**Supporting and promoting children’s social and emotional development during COVID-19**

Lockdown for some children may have been a positive experience spending valuable time with family, but it has definitely been a difficult time of uncertainty and increased anxiety from social distancing and isolation.

As more children return to settings we need to be mindful that their different experiences may lead to emerging worries and anxieties which could impact their social and emotional development.
How a child reacts socially and emotionally will vary depending on age, understanding, ability to communicate, experiences, and how they cope with stress and anxiety. Some children may experience separation anxiety following the extended amount of time at home with family. Children experiencing separation anxiety will need consistent emotional support and encouragement to separate from their loved ones.
You can find factsheets on separation anxiety at [www.ndna.org.uk/factsheets](http://www.ndna.org.uk/factsheets)

As practitioners we play a crucial role in working closely with children and parents to identify and help children to explore anxieties and to find positive ways to promote their social and emotional development whilst effectively managing the risks we are still faced with.

Due to the experiences children have encountered they may be anxious about leaving family and being in a close proximity to others, they might be frightened to touch things, unsure of what they can and cannot do and may be even scared to use the toilet.

Ways to support children’s social and emotional development

1. Exploring emotions - to understand and talk about their emotions
2. Reconnection and bonding - provide opportunities for children to play alongside each other. Planning adult supported activities. Building a den is a great idea where children are encouraged to work together especially outdoors where the risk of transmitting COVID-19 is reduced this provides opportunities to interact, have fun and develop confidence.
3. Provide stories and props to explore feelings and worries- use books that explore feelings
4. Being physically active- being active stimulates the release of chemicals in the brain which play an important part in regulating the mood. If children are overly anxious, engaging them in physical activity can help to divert and calm them. Going on daily adventure walks and spending time outdoors can support them emotionally as well as physically.
5. Relaxation techniques such as yoga- through yoga, children of all ages can focus on what they are doing at that moment, which can help take their mind off worries and anxieties.
6. Deep breathing - Simply taking a series of deep breaths will slow down a child’s heart rate and help make them feel in control. Simple and fun activities such as blowing bubbles can help calm a child.

Children can feel less anxious if they are able to express themselves in a safe and supportive environment, make things fun such as catchy hand washing songs. Provide children with clear information ensuring they have time to ask any questions.

Ask open questions and be curious, listen to what children are saying. Show compassion with their anxieties.

Outdoor play is crucial for ;
Improving physical health and fitness, contributing to reducing obesity.
Improving mental and emotional health
Reducing the spread of viral and bacterial infections
Giving children fresh air
Having fun!
Developing a lifelong connection to the outdoors
Supporting all areas of development
Supporting children to become effective learners

The impact of the pandemic on children’s behaviour

Some children may struggle with transitioning back into nursery, returning to new groups, new friends and different expectations from practitioners. A consistent approach is always important in developing emotional regulation. As practitioners we must feel confident in providing consistent and informed responses to each child’s behaviour and needs.

I hope you find this information useful 🙂