

Tuneful Chatter Resource: PSED

Age Group: 3 – 5 years

Early years activities for personal, social and emotional development.

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Warm Ups

Sensory Exploration

An exploration of open-ended materials (items that can be used in multiple, creative and imaginative ways) which relate to the theme of the session. Some of these materials could include:

- Floristry ribbon
- Sponges
- Natural materials
- Scarves and silks
- Big pieces of fabric
- Ribbons
- Feathers
- Balls of different sizes
- Umbrellas

These can either be arranged for when children come into the space or distributed throughout the session. If arranging before the children enter the space: arrange/display the materials in the centre of the space, thinking about how you want the children to view/access them. Is there a particular scene you're trying to create (for example, garden, ocean, circus)? If so, aim to set up the sensory materials to match that scene.

If distributing during the session: it may be helpful for children to be in a circle whilst you distribute, either handing out individual items to each child or creating the scene/placing the sensory objects in the middle of the circle.

It is worth noting that expectations around how to interact/engage with the materials will need to be shared so that every child can access them safely.

You may also want to put on some appropriate music/sound effects whilst the children are exploring the materials.

How it can be used to explore feelings/emotions

When distributing the materials, the children may be required to wait for their turn. This can be tricky for some children and can lead to feelings of frustration. Supporting children to succeed, talking through situations as they arise (for example, 'It's Joe's turn now – it will be your turn after him'), and establishing turn-taking as a routine so that children can practice the skill will help them be able to manage these feelings.

Because of the explorative nature of sensory play, children will be required to share the materials on offer. They may use the materials as part a larger group activity (for example, building, burying, making, holding) or they may break off into smaller groups. This could bring up emotions such as sadness (when their friends do not share the materials), happiness and excitement (when working together to create something) or disappointment (if others do not use the materials in the same way that they wish to). By engaging in the sensory exploration with the children, you can pick up these emotions as they show themselves, communicating them explicitly with the children.

Example: 'I can see that you're feeling disappointed that Joe took the sponge that you were using. Why don't we see if there is another one we could use?'

By naming the emotion, children feel validated and can start to associate the feelings in their body and mind with the name of the emotion. By offering a solution, you are modelling the fact that emotions can be acknowledged and worked through, and children can use these models to start to find their own solutions.

Access

The open-ended materials are chosen for the fact that they can be used in multiple ways. Some groups will jump straight in and explore the materials creatively and you can respond, react to, and develop their ideas. For other groups, you may find that it will benefit the children for you to give ideas/directions.

Examples

- Can you balance this on your head? Where else could we balance it?
- What do you think this scarf could be? Can you show me?
- Can you make this ribbon wiggle? Can you make it still? How else could we move it?

By offering examples, and then opening up the questioning, you are still creating space for children's ideas and voices to be heard.

It is also beneficial to be aware of any children who may have sensory sensitivities and be averse to specific textures. This means that you can choose materials that all children can use. Giving options for differently sized objects also accounts for differences in fine motor skills.

How to use this technique across different topics

One sensory element can be used across different themes/topics to represent different things.

Examples

- Floristry ribbon of different colours could be used as grass, seaweed, snakes, water etc.
- Sponges could be used for a bath time theme, as honeycomb in a bee theme, as sunshine etc.

Once you have decided on a topic, choose what sensory elements you could use to represent moments/settings within it.

Follow-Me Movement Warm Up

A full-body warm-up we often use before embarking on a Tuneful Chatter session. Different movements are completed with different parts of the body, with the aim of moving and warming up every part of the body (fingers, arms, shoulders, neck/head, waist/hips, knees, ankles, toes) by the end.

Examples of ways you could move different body parts

Fingers: wiggle, shake, draw circles with different fingers/thumb, scrunch and stretch

Arms: move wrists in a circle (both directions), stretch up high/wide/low, bend elbows and reach out

Shoulders: roll shoulders (both directions), shrug up to ears and release, draw big circles with arms (either one at a time or both together; both directions)

Neck/head: move ear towards shoulder gently and return to centre (both sides), roll chin on chest (note: do not roll head backwards), look up and down.

Waist/hips: use a pretend hula-hoop to draw circles with hips (both directions), move hips side to side, knee raises, side lunge.

Knees: bend, hop on one foot then the other, knee raises, lunges

You will demonstrate the movements to the children and the children will follow along with you, copying the movements you are making.

How it can be used to explore feelings/emotions

Movement has been scientifically proven to release endorphins and feel-good chemicals such as dopamine and serotonin. This can provide a boost to wellbeing, as well as improving concentration and engagement with other parts of the session.

The 'Follow-Me' concept of the warm-up improves gross motor skills and develops the control that children have over their own bodies. When following along with the warm-up, children may feel happy and proud that they are able to complete movements.

If children are having difficulties with any of the movements, they may feel upset or dejected. It is important to validate these children and perhaps suggest adaptations to the movement to allow for success, leading to more positive emotions. The resilience that will come from practising and mastering different movements will also be beneficial.

Access

Certain adaptations may need to be made so that the children can follow along. If an adult is working with a baby/very young child, the adult may need to do the movements with the child. You can also leave the movements freer, by suggesting different ways of warming up the body parts (for example, wiggling, shaking, drawing circles, bending, stretching) and allowing children to choose what is comfortable for them.

For more of a challenge, more complex movements can be added: moving two different body parts at the same time, moving the same body parts in different directions or adding balances.

Once children are familiar with the routine, they can suggest their own movements for the warm-up. They can become the leader, and model their own movements to the group, leading to feelings of happiness and pride. This is a precursor to improved self-esteem.

Ankles: bend knees, draw circles with one foot at a time (both directions), hop, jump

Toes: wiggle inside shoes, stand up on tiptoes, hop, jump

You will demonstrate the movements to the children and the children will follow along with you, copying the movements you are making.

How to use this technique across different topics

This can be used ahead of a focus in any topic. You might want to choose different pieces of music to set the warm up to, depending on theme or feeling of your session/lesson.



Main activities

Exploring Feelings Through Characters in a Story

Using stories to explore the feelings of the characters. By using stories, this creates a 'safe distance' between the children and the characters. You don't necessarily have to share the full story with the children; you may just want to choose small moments from the story where there are different emotions/viewpoints to explore.

How it can be used to explore feelings/emotions

By exploring characters' emotions rather than the children's own emotions, you can begin to explore some bigger feelings and explore them in a safer way.

It is recommended to explore some less complex emotions to begin with, like happy and sad, to give children the framework with which to explore emotions. More complex emotions like anger and worry can then be explored. Below is an example for how to explore 'anger' with a group, but these questions can also be used with less complex emotions to begin with.

Example

If a character is feeling angry in a story, we might ask: 'What has made the character angry?' (rather than what makes the children angry, although this can come later if appropriate). You can ask the children questions like: 'How can we tell this character is angry?' and 'Where might the character feel anger in their bodies?'

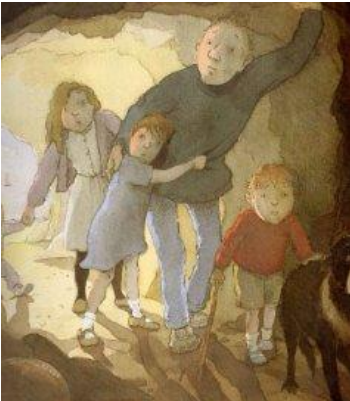
This allows the children to make links between how the character is feeling in the story, and then their own emotions, developing their emotional literacy.

There are different ways of exploring these emotions: you could use puppets, props, drama techniques such as freeze frames and facial expressions/body language, as well as movement.

Access

To begin with, you may just want to name emotions and ask the adults to model these to the children. You could then move onto using illustrations from the story to demonstrate different emotions and get children to recreate what they see.

Example



We can tell that dad might be feeling worried here. How do we know he is feeling worried? (He is looking around, he is not smiling, he is holding tightly to another person.)

Can you show me what a worried face might look like?

How might dad feel in his body if he is worried?

Can you show me what a worried body might look like?

This could then lead onto more complex discussions about how emotions present in different ways depending on different characters.

You may then encourage children to explore these different emotions through discussion/freeze frame/movement/puppetry, depending on the group you are working with. Children may also be able to articulate the emotions of the characters readily. In this case, you could explore some alternate viewpoints.

It is also good to be aware that some children may be experiencing some big emotions/feelings so it's always best to do these sessions with a trusted adult, so children feel safe to share if needed.

How to use this technique across different topics

If you have books that you are focused on, look out for key moments of emotion in the story and think about how you could explore these with your groups.

Exploring Feelings Through Settings

Not all your creative sessions have to be story-based, so this is about looking at how different types of setting can involve emotions/feelings and how these can be explored together.

How it can be used to explore feelings/emotions

During the session, you might 'travel' through different settings/lands before you reach the destination (which is usually the setting that matches the theme/topic of the session). As you do this travelling, you may encounter different settings that provide opportunity for different emotions to be explored.

Examples

- Dark spaces, such as caves, tunnels etc: nervous, worried, unsure, scared, brave, courageous.
- Adventurous spaces such as jungles, mountains etc: bold, excited, curious, anxious

- Familiar spaces such as homes, gardens etc: calm, happy, worried, sad (depending on home circumstance)
- There may be contrasting emotions that emerge depending on the children, and these can be used as a discussion point, naming the emotions, with suggestions being made for how to acknowledge and work through them. You can even put yourself at the heart of these to create that sense of space and safety.

Examples of things you might say

'I feel a bit nervous about going into that dark cave because I am a bit afraid of the dark. Can anyone help me feel less nervous?'

'You look like you are feeling really brave. What does brave feel like? What advice could you give me for how to be brave?'

Access

Feelings and emotions may be heightened if you are changing the feeling in your space (for example, turning off lights, using props, moving through different spaces). This is something to be mindful of and support children through if it arises.

Once children are familiar with and communicating basic emotions (happy, sad, worried, angry, scared), you can always develop more precise language to describe emotions (excited, giddy, content, anxious, frustrated, furious) and how these feelings present differently in the body.

If children are finding it difficult to articulate emotions verbally, you can introduce the use of Makaton signs with them, which will give them an alternative way to communicate. You can find a useful video on Makaton signs for feelings/emotions here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EfrJriE5Hwg>

Again, it is always best to do these sessions with a trusted adults, so children feel safe to share if needed.

How to use this technique across different topics

When looking at what themes/topics you want to cover, look at what settings you may encounter.

Examples

- In a seaside theme, the different settings could be water/the sea, the sand, a cave, a lighthouse, a boat etc.
- In a jungle theme, the different settings could be in the jungle itself, a treehouse, a lion's den, in a tree with monkeys/birds etc.

When looking at the settings, try to anticipate what feelings these might bring up for the children, so that you can discuss and explore these feelings in the moment.

If you are at the point of having the children decide on what settings you visit on your 'journey', you may notice that settings come up repeatedly, or you may just need to be aware of the positive/negative emotions that may be present in the moment, if it's a setting that has not previously been explored.

It's important to note that no matter the theme or setting that you explore, every emotion is valid when it comes to exploring them.



Cool Downs

Reflection on the Session

A reflective discussion about the session, revisiting any feelings and emotions that surfaced and talking through them again.

How it can be used to explore feelings/emotions

By revisiting particular moments of the session, you can allow for children to process the events and activities that have been done and encourage them to articulate how they felt at different parts of the session. This is useful not only for developing the emotional literacy of children but also for designing future sessions or being aware of things that you may not have considered.

Access

For those children who are not yet using language, you could have emotion flashcards with the word and a corresponding facial expression for them to choose when reflecting or use Makaton. Reflection can be done either in the full group, or in small groups, for those less confident in sharing. If children are confidently discussing their feelings from different parts of the session, you could encourage them to think about *why* those moments made them feel a particular way.

How to use this technique across different topics

This activity can be done at the end of any session, regardless of the topic/theme covered.

Calming Moment

A moment of stillness and calm, sometimes accompanied by peaceful music, where the children can be quiet and still and concentrate on their breathing.

How it can be used to explore feelings/emotions

Having a calm moment to focus on breathing helps to regulate the nervous system. If used at the end of the session, it allows the children to leave the activities of the session behind and have a calming moment before transitioning into the next activity.

It can be used at any point during the session where you feel that there is a need for a collective reset and/or where children may benefit from having a moment to regulate themselves.

It is a skill to be able to be still and quiet, so by practicing the skill, you are equipping the children with something that they can access independently to be able to regulate in the future. This, in turn, can lead to an increased sense of wellbeing.

Access

Encourage the participants to find a comfortable position. This may be lying down, but equally, it may be sitting, or standing.

If working with parents with babies/very young children, encourage a moment of connection here: having a cuddle, holding hands, lying closely together. This can also lead to an increased sense of wellbeing and contentment.

Once participants are familiar with this element, you could start to introduce specific breathing exercises, such as square breathing (breathe in, hold, breathe out, hold whilst drawing a square with your finger) or finger breathing (breathing in and out as you trace the outline of each finger).

How to use this technique across different topics

This activity can be done during any session, regardless of the topic/theme covered.

