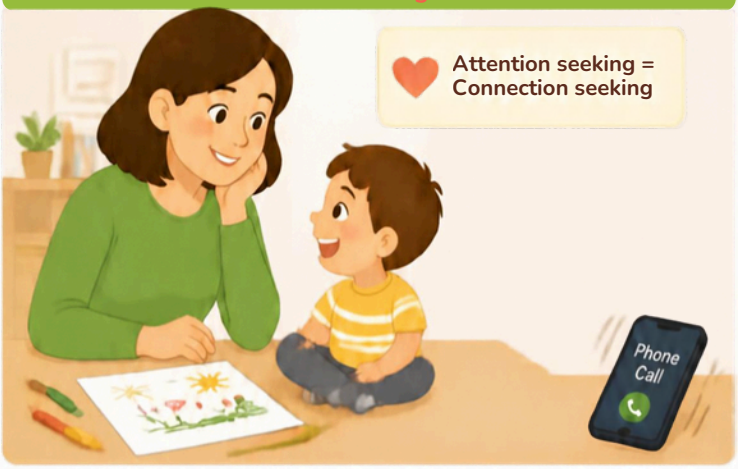
SPACE OF SEE ME

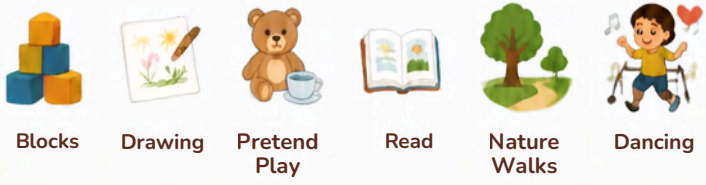
The Big Idea: Responding to what the child sees, does, and feels — noticing them



HOW TO CONNECT & REFLECT



IDEAS FOR SPECIAL PLAYTIME (CONNECT & REFLECT)





Solo play is okay!

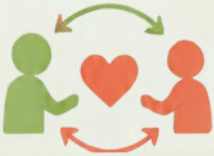
A quick glance-over during their solo play ("I see what you're building") can hold them over until you're free.



The Science:

Serve & Return supports adult-child connection, turn-taking, patience, and communication skills.



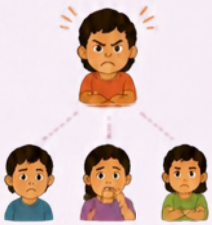


SPACE OF SAFETY

Feeling safe to show how they feel



Get curious about what is underneath anger: sadness, fear, jealousy



Name the feeling.



Give a 5-minute warning before hard transitions



Be kind to yourself. Supporting children's feelings is hard.



Build an emotion word bank through books, shows, and everyday moments



Books



TV & movies



Everyday moments

Name it to tame it



Upstairs / Downstairs Brain



Upstairs Brain: Calm, thinking, connected

Downstairs Brain: Big emotions, not thinking



Naming our children's emotions supports their...



Self-awareness



Regulation



Resilience

Space of Soothing

Big Feelings

The goal is to help the brain feel safe first, not NO big feeling moments.



1. REGULATE

- Use fewer words
- Lower your voice



2. RELATE

- Name what you see
- Stay close



3. REASON

- When calm, review what happened
- Practise what to do next time
- Repair



Connection before correction

Children need co-regulation before they can regulate themselves.



SPACE OF STIMULATION

Play isn't a break from learning



Play builds focus, regulation, flexibility & memory

1 IMPULSE CONTROL



- Freeze Tag
- Simon Says
- Go Go Stop

2 FLEXIBILITY



- Imaginative play
- Change game rules

3 WORKING MEMORY

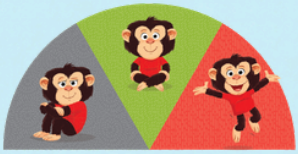


- Matching games
- What's Missing
- Songs & rhymes

Match the activity to the energy zone:

calm & ready to learn

low energy – needs to wake-up



busy body – may need movement or reduced stimulation

Notice what helps to shift your child's energy zone

Every child's sensory system is different



sound



touch



smell



movement



crunchy snack



cool cloth



Executive function grows through play, not forced regulation.



Co-regulation helps children learn regulation.

SPACE OF SECURITY

Safety, Warmth, & Yes Brain

Children feel safe when rules are predictable and consistent.

Turn ‘No / Stop / Don’t’ into a helpful next step.



Connect → **Limit + choice** → **If needed, empathy + repeat the limit.**



When upset: safety and empathy.

Teach when *calm.*

Warmth + boundaries support self-esteem, regulation, & social skills.

This is <u>not</u> permissive parenting. The parent still decides what is safe and important.

Offering small choices inside a firm limit can help children *respond* to boundaries instead of *react* to them.

Be patient — this takes practice for both of you.

Helpful for PDA/neordivergence.

Turn this...	...into this
No / Stop	I love the story you are telling me. I’m just on the phone, I’d love to hear it after.
STOP jumping on the couch	Wow. You have a lot of energy. Let’s go outside. The couch is not safe to jump on.
NO cookies, it is dinnertime.	Yes, after dinner.

Space of Self Worth

Supporting children to see themselves as capable.

Confidence grows from *effort* being noticed, not just *results*.

Growth mindset supports well-being, resilience & learning.



Praise the process, not just the product.

Instead of:

"You're so smart."

Try:

"You worked really hard on that."



When it feels hard, your brain is growing.

Break tasks into smaller, achievable steps.

Keep expectations developmentally appropriate.

Let children see adults make mistakes — mistakes are normal.

Model apologizing when you don't respond the way you wanted to.

Mistakes happen

I spoke too sharply.



Repair & apologize

I'm sorry. I'll try to take a breath next time.



Practice executive skills through play, with scaffolding (help) and co-regulation when needed.



Biological Regulation & Physical Development



BIG IDEA:

Behaviour often starts in the body. Before addressing behaviour or a learning goal, check for biological stressors such as hunger, sleep, sensory load, and movement.

1 Start with the body

- Hunger or thirst
- Pain or illness
- Tiredness
- Uncomfortable clothing
- Too much sugar or caffeine
- Strong sensory input such as noise or light
- Too much or too little movement
- Temperature

A small body focused on these needs cannot focus on attention or regulation.

2 Try this:

> I see you trying hard to hold your pencil properly while you write. It takes practice! Let's take a break and play with some playdough or beads. Which one would you like?

3 Build skills through play

Build gross motor skills through bike riding, balancing or hopping, catching, animal-walks, pretend play, and stop-and-go games.

Build fine motor skills through playdough, string and beads, drawing, buttons and zippers, and card games.

Reframe goals around interests, such as playdough or Lego; these build the hand skills needed for writing.

A child often does not want to sit and write. Blocks, playdough, and building toys still build the same hand skills in a different way.



A dysregulated body makes it hard to focus, learn, or behave as expected.

Checking the body is often the fastest first step.

Communication & Early Literacy



BIG IDEA

Language and early literacy grow best through connection and a child's own interests.

Communication is not limited to speech and writing.



1 Follow their interests

Try to incorporate children's current obsession, such as trucks, animals, or construction into books, signs, and play.

Interest drives attention.



2 Build language through everyday tasks

Ask a open-ended questions such as "Tell me about your picture" and "What are you making"?

Don't be afraid to re-read favourite books often: repetition builds vocabulary and confidence.



3 Support pre-reading and writing through play

Point out signs and logos. Add reading and writing props to pretend play, such as menus, signs, and tickets.



4 Build pre-writing skills through play

Use lacing activities, playdough, drawing, beads, and sand play to build fine motor skills needed for writing.



Connection + interests help children build communication, language, and early literacy.

COGNITIVE REGULATION

BIG IDEA

Executive function — impulse control, flexibility, and working memory — are built through play and games, not through demands to 'sit still' or 'focus.'



YOU ARE ALREADY DOING IT!

All of those fun games you play in the classroom are actually helping to build up their executive functions.



GROW EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS THROUGH PLAY!

BUILD IMPULSE CONTROL
with movement games such as Freeze Tag, Simon Says, Go-Go-Stop, Duck Duck Goose, and Hide & Seek.



BUILD FLEXIBILITY
by changing rules mid-play, changing an obstacle course, and creating new story or song endings.



BUILD WORK MEMORY
with matching games, "What's Missing?" and multi-step instructions woven into play.



- Normalize that these brain systems are still developing, so a fidgety, impulsive four-year-old is developing rather than misbehaving.
- Pair skill-building with growth mindset by normalizing mistakes such as "I can't do it...yet!"
- Praise effort over outcome.

TAKEAWAY

PLAY IS HOW EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SKILLS GROW!.

ACTIVITY RECAP

IMPULSE CONTROL	FLEXIBILITY	MEMORY
• Freeze Tag • Simon Says • Go-Go-Stop • Duck Duck Goose	• Change rules mid-game • New Simon Says actions • Changed obstacle course	• Matching games • "What's Missing?" • Songs with repeating sequences

Praise effort and process: 'You worked so hard on that tower!' to build a growth mindset alongside these skills. Your movement breaks are an important part of learning — they help a busy brain reset and refocus.

EMOTION REGULATION

Helping Children Move from Survival Brain to Thinking Brain

The I CARE approach helps a child move from their downstairs survival brain, through connection, up to their upstairs thinking brain.

Some children, including children with ADHD, ASD, anxiety, or trauma, may take longer or struggle more to move from downstairs to upstairs brain and need more co-regulation, not more punishment.



BIG IDEA

Big feelings are a stress response, not misbehaviour to punish.

SUPPORT EMOTION AWARENESS

Expand the child's emotion vocabulary in calm moments through books and naming feelings as they happen, so they have words for big feelings later.

THE BIG PEOPLE

Co-regulating a child's big feelings takes a regulated adult — your own self-care matters.

DISCIPLINE = TEACHING

Reframe discipline as teaching, not punishment. The goal is not shame and punishment, the goal is teaching an alternative way to expressing their feelings.



THE I CARE APPROACH

1. REGULATE

Use fewer words and try "I'm here." You're safe."

Then wait and let the child reaches for comfort rather than rushing in with questions or demands.

Even a gentle question such as "do you want hug?" can overwhelm the dysregulated brain.

2. RELATE

Once the child starts to calm, name the feeling, for example "This is hard."

I wonder if you're feeling frustrated."

Avoid jumping straight to redirection before co-regulation and validation.

3. REPAIR & REASON

Discuss, apologize, and problem-solving only once "the child is calm."

TAKEAWAY

A child in a meltdown needs *connection before correction* — their brain can't problem-solve until it feels safe.

SOCIAL REGULATION

BIG IDEA

Social skills — sharing, turn-taking, joining play — are built primarily through play itself, especially imaginative/pretend play.



TIPS

- **Offer lots of imaginative or pretend play such as turning a space into a restaurant and taking on roles.**
- **Use turn-taking and sharing games to practise waiting and cooperating, increasing group size and complexity as the child improves.**
- **Use CALM's Solution Centre scenarios to rehearse social problem-solving before real conflicts happen.**
- **Reinforce cooperative moments with Connect & Reflect, for example "I see you shared that toy".**



PLAY SUGGESTIONS

- **Pretend play such as dress-up, restaurant, and doctor.**



- **Turn-taking games such as board games and ball games.**



Play is the work of the child

TAKEAWAY

Young children build social skills mostly through play — especially pretend play.

DEVELOPMENTAL NOTE

Parallel play is common: children may play alongside peers rather than directly with them.

It is a stage, not necessarily a red flag.



PROSOCIAL REGULATION

BIG IDEA

Kindness is modeled and caught more than it's instructed — and specific, in the moment acknowledgment helps a child connect their behaviour to the value.



IDEAS

Notice and name specific kind moments as they happen instead of saying only "good job". Try: "I loved seeing you share your toy with your friend. Look how happy Joey is now!"

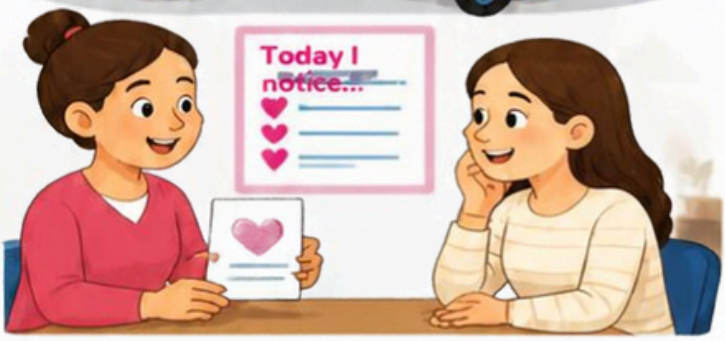


Use books as a low-pressure way to introduce kindness, sharing, and feelings before or after a real conflict.

Watch for a child's better moments (often mornings, before hunger or fatigue) to reinforce kindness when they have more capacity for it.



Share "glimmers" of positive behaviour with parents, not just the hard moments — it's reassuring and reinforces the behaviour at home too.



DRAW ON CALM RESOURCES

- Solution Centre
- The Kindness Tree
- Melvin is kind
- The Super Friends book

TAKEAWAY

Kids learn kindness mostly by watching adult models it — and by having their own kind moments specifically noticed.

A FEW THINGS TO TRY

- Be specific when you catch kindness.
- Use books to talk about kindness and feelings.
- Notice better moments earlier in the day.
- Share positive moments with families too.