



MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING IN THE EARLY YEARS

SEMH
Toolkit

GROUP CONTRACT

- Confidentiality
- Take responsibility for what you share
- Turn mobile phones to off or silent
- Respect contribution of others
- Attend all sessions
- Personal reflection

WORKSHOP AIMS

- Gain skills and confidence in promoting and supporting positive mental health and wellbeing in the early years
- Understand different approaches and interventions to respond to SEMH needs

TRAUMA- INFORMED PRACTICE IN THE EARLY YEARS



ARC FRAMEWORK

Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019



Attachment

- **Attunement:** helping staff to make sense of and deepen their understanding of individual children's behaviour, and enhancing their relationships with children
- **Effective responses:** supporting staff to respond in an effective and trauma-informed way to behaviour
- **Caregiver affect management:** working with staff to become more aware of their own emotional responses to behaviour



Regulation

- **Identification:** Support children to develop their awareness and understanding of their feelings, associated thoughts and behaviours
- **Modulation:** build children's capacity to tolerate their physiological and emotional experiences and learn the skills needed to self-regulate



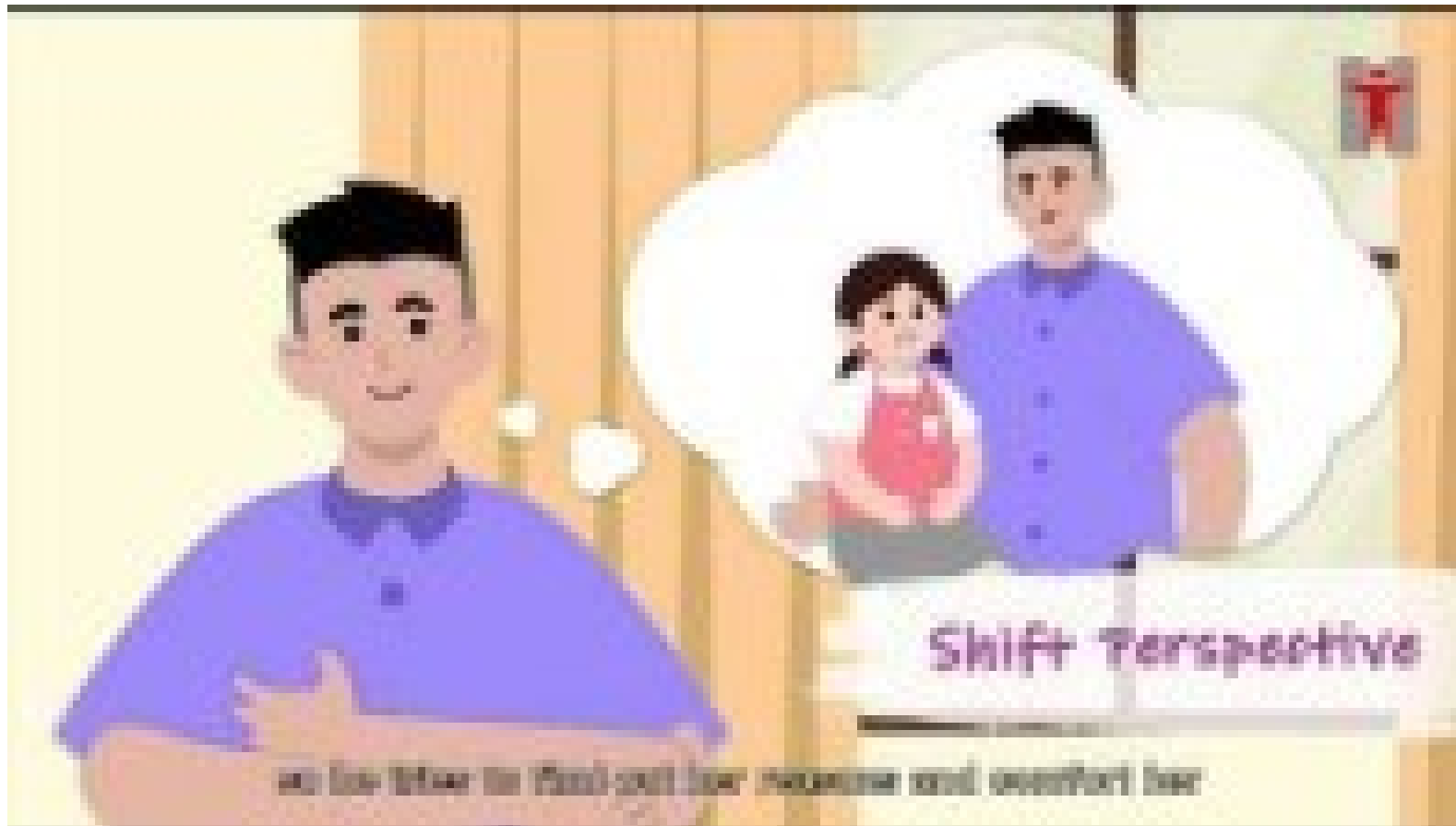
Competency

- **Executive functioning:** build skills by working alongside children to solve problems, evaluate and make decisions
- **Self development & identity:** supporting children to explore, reflect and accept who they are as individuals and help them make sense of their life experiences
- **Relational connection:** increasing capacity to tolerate, build, sustain and repair relationships

TRAUMA- INFORMED CHECKLIST

- Nurturing and responsive relationships (foster relationships that emphasize attachment, trust, collaboration, empowerment)
- Create a safe learning environment using positive directions and rules
- Create calm predictable transitions
- Help children regulate their emotions and express their feelings appropriately
- Intensive interventions that consider the child's experiences

EMOTION COACHING



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01

BE AWARE OF THE CHILD'S FEELING

- Label the feeling
- Validate the emotion
- Listen and respond with empathy

"I can see that you get angry when that happens. I would get angry if that happened to me. It's normal to feel like that"

"I'm noticing you keep looking round at the others in the group and are struggling to settle. I'm wondering if you're feeling quite worried about the work you're trying to complete?"

02

SETTING LIMITS

- Communicate clear boundaries
- Separate the feeling from behaviour
- Retain connection

"It's OK to feel angry but it's not OK to hurt yourself or anyone else"

"We can't behave like that, even if you are feeling very frustrated, because it isn't safe for you or the others in the classroom."

03

PROBLEM SOLVING

- Explore the feeling triggers
- Scaffold alternative ideas
- Empower the child

"This is not a safe place to be angry. Let's find a safe space where we can talk. Where could we go?"

"Next time you're feeling like this, what could you do? How do you think you could react differently next time?"

"What would feel most helpful to you right now?"

COMMUNICATION STYLES

What is your communication style?

Dismissive

- Avoids emotion
- Uses distraction
- Uncomfortable with 'negative' feelings
- Jumps straight to problem solving

Disapproving

- Judges and criticises emotions
- Being emotional viewed as a weakness
- Fears emotional displays are manipulation

Laissez faire

- Lots of empathy but no limits
- Shows own emotions but lacks ability to manage them

Emotion Coaching

- Uses empathy to connect
- Accepts all emotions as ok & healthy
- Separates feelings from behaviour
- Remains calm
- Self-awareness
- Helps child address issues



PACE



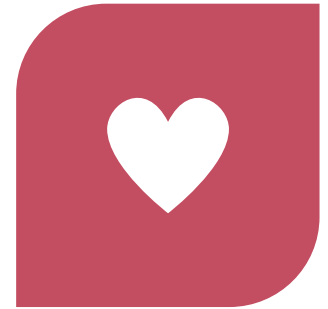
PLAYFULNESS



ACCEPTANCE



CURIOSITY



EMPATHY

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING OUTDOORS?

Builds confidence

Promotes creativity and imagination

Teaches responsibility

Provides different stimulation

Gets children moving

Gives space for reflection

Reduces stress and fatigue

CASE STUDY: RISE & SHINE WELLBEING

'Tree-Babies' objectives:

- To allow parents the opportunity to engage with their baby in a safe, therapeutic environment within a group setting of their peers thus providing opportunities to promote attachment, attunement and play skills, alongside developing care-giver social skills, confidence and peer relationships within a nature-rich, motivating environment.
- To promote the mental health and emotional wellbeing of infants and their parents via symptom reduction in the outdoors

Facilitated by and Infant Mental Health Key Worker & a Yoga & Meditation Instructor



Nature faces

Making faces showing different emotions out of natural materials

Feelings



Playing together

- Go on a hunt for materials – ask the children to collect things in the garden or park which they could use to make faces.
- Put all the materials in the middle and draw circles on the floor in chalk for children to create their faces in.
- Demonstrate making a happy face from the natural materials e.g. stones for eyes, sticks and leaves to make a smile.
- Show a photo of a sad face. Ask everyone to make their own natural face which shows the feeling on the card. Talk about each other's faces; discussing the different materials used and when they may have felt this particular feeling. Repeat with other emotions.

You will need

- A collection of natural materials found outside (sticks, leaves, flowers, stones)
- Chalk
- A selection of photos of faces showing different feelings



More ideas



- For younger children, you may want to mark out on the face where the eyes, nose, ears and mouth go so they know where to put their objects.
- For older children, you could ask one person to make a face and the rest of the group has to guess what the emotion is.



PLAY AND CREATIVITY

- All you need for this is some paper and coloured pens, paints or crayons.
 - Take a moment to check-in with yourself.
- What emotions are present for you today? Can you feel these in your body? Maybe you feel tired and a heaviness in your shoulders or excited with butterflies in your tummy.
- Try to name the different feelings you are experiencing. Write each one down.
- Now close your eyes and think about what colour each feeling would be. What size or shape would your feelings be? How do the different feelings fit together?
- Without thinking about it draw or paint your feelings on to the paper in whatever way feels right for you.

MINDFULNESS

BBC Radio 5 Live – #mumtakeover,
Mindfulness for babies



STORYTIME

'Cultivating an enjoyment of books and stories from an early age can offer children a strong foundation for healthy emotional development as they grow, providing gentle yet vital support in helping children process how they are feeling.'

Diana Gerald, CEO of Book Trust

Storytime: 'I feel'

Build up an emotion vocabulary bank by sharing stories about feelings

Communication



Playing together

- Either share the book or watch the reading online together.
- Choose specific pictures from the book (or freeze the online version) to explore the different feelings the characters in the book could be experiencing. Use the thought bubble for this, stick the appropriate feelings flash card on the thought bubble above that character. You may need to demonstrate this first.
- You can also ask the children what the characters in the story said about their feelings and practice saying these together – writing answers on the speech bubbles.

You will need

- Books about feelings: Partnership for Children's Good Books for Tough Times or The Colour Monster – Anna Llenas, Ruby's Worries – Tom Percival, The Worrysaurs – Rachel Bright and Chris Chatterton
- Thought and speech bubble template
- Feelings and emotions flash cards



More ideas

- Provide appropriate small world resources, puppets or other props for the book(s) you have shared to give your children more opportunity to re-enact the story.



REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

What has inspired or excited you in today's workshop?

How could you use or apply one of the ideas from the SEMH toolbox?