to fend off these intolerable feelings, so they cry and rage and lash out. If they feel safe expressing their anger, and we meet that anger with compassion, their anger will begin to melt. That's when they can access the more upsetting feelings underneath. So while we honor our child's anger, it's the expression of the tears and fears beneath the anger that's

healing

Wait

Give your child space to feel their feelings and they'll be able to calm down on their own...eventually.

You could say: 'I can see you're angry, I'll wait until you're calm.'

'I know you're mad, but I'm ready to talk to you when you're calmer.'

Ensure that you are safe, by setting boundaries on actions, but not feelings!

For example: 'I see how angry you are. You can hit the pillow, or push against my hands, but I won't let you hurt me.'

or

If you need to move away to stay safe, tell them, 'I won't let you hurt me, so I'm moving back a bit, but I am right here. Whenever you're ready for a hug, I'm here.' If they yell at you to 'Go away!' say, 'You're telling me to go away, so I am moving back a step, ok? I won't leave you alone with these scary feelings, but I will move back.'

Acknowledging their anger will help them calm down and show them that you empathise and you are there to support them. Often anger comes from a store of hurt and difficult feelings and it only takes one thing too many to push them over the edge. Often a child's angry outburst is not just a reaction to the situation. By acknowledging their feelings and supporting them you are showing them they are not alone and that it is ok to be upset.

Once your child starts to calm down you can talk to them about what has upset them, for example: 'I'm so sorry you can't have the \_\_\_\_\_ you want, I'm sorry this is so hard. Then you can give them a hug to show them love and



support.





# Forgiveness

Forgiveness is different from pardoning, condoning, excusing, or reconciling. Forgiveness has to do with making a decision to free yourself from holding on to resentment and feelings of revenge toward someone who hurt you.

Retaliation may be children's first response to others who have offended and hurt them. Even though retaliation is risky, kids may feel like they are merely responding in kind and offering a warning to those who might provoke them in the future. But acting with vengeance comes at a high cost: Vengeful kids may become more withdrawn, be less accepted and more rejected by other kids, and have fewer or lower-quality friendships. On the other hand, choosing to forgive can de-escalate a cycle of conflict and preserve a valuable friendship.

## Model forgiveness within the family

Parents can teach their children about the value of forgiveness by regularly practicing it in their own lives.

## Support children's capacity to respond to their strong emotions

Being able to stay calm and not respond to impulses may help kids to consider forgiveness as an alternative when they've been wronged by someone, rather than act on a knee-jerk urge to retaliate.

What can parents do to help? Playing dress-up with silly costumes and encouraging kids to use their imaginations to be characters in fantastical worlds isn't just fun; it allows kids to practice becoming aware of, embodying, and responding to various emotions. Support your child in recognising and expressing their emotions and spend some time with them talking about their emotions and how they make them feel. By being open about their feelings they may be able to regulate their emotions easier and find ways to keep calm in stressful situations.

## Discuss how people can do hurtful things by accident

Children tend to be more forgiving when they give their friends the benefit of the doubt. Children might turn to their parents when they are not sure whether a peer harmed them on purpose, and that moment could be an opportunity to help children consider forgiveness. When watching movies or reading books you can talk to your child about people's actions and why they act that way, to help them understand why accidents happen.

Forgiveness might not be the first choice that grownups and children think about because being hurt by family, friends, or peers can feel overwhelming. But choosing forgiveness helps kids to feel empowered by releasing them from the heavy burden of anger and vengeance.



# Play and exercise

## Build a fort

Use cushions, sheets and chairs to build a fort at home. Decorate it with some lights, pillows and blankets. Maybe have a picnic in there, or a movie night. It can be a safe space to relax and have some fun.



## Make finger puppets.

Draw your own or find pictures of your favourite characters. Make sure the pictures are finger width. Print, colour, and tape the puppet to fit either yours or your child's fingers. Create your own stories with your favourite characters.

## Put on a play with stuffed animals

Set up a stage by draping a sheet over a chair so your child can stay hidden behind the chair. Use stuffed animals to put on a play. Record it and watch it over and over again. It will be something fun your child can watch and be proud that they created something!

## Dance Party!

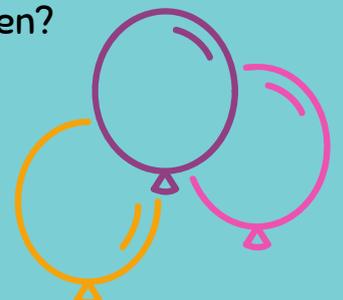
Having a dance party can be fun and is also a great way to exercise. You can put up some lights, put on party clothes and play your favourite music. It is a great way to have some fun and create some happy memories.

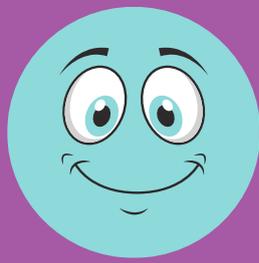
## Obstacle course

Set up an obstacle course in your house to help them burn off some energy. Each obstacle can be a different challenge to give them something fun today and to keep them active.

Ideas:

- Carry teddy on your head from the kitchen to the front door without dropping him
- Make a tunnel out of bed sheets to crawl through and help your teddies get through
- Build a house out of pillows (Can you make a door so you can fit inside?)
- Can you roll to the bottom of the garden and back without getting dizzy?
  - How many somersaults can you do down the garden?





# Share feelings



## Feelings Charades

Print/Draw pictures of different feelings, or write emotions on pieces of paper and take it in turns to pick one to act out.

### Name feelings

Get into the habit of labeling the feelings you believe your child is experiencing. For example, if your child runs up to you and hugs you as you walk through the door, you can say something like “someone is excited to see me” or “someone is happy I’m home.” Labeling your child’s feelings as they happen helps them to build their feelings vocabulary.

This can build up to you asking them how they are feeling to help encourage them to talk openly about their feelings.



### Character feelings



When you read to your child, discuss how the characters in the story are feeling. Point out any clues that lets you know what they are feeling such as facial expressions or behaviors. Then explain to your child why the characters feel the way they do. If your child is able to, let them take a turn identifying how the characters are feeling and why.

### Model healthy expression

Children are always watching us and like sponges they soak everything up.

Good and bad. If your child sees you expressing your feelings in a positive way, over time they learn to do the same. However, if they see you yelling and throwing things when you get upset, they are more likely to mimic this behaviour.

### Praise and positive encouragement

Praise your child when they use words to express their feelings. Having the self-control to express your feelings appropriately is no easy feat. There are many adults who are unable to do this. When your child tells you how they are feeling instead of having a complete melt down, praise them for doing so. Be very specific. For example, “I like how you told your sister that you were sad when she called you names. That was very mature of you.” Praising your child for practicing good behaviour makes them more likely to do it again in the future. It also lets them know that you are watching them and notice when they do good things.



# Understanding behaviour

## Acting out when asked to do something new

It is common for children to feel insecure when they are starting a new activity or there is a change in their routine. If you notice that your child tends to get clingy or acts out when they are being asked to adapt to something that is not their idea, they may need you to help them ease into the change.

## Can't sit still

Children have an innate need to move around and for some children this need is higher than for others. If you notice that your child is constantly getting in trouble for jumping on furniture, running around the house, and refusing to sit still he may need more outdoor time and less scheduled activity.

## 'Tantrums'

Pay attention to when the tantrums happen, who is present, what your child is asking for and what happens after the tantrum ends. Patterns will help you identify what they need and you can help them learn ways of expressing themselves. You may notice that they occur before mealtimes (hunger) or before bedtime or after they have stayed up late (tiredness). When a child needs something and is feeling overwhelmed, they lose the ability to ask for what they want. You can help by remaining calm and acknowledging what you think they are feeling. During these times a gentle hug or hand on their shoulder can go a long way in helping them to calm down.

## Being bossy

It is developmentally appropriate for children to explore their independence beginning at the age of 3. If you notice that your child refuses to do things the way you asked them to they may need you to give them more freedom.

Although children thrive on having clear and consistent boundaries and expectations they also need to be allowed to make many small choices. Let them pick from two different outfits you put out in the morning. Let them decide if they would rather have milk or water with their lunch. Ask them to choose what you eat for dinner one meal a week. Maybe they can choose what movie you watch one night?



# Be together



## Thought Busters

Duration: 5 Minutes

Age: 6+

Instructions: Sit down together and each pay attention to the thoughts going on in your head. To make this easier first sit for a couple of minutes and breathe in and out, focusing on the breath entering and leaving your body. Then pay attention to one thought in your head. Watch the thought, watch how it changes. Then imagine poking the thought with a pin and watch it fly away. We can learn that thoughts come and go, they aren't necessarily reality and they can easily change or disappear. This exercise helps children learn to pay attention to what they are thinking. It's a skill that will follow them throughout their lives and help them to recognize negative, or harmful thought patterns, and by recognizing them they can work to change them.



## Counting Breaths

Duration: 1 Minute

Age: 2+



Instructions: When your child is overwhelmed, whether it be overstimulated or upset. Ask them to take 10 deep breaths. Count together out loud. Say 1, deep breath in, 2, deep breath out. 3 deep breath in, 4 deep breath out. Rest your hands on your belly, notice your hands moving each time you breathe in and out. Breathe deep, right now into your belly on your inhale. Underneath your belly button. Hold your breath for 3 seconds. Exhale deeply.

Variations: Imagine a sailboat that rises and falls with each breath. Can you envision your breath as a colour? Your favorite colour perhaps?



## Silly Puddy Stretch

Duration: 2 Minutes

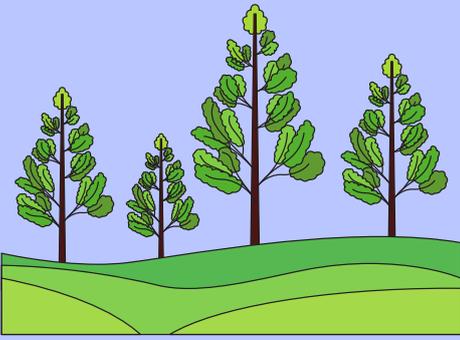
Age: 4+



Instructions: Upon waking up (or before bed), ask your little one to stand tall at the foot of the bed (or beside). Guide them in this three-part stretch. Circle arms up to the sky. (Sun Salutations) Hold and breathe for a count of two. Swoop your arms below your knees and hang there for a count of two breaths. Feel your neck relax. Swoop back up to standing position and bring your hands in prayer position at your heart.



# Be together



## Watchful Walk

Duration: 15 Minutes

Age: 4+

Instructions: Go for a stroll and designate 5 minutes of your walk to discuss what your little one sees, feels, hears, and smells. Designate short periods of time to zone into your senses. LOOK at the trees, dandelions, butterflies. Try to find bugs, ants, and other creepy crawly's. LISTEN for birds, woodpeckers, and lawnmowers. FEEL the weather and the sensations in your body.

SMELL the flowers, spring scents, or even rain.

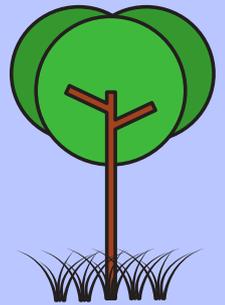
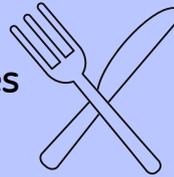


## Dinner Dates

Duration: 20 Minutes

Age: 5+

Supplies: Dinner



As often as possible sit down to eat dinner together – minimize distractions. No phones and other devices. Share a moment of silence before you eat. Take a moment to be grateful for each other and the food you are about to eat. Expressing gratitude cultivates kindness and thoughtfulness. During dinner, each takes a turn telling each other the best part of your day. This is a great way to build your relationship with your child and your happy memories together.



## Thirsty Plants

Duration: 10 Minutes

Age: 3+

Supplies: Watering can



The act of watering the plants can be a great way to calm down. There is something soothing and therapeutic about it. Spending time with nature and spending time together is a wonderful way to deepen your relationship while invoking a sense of peace and calm into your body. Invest in two watering cans, one for you and one for your child. Make it a routine to water your plants together. While watering the plants talk about how alive the plants are and take a moment to examine their leaves and color.

Pro Tip: In the summer, don't wait till your kids are in bed to water the gardens, do it together. It's a great exercise for you both.

