

CONNECTION, PRESENCE AND LOVE

REST Play

CHILDREN'S SAFETY NET

SOCIAL SKILLS

DEVELOPING MIND

WELL BEING OF A CHILD'S MIND

CRISIS AND COPING

SELF-ESTEEM

DAILY RHYTHM

Emotions



HOW DO YOU ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO LISTEN TO THEIR CHILDREN AND ENGAGE WITH THEM?

1 CONNECTION, PRESENCE AND LOVE

At the heart of children's mental health is the love, tenderness and genuine presence of those dearest to them. Tenderness and love are conveyed to children as daily acts and friendly words. Mental health is built on the joy of life, songs and rhymes, caring and being available to one another.

In which situations did you stop and listen to a child today? How do you show children that you are there specifically for them?

Taking delight in children

Children's mental health is built on the knowledge that they are accepted and loved and bring joy to their loved ones and others around them. Becoming heard and being seen are particularly important experiences for children. Connecting with and understanding children is crucial to mental health promotion. Adults hold the responsibility and power for the wellbeing of children. Children who are supported and encouraged by adults learn to value and love themselves and respect others. It is children's right to experience love, feel safe and be cared for.

Through their mere existence, children welcome endearments and naturally give permission to them. Children are masters of breaking boundaries, which is why their presence brings new dimensions to adult world. Children's effervescence grows with emotional attachments based on love.

Respect and empathetic listening

Adults' courage to daydream and their positive attitude to life are reflected on children. The images and expectations adults create of the future are an inseparable part of children's life and the environment they grow in. The acts and attitudes of the adults in children's life have an impact on their self-image and courage.

Empathetic listening is an integral part of a respectful and mindful encounter. Adults can show empathy by ensuring that children feel that they are visible to adults around them and that they listen to them. In all encounters, it is essential that both parties respect and value one another. Engaging with another person means active presence, listening, seeing and answering.

HOW DID YOU ENGAGE WITH A CHILD, WHO WAS HAVING A TANTRUM TODAY?

” Playfulness is an integral part of activities for both adults and children – or at least it should be. Taking turns, encouragement, cheering on and instigating silliness spread wellbeing and trigger the care system.”
(Sajaniemi & Mäkelä 2014)





WHAT ROLE DOES SENSITIVITY PLAY IN YOUR WORK?

Every child has the right and need to experience love

- Love creates a foundation for positive development.
- Love offers a basis for children's emotional life, social life and mental health.
- Love does not expect children to have any specific characteristics, but it enables the development of positive ones.
- Love is not based on the benefits, joy or safety the giver may expect to gain.
- Children should never have to fight for love.
- Love is not based on external factors, but on the awareness of love as an intrinsic value.
- The amount of love should never be regulated based on what we imagine the child deserves.
- Love does not need explanations or special reasons.

(Puolimatka 2010)

Thus, words, gestures and facial expressions convey genuine acceptance and respect.

Empathy and caring help adults find positive attributes in children whose behaviour is challenging. Sensitive adults notice when children need help and comforting and soothe them. Sensitivity refers to the ability to engage with children on an emotional level. This requires positive and genuine emotional expression – adults smiling at children, taking delight in them and openly showing their feelings and conveying them. It also means that adults take the time to acknowledge children's grief and respect their feelings of disappointment, instead of bypassing them with a shrug. Numerous things impact children's growth and development, and we cannot protect them from everything. However, we can offer them good advice, which helps them cope in life. All this can be communicated through enthusiastic encouragement, a warm tone of voice, a friendly look and a gentle touch.

Empathetic listening and the ability to engage are important tools in child health clinics and ECEC and can be used to promote the mental health of all children and to maintain easy interaction with parents. Everyone working with children can strengthen these skills and make them a key part of their work.

What is love?
child asks
in the warmth of your lap.
Love is
holding you,
you say,
your fingers gently slipping
through the delicate hair.
Delicate like child's hair
is love,
as fragile,
as clean and robust.
Why do you then
never sit on my lap?
child asks solemnly,
and won't accept that
one love would be
smaller or greater than another.
Tommy Taberman

About pedagogic love

Educators' pedagogic love means that children get to experience a sense of belonging, for example, in day care and that educators' genuinely care for and accept them and show interest in what they do and learn. (Uusikylä 2003)

Connecting with children to support mental health

FORMING A CONNECTION

- Emotional skills + social skills = interactive skills
- Interactive skills + mindful presence = connection

(Tiina Rönning)

SENSITIVE EDUCATOR

- uses positive and transparent emotional expression
- encourages
- has a warm tone of voice
- acknowledges the importance of eye contact and touch
- is available for the child.

COMPETENCE TO CONNECT

- the competence to connect protects and strengthens the mental health of adults and children.
- connecting and engaging with an adult supports children's self-esteem and creates a safe and encouraging atmosphere in interactive situations.

Better encounters at child health clinics

- Bring up an issue. Ask and specify. By specifying you show that you are listening.
- Move from problem-based approach to resource- and solution-oriented approach: change problems into goals.
- Pay attention to what works, and provide positive feedback. That empowers people.
- Remind yourself to be interested time and time again in each customer and their issues.
- Remember that you do not need to solve the problem, but you can help people find solutions.
- Remember that a problem is only one part of that person's life.
- Often all that customers need is an opportunity to share their problem with a person who listens and shows interest.
- Help customers see hope and possibilities.
- Instruct people who to contact next if needed.
- Find solutions together through discussions – where else could help be found?
- Look after your own wellbeing and find out about your possibilities to receive professional guidance.

(Karila-Hietala, Piha)

Cooperation with parents

Use the Pinwheel of Wellbeing poster and its tools in your day care centre's parent evenings and in child health clinics' family guidance. Try using the picture cards and art cards to support discussions and encounters.





Mice run – rhythm instrument activity

Children have maracas, egg shakers, egg maracas or other percussion shakers. The children start playing their instruments whilst the instructor repeats “Mice are running, mice are running”. When the instructor bangs the drum, the mice stop and stay “quiet as a mouse”, because the cat is near-by and mustn’t notice the mice. The activity continues for as long as the children’s concentration allows. Towards the end of the game, everyone plays their instrument very fast to make sure the mice make it to their home before the cat catches them. The musical activity ends with a final beat of the drum.

The activity is based on the two opposites of “sound and silence”. Even one-year-old children can learn to stop playing their instrument when they hear the drum, if they are encouraged to do so. The instructor can emphasise the silence by whispering that the cat is close-by and lifting the finger in front of the lips as a sign of silence. When everyone knows the game, children can also take up the role of the drummer. The mood can be further heightened by bringing out a cat soft toy or pictures of cats.

When the children run together and go to the shared hiding place at the beat of the drum, they share an experience. The activity also strengthens their interaction. The children might feel a bit fidgety, but they will find support in one another. They will also learn to listen to the silence. That enforces their mindful presence.

(Paasolainen, T. 2009. Pienestä laulusta iso ilo)



Intensifying and quietening – rhythm instrument activity

Children sit in a circle on the floor. Each child is given a rhythm instrument, which is placed on the floor in front of the child. When an adult softly taps a child on the shoulder, the child picks the instrument up and plays it. When the adult moves from child to child, the music intensifies. The children can continue playing until the adult touches each child’s shoulder again to mark that they must put the instrument on the floor again. The music stops when the adult touches the last player.

This activity plays with the opposites “quietly and loudly” and “intensifying and quietening” as well as “sound and silence”. The children’s social skills are enforced as they wait for their turn to play, and the group’s team spirit deepens through the shared experience of playing an instrument. Depending on the skills of the group, the exercise can also be done with the children holding the instruments in their hands from the beginning. If the children know one another well, the instructor might ask the children to keep their eyes closed throughout the activity. That sharpens their capacity to listen and concentrate and enables the children to sense the different colours attached to sounds and the mood of the activity. Smaller children can do a more simplified version of the activity with the adult saying the name of the child who can start and stop playing.

Each sound belongs to the soundscape just as it comes. Everything is correct as long as the child has the patience to start and stop when the instructor gives the signal. A soft tap on the shoulder is an intimate gesture that creates a positive sensation. It gives its own warm tone to this activity. When you close your eyes, your ability to listen strengthens and there is more room for the imagination. The activity works as a relaxing shared experience, and everyone who is present has a role to play.

(Paasolainen, T. 2009. Pienestä laulusta iso ilo)



Security toy

The children are asked to choose one toy that makes them feel safe. It can be a soft toy for instance. The children place the toy of their choice around the edges of the room. The music plays and the children can move around the room freely. As the adult stops the music and shouts out the word “safety”, the children have to run to their toy. After the safety game, the children form a circle and join in a group hug.



Feather

The children are divided into pairs and each pair gets one feather. The children take turns in touching their partner with the feather whilst the other one tries to name the part of their body the feather has touched.



Let's look at art: Kaarina Antintytär

This artwork is by Venny Soldan-Brofeldt. It is called Kaarina Antintytär. The artwork was painted in 1933 with oil paints on canvas. The size of the painting is 51.5 x 35.5 cm.

This painting by Venny has warm tones and a peaceful and kind feel to it. The painting pictures a girl sitting holding a rabbit on her lap. This type of a painting is called a portrait. This portrait is unusual because it includes an animal, a rabbit. At the time when Venny painted this artwork, approximately 80 years ago, animals did normally not appear in portraits.

The girl in the painting sits leisurely cuddling a rabbit. She holds the rabbit gently. It looks like the rabbit may be the girl's friend. The white rabbit looks really soft. The girl has some greenery in her hand for the rabbit to eat. Do you think the girl and the rabbit have played and chatted before this moment? What do you think they might have played? Do you think the girl can speak “rabbit language”?

It looks like there may be a book case behind the girl and the chair. Can you see it? Do you think it is the girl's book case? Or whose could it be? Which books might we find there? I wonder if the girl's favourite storybook is in the book case, what do you think?

The girl in the painting is Venny's granddaughter. The girl must be very dear to her grandmother, because she has painted a portrait of her. The painting is called Kaarina Antintytär. Kaarina Antintytär (Antti's daughter) is also the real name of the girl in the painting. Nowadays, it is unusual to give a name that tells whose daughter or son you are. But the name of the girl in the painting tells that her father's name is Antti. What would your name be if you had been named after your mum or dad as his or her son or daughter? Do you know someone who has a name like that?



Let's make graphic art!

Let's make a picture of a toy or an imaginary creature using graphics. First we will think about our favourite toy or a fairy-tale character together. You can also imagine what your imaginary friend may look like.

There is magic in making graphic art, and you can use your imagination. There are many materials on which you can carve or scratch your picture before it is printed. Our imagination is the only limit to making graphic art. When we print the picture, it becomes a mirror image of the original carving, and the mood of the picture changes as the colours change.

- What does it mean that you are someone's grandchild?
- Imagine what it would be like to cuddle a rabbit. How would it feel?
- What kinds of feelings does the girl have for the rabbit? What does it feel like to be near an animal?
- What is the girl thinking of? And what might the rabbit be thinking about?
- What is the mood like in the painting?
- Have you ever pretended to be an animal? What would it be like to pretend to be a rabbit?
- What do you think the girl and the rabbit will do after the moment pictured in the painting?
- What would you call this painting?
- Does the painting make you think of any story?



KAARINA
1933

