

# Help Sheet

0 – 25 Specialist Teaching And Support Service

## How to create an emotional support plan.



### Why?

- A child may be at the stage where they need support to manage their emotional responses. They need an adult to co-regulate with them.
- Adults need strategies to help the child to manage their emotions.
- All adults in the setting / school need to understand the best ways to provide emotional support.

### You will need:

- To learn what helps the child to stay calm and happy.
- To learn what the child dislikes.
- To be aware of anxiety triggers and read the alerting signals which the child gives out when their emotional state is changing.
- To try different de-escalation strategies and record which work well and which to avoid.
- To discuss the Emotional Support Plan with parents / carers so that the plan includes strategies that are known to work at home.

### How?

- Complete each section of the Emotional Support Plan.
- Gather information from all the adults who work with the child and the parents / carers.
- Share the Emotional Support Plan with all the staff who work with the child and use the information to support successful co-regulation.
- Update the plan frequently – it should be a working document which evolves as you get to know the child better.

### These are de-escalation strategies that you could try:

- **Validate their emotions:** For example, 'It's OK to feel cross, I can help' or 'If that happened to me, I would feel cross too'. Regular emotional check-ins can support children to understand their feelings.
- **Feelings in their body:** Talk about how their body feels and help them to link those feelings to the appropriate emotion word.
- **Distraction:** Offer something to do which he / she likes or finds motivating.

- **Diversion:** Give a task to do e.g. take a message to the office.
- **Change your body position / language:** Have open body language and adjust the position of your body to be at their level. Think about proximity to the child – is nearer or further away more comforting?
- **Speak in a calm quiet tone and give clear directions:** Say you are here to help and listen. Tell the child where you want them to go or what you want them to do. ‘Shall we...’ is a good sentence starter that shows that you are alongside in a supportive role.
- **Offer ‘forced choice’ alternatives:** Give two options of what to do and give time to think and respond. Make the one you want the child to do the easier option.
- **Processing time:** After giving options allow processing time. Tell the child you are there when he / she is ready.
- **Planned ignore:** If the child is attempting to engage in connection seeking behaviour ignore what they are doing and change the situation. Praise any positive responses.
- **Contingent touch:** To gain attention say the child’s name and touch them on the arm to reassure. For younger children, it may be appropriate to offer a side hug (depending on school policy).
- **Negotiation:** Make a ‘deal’ and stick to it.
- **Breathing:** Practise breathing strategies when the child is calm then use them together when they are becoming dysregulated.
- **‘Stop’ instead of ‘no’:** Practise stop / go games with visuals when the child is calm. If they are at risk of hurting themselves or others say ‘stop’ instead of ‘no’.
- **Visuals:** Use visuals alongside spoken language, so that the child has two ways to process the information.
- **Change of place to reduce overwhelm:** Offer support to move to a space which is less overwhelming e.g. a calm space (small tent or cosy corner), time outside.
- **Transfer adult:** Change places with another adult to continue de-escalation strategies. A change of face can be an effective way to divert thinking.
- **Humour:** Where appropriate use humour to diffuse situations. Try doing something silly.
- **Reassurance:** If he / she loses control, later on reassure them that what has happened has finished now.
- **Success reminders:** Remind the child of other times that he / she has found difficult and what happened to bring about success. Photographs of the child experiencing success could be collated and used to reinforce the positive behaviours.

### Things to note:

This help sheet is part of the Emotional Support Plan Toolkit.

- [Help Sheet - How to create an emotional support plan.](#)
- [Template – Template for an Emotional Support Plan.](#)

### Resources / Evidence base – informed by:

50 Fantastic Ideas for Co-regulation – Kerry Murphy 2024

Team Teach