

Healthy Body, Happy Me 2024

Respond to me



Respond to me

As children explore the world, practitioners are like lighthouses helping them to guide and navigate their earliest, most formative years.

Every interaction you have with a child is an opportunity for connection, a chance for them to express their thoughts, feelings and ideas and for you to respond to their uniqueness with empathy and understanding. You have the chance to ensure children know that they matter, their expressions are valued and their development is nurtured with the greatest of care.

Dr. Suzanne Zeedyk, a developmental psychologist, has extensively studied the significance of responsive caregiving in the context of brain development. She emphasises the importance of early experiences and advocates for a deeper understanding of the impact that all caregivers have on shaping a child's neural pathways and, as a result, their overall future development and well-being.

Being responsive to a young child's needs not only provides comfort and feelings of safety but actively influences the formation of neural connections. The neural pathways in a baby's brain are built on the foundation of their early experiences. Every sight, sound, touch and interaction shapes a child's developing brain.

Responsive actions from practitioners working in the early years help to establish strong foundations for emotional regulation, socio-emotional skills and overall cognitive development, so it is imperative that we place this at the centre of the work we do with children. Today's activities have been devised with the theme of 'respond to me' at their heart.



Learn together



Activity 1 What does my friend need?

Learning how to recognise and respond to our basic needs is a life skill. Supporting children to become independent and care for themselves promotes confidence, self-esteem, motivation and resilience. Encouraging self-awareness and responsibility also helps children make healthy choices for themselves and others.

This activity will help children recognise and understand their own basic needs, such as hunger, thirst, staying warm when it's cold and cool when it's warm, and also learn to recognise the needs of others, which will encourage self-awareness and foster empathy. It will help older children identify ways to meet these needs independently.

Activity outline

Ask the children to consider how they need to dress for the weather today. Ideally, do this outside so that children are not guessing and can actually feel if it's warm, cold, windy etc. Ask children why they suggest the clothes they do, e.g. "Why would/wouldn't you choose a sunhat today?" Find out how they know if they are warm or cold. You may need to model some descriptive language, e.g. "I feel shivery."

In pairs, children ask each other how their bodies are feeling. Encourage them to say how they know, e.g. "My nose feels cold when I touch it." Once they've answered, the friend suggests a solution, e.g. a hat to warm your head.

Continue this format to encourage them to think about signs of hunger or thirst and to find their own solutions.



Preparing drinks for friends



Resources

- A range of different clothes and accessories.
- Healthy snacks
- Water in bottles/cups.



Sharing is caring



Activity 2 Cuddle corner

The inclination to cuddle is a natural and physical response that is deeply embedded in human nature. Cuddling and physical closeness are ways for parents, carers and practitioners to form secure attachments with a child, soothe their emotions, promote feelings of safety and aid the formation of neural pathways.

Physical touch triggers the release of hormones such as oxytocin, which promotes bonding, and lowers cortisol levels, which alleviates stress and induces a feeling of calm. It forms a connection between the caregiver and the child, allowing them to respond to the child's needs and emotions and supporting them to regulate their emotions.

Activity outline

To foster children's mental and physical skills for self-regulation and feelings of safety, encourage children to sit close together, cuddle soft toys or, with consent, each other while you read a story that promotes the theme of kindness/togetherness, e.g. *We Are Together* by Britta Teckentrup.

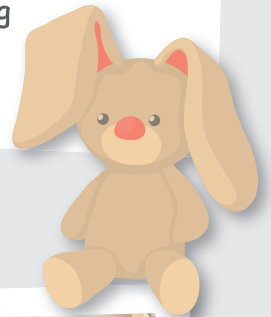
Encourage children to express their feelings and thoughts, creating a cosy atmosphere that encourages sharing and bonding together and prompt interactions by asking how the characters might be feeling.

After the story, encourage the children to engage in friendly hugs or gentle pats. Practitioners can participate to ensure a warm and inclusive environment.



Resources

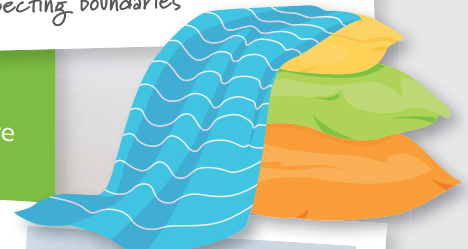
- Cosy, quiet, safe space
- Soft cushions/blankets
- Soft, warm lighting
- Storybooks
- Soft toys.



Respecting boundaries

Top tip

Individual preferences to physical touch vary - agree other ways to share togetherness, such as sitting close or sharing a cuddly toy.



Cuddle time!



Activity 3 Once upon a nature walk

Children have an innate drive for interactions and responses from others to develop and thrive. An attuned, responsive adult plays a pivotal role in providing the necessary environment to facilitate meaningful interaction.

This activity fosters communication by intertwining sensory experiences with nature-inspired storytelling, allowing children to express themselves verbally and non-verbally and enhancing their communication skills.

Activity outline

Accompany the children to collect natural items from outside. As you find things, describe what you've found, how it looks, feels or smells. Use your body and face to express how the items make you feel. This will serve as a model for the language/feelings you hope to elicit later.

Ask the children to lay out their collection. Encourage them to interact with the items and describe the features using words, e.g. soft, rough, sweet smelling etc. or non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and gestures.

Begin narrating a story and integrate the natural items into it; encourage the children to make suggestions, e.g. "Once upon a time, in a land where trees giggled and leaves sparkled, Woody Walter (twig) hopped into the forest to explore...". Small stones could be stepping stones, leaves could be wings, or flowers be magical. Encourage children to engage with the story using words and/or actions, making it accessible to everyone. Afterwards, display the items so children can make up their own stories.



Resources

- A blanket/fabric in a quiet area (outside or in)
- Natural items (leaves, pinecones, stones etc.) collected by the children
- Small basket/bag for collecting.



Let your imagination run wild

Activity 4 Munching maths

Routines provide structure, stability and a sense of security and they can also be a time to develop children's skills. Snack time offers an opportunity to explore and develop mathematical concepts such as counting, sorting based on attributes such as colour, understanding shape, e.g. a round biscuit and division, as they share apple pieces equally between other children. These enhance maths skills as well as promoting social skills, as children communicate and collaborate during this communal experience.

Activity outline

During snack time, practitioners can support children to:

- **Develop counting skills:** one-to-one correspondence, e.g. matching the cups to plates, counting orange segments etc. supporting children to touch/point/say the name of the number for each item as they count
- **More/less:** Encourage children to take one more and say how many they have got, eat one (take away) and say how many left, who has more on their plate
- **Match and compare size/shape of food:** Use language of comparison, e.g. bigger than, smaller than, same as
- **Sort and classify:** Focus on properties of food, plates etc., encouraging children to find similarities and differences
- **Estimate and compare:** Encourage children to estimate number/size of food items (how many apple slices on the plate), the quantity of liquid/food or the capacity of containers
- **Pattern recognition:** Create simple patterns with pieces of fruit and/or vegetables, identify patterns on fruit skin, containers, table or mats.



Resources

- Different coloured plates/cups, serving dishes
- Child safe knives, chopping boards
- Number cards with matching dots.



Spot the difference

Extension idea

Introduce maths concepts into other routines, e.g. compare patterns/shapes on wellies.



Further resources, links and stories:

Maths Champions

www.ndna.org.uk/maths

PANCo - NDNA training

www.ndna.org.uk/PANCo

Your Essential Guide to
Working with Children Under
Three - NDNA publication

www.ndna.org.uk/underthree

Creative Storytelling in the
Early Years - NDNA training

www.ndna.org.uk/storytelling

Everything your setting needs

www.hope-education.co.uk



National Day Nurseries Association

At NDNA, we don't just provide nursery membership, lobby government and offer training, we are dedicated to making a difference. We are a charity that believes in quality and sustainability so we put our members' businesses at the very heart of ours. We enhance, support, nurture, cherish and challenge.

Every year we run an annual Healthy Body, Happy Me campaign to encourage better health and happiness by giving nurseries FREE resources for play, learning and fun.

Get involved with our 2024 campaign and help keep your children happy and healthy.

Important: Activities with children must always be risk assessed, including for allergies or choking. Children must always have adequate supervision. Resources and materials must always be appropriate for children's age and stage of development.



National Day Nurseries Association

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#HealthyBodyHappyMe

www.ndna.org.uk

Create the cosiest cuddle corner

NDNA member
benefits
with Hope



15% off
every order



20% off one
order per year



Up to 70%
off over 200
essentials




Free delivery
with no
minimum spend

Den Frame
With Shelves
from Hope
HP00055779


HOPE
developed
product



HOPE
is all you need

A brand you can trust | Rated excellent on  Trustpilot
Proud Supplier of the Year winner | Super quick delivery