

After the Buzz, social thinking ideas for parents and caregivers

From *What's the Buzz?* for Early Learners: A complete social skills foundation course



Lesson 11 of 16: Building healthy bodies, happy minds and steady feelings

After the Buzz presents ideas for parents, guardians and educators to encourage the generalisation of the social thinking the children have learnt in the session. Children rely on our commitment to consolidate these skills by modelling them, and emphasising the language and the ideas used in the lesson.

The aim of this lesson was to alert your child that there are things they can do to take care of their emotional health. It offered a collection of ideas to balance their lives so they might feel calmer, happier and more resilient. Be sure to follow up because your active involvement adds weight to what your child has touched on in this lesson. Here are a few useful ideas to support your child's well-being.



A work in progress

The truth is that learning to manage our emotions is one of the hardest things we ever have to learn. Just to remind you – think about a time when you've felt angry, disappointed or hurt. Were you always able to stop, take a deep breath and think through a rational approach? Probably not! Most of us admit to having had a moment or two when rational thinking flies out the window. When we look at the management of feelings in this honest light, it is not reasonable to expect a child, with only a few years of experience, to do what has taken us many years to polish. Managing tricky feelings is a work in progress.

Model how to live

One of the best things we can do is to consistently show our kids how to handle their feelings by handling ours. When we feel upset and say nasty things about others or play the righteous role our children watch us and, over the years, they learn to do the same. Never underestimate your influence.

Model how to 'balance' life

Organise your life, and your children's, with a balance of fun, work, learning, relaxation and companionship. Show your children how you do this by spending your days combining these elements. In addition, coach your children about the value of healthy sleep patterns and a balanced diet. Teaching them to cook and grow vegetables and herbs is a powerful way to further this healthy balance. Find family time to get everyone active and outdoors. Bushwalks, tadpoling, beachcombing, swimming, bike and scooter riding together are great options to get family members bonding while keeping active. Parents often comment that their children argue less when out enjoying themselves on neutral ground free from the usual screens and toys at home.

Tell your child what you see in them

Children feel secure and gain a sense of who they are when we regularly reflect back their positive qualities. Try this approach – each of your children possesses a mix of positive qualities unique to them. In your mind tick off their positive attributes. Are they fair, gentle, reliable, sensitive, persistent, determined, loving, cuddly, loyal,

helpful, honest or kind? In the future, when talking to them, use these optimistic adjectives to highlight how you see them and emphasize what their natural strengths are.

Coach 'can do' attitudes

Do your best to encourage positive problem-solving attitudes. Engage them to think about different solutions and possible courses of action. When errors of judgement happen, and they will, use the mistake as an opportunity to learn and grow. Mistakes are alright – having a go matters most. When children develop plans of action through the guidance of parents, their sense of competence grows.

Encourage a broad range of interests

The idea of helping your child to develop a variety of skills, interests and links to others gives them a basis to feel connected and adept. Working from a strength position when confronted by a challenge means they're less likely to become a catastrophic thinker. Instead, they are more likely to see the challenges as an isolated or manageable difficulty, and one that can be overcome to bring their life back into balance.

Contribution

Build deliberate opportunities for your children to contribute. By contributing they will gain a sense they can make a difference – that the world is a better place because they are in it and they have some influence. Our challenge as parents is to find ways for them to develop care, compassion and a social conscience.

At home, one way to raise your children's contribution is to organise for them to prepare a meal for the family each week or fortnight. Sure, it may end up making a little extra work for you, but it's a long term investment in their mental health. With help, most five year olds are capable of arranging a simple meal for the family and serving it to them. As we nudge children to do more for others it immerses them into the world of giving.

Outside of home, continue to broaden your child's world by arranging acts of kindness they can do for others. One option is to involve the family in different forms of help, community or charity work – walks to raise money for hunger, children with disability or disease, animal shelters, homeless people or helping out at the local aged care home. The notion of giving to others immerses them in an emotionally larger world where they can start to compare their attitudes, life and feelings to the lives of others. As they see and participate, a more selfless view of life is naturally promoted – no preaching is required.

Finally, ask yourself how long it's been since your child did something to show care for someone who was helpful to them, or to someone who needs their spirits raised? How long is it since your child made and sent a thank you card, wrote a long newsy letter, made or bought and presented a gift, took some time to make a visit, sent an email or text, wrote a note or made a call to someone who deserves it? Start by setting them up to deliver a kindness that they may not normally think of. Teaching care to our kids underpins that they themselves are cared for. It teaches how communities receive and contribute.

It's never too late

Some of us know that we're not as resilient as we wish we were. We remain troubled by memories of an emotionally vulnerable childhood. That's why it's frightening to see the same susceptible traits in our children. These traits fill us with fear and before we know it, our love has us over-helping and over-fixing things for them. Little by little, our over-protectiveness creates a helpless child – the very thing we wanted to avoid. Without reflection we can become one of the greatest barriers to our children's healthy emotional development.

The good news is that it's never too late to change our habits. You do know where a large part of your resilience has come from, don't you? It's the memory that you faced a setback, felt hurt, recaptured your composure, conquered the problem and gained confidence. The same applies for your child.

Useful websites

Kids Matter: This website provides evidence based literature, as well as fact sheets, on ways to encourage social and emotional growth in young people with a particular focus on resilience. Free monthly newsletters can be accessed with helpful tips for families. For more information visit www.kidsmatter.edu.au

Wake Up Project: A website dedicated to encouraging kindness and compassion. Free kindness cards can be posted to you to begin your own 'project kindness'. The cards are used when a random act of kindness occurs. For more information visit www.wakeupproject.com.au

Authentic Happiness: This is the homepage of Dr. Martin Seligman, Director of the Positive Psychology Centre at the University of Pennsylvania. It encourages individuals to identify their character strengths by taking evidence-based surveys. The surveys and website are free to access. Visit www.authentichappiness.org

Kidshelpline (Australia) phone 1800 55 1800: A free 24 phone service for children worried about their own well-being or the well-being of friends and family. The key message is that there is always someone you can talk to who will listen. This is particularly important for our boys as research shows they are less likely to talk about their problems as they get older, internalise them and can feel helpless.

Early Childhood Australia (ECA): Has a 75 year published history as a voice for young children in Australia. In 2013 it became an evidence based website to encourage resilience and social emotional growth. For more - www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

Young and Well CRC: A cooperative research centre promoting young people's cybersafety, mental health and well-being. For more information visit www.youngandwellcrc.org.au

The Resilience Doughnut: A creative way of working with children to strengthen their spirit, their sense of self and build hope and optimism. For more information visit <http://www.theresiliencedoughnut.com.au>

Photocopiable and Online Resources

These resources can also be downloaded from www.whatsthebuzz.net.au