



THE SEL SCOOP – January 2021

Supporting your Child Socially and Emotionally

Special Edition: Managing Big Feelings!



For many reasons beyond our control, life can feel stressful right now. Here are a few tips to help your children manage when big and uncomfortable feelings show up :

Talk about Emotions

Being able to identify, name, and talk about feelings reduces input from the emotion center of the brain and increases input from the thinking and problem solving center of the brain. It is also helpful to practice noticing emotions as physical sensations (literally, feelings)!



Acknowledge your own Feelings

It's helpful for children to see that everyone struggles, even grown-ups. Model talking about feelings, talking about how feelings show up in the body, thinking through solutions, and using healthy coping strategies that make problems better, not worse! Choose self-disclosures carefully and keep adults worries in the hands of adults!

Listen and Empathize

Validate their feelings, judgement free – all feelings are okay, but all behaviour is not! You don't have to agree with what they might be feeling, but it is important to listen and respect it. Ask open-ended questions ("tell me what that feels like"; "tell me more". Ask prompting questions "What do you think would happen if . . .")

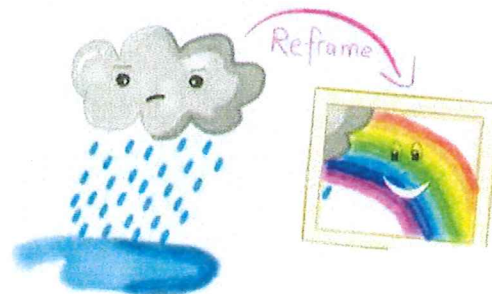


Reframe Feelings as Messages

Feelings are simply pieces of information that we have the power to choose what to do with. We don't want to ignore feelings but we don't want to respond impulsively to them either. Help them learn to interpret the message - stop and think, and make a good choice.

Reframe Stress & Encourage a Growth Mindset

Help children shift from a "stress hurts" to a "stress helps" mindset. Stress, big or small, presents opportunities for growth and learning. Even though a situation can't always be fixed, every situation can be improved - help them identify the powers they have to influence things.





Notice What They are Doing Well

Praise effort more than outcome. When offering positive feedback, be specific (identifying a clear desired behaviour that you would like to see repeated) and legitimate (following purposeful and meaningful accomplishments or actions and contributions). Encourage your child to think of how far he or she has come rather than how far he or she still needs to go. Help them see what they can do!



Teach and Practice Problem Solving Skills

What am I feeling? What is the problem? What are the possible solutions? What would happen if...? (weigh the pros and cons). What will I try? Did it work? Practice stress management techniques such as deep breathing, distraction, movement, and positive self-talk.



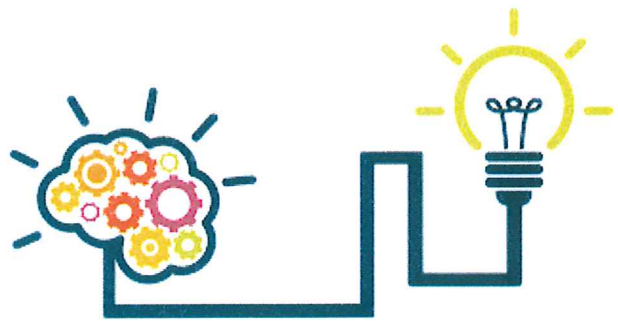
Give them Choice

Having a sense of agency, purpose, and control in a situation that may otherwise feel very much out of their control can be helpful. This could as simply as choosing what activities to do when, what to have for meals, what they want to wear, what movie to watch during family movie night. Some kids may need controlled choice (options limited to 2 or 3)



What we Give Attention to Grows

What we focus on, we get more of – choosing to focus on the positives, the learning opportunities, what is within our control, and the ways that we can make a small improvement in a given situation is empowering!



Talk Openly About Change

Remind your child of a time when they successfully coped with a major change, limitation, or uncomfortable situation in the past (starting a new school, joining a new team). How did it feel, how did they cope, how did it end?