

Strategies for socio-emotional development

Managing difficult emotions in young children during the pandemic

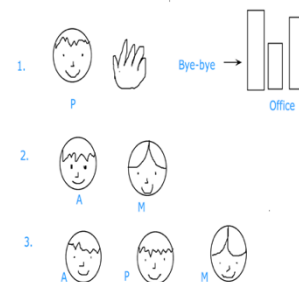
Since the pandemic began, each of our lives has been affected in a myriad of ways. the lockdown period has had its own share of positive effects (slowing down the pace of our lives, reconnecting with ourselves and family). However, the loss of certain kinds of opportunities has affected children's socio-emotional regulation, coping skills, as well as overall functioning. Possible 'Social anxiety,' speech delays, being always on the "go", frequent meltdowns, and clinginess with parents/caregivers are some of the concerns that are increasingly being reported among children during the lockdown. Some of the things that we could do to manage these concerns at home are:

Preparation for transitions:

Due to all the uncertainty in present times, children may feel especially overwhelmed when there is a change/transition in their environment. Transitions may include small changes in daily routine (e.g. papa/mumma starting to go to work again, a new family member coming to visit post-lockdown etc.) or big changes and life events (e.g. shifting to a new house). Any situation that is likely to bring a change in your child's routine would be considered a transition for them, and can be expected to affect them in different ways.

Think about how we as adults prepare ourselves for any expected transitions e.g. starting work after a long period of lockdown - we get involved in the process, we talk to people around us, we pick out our office clothes/prepare our office bag etc. We do all these things to process the change, build predictability for ourselves, and get ready for what's coming. Similarly, preparation also helps children to understand these changes, and know what to expect. What are some ways through which we can prepare children?

- ***Actively talk to your child*** about the transition, describing what's going to happen, and what they can expect.
- ***Use a multimodal approach*** to prepare your child - show them ***pictures and videos*** related to the transition/event, and talk them through the process. For instance: if someone is visiting you, show your child their pictures or do a video call with them in advance.
- ***Visual schedules*** are also effective tools for preparing children, and helping them process. You can use simple drawings to show them (like the one attached) what will happen.



- Help them understand what their day will look like when the transition occurs e.g. in your absence, who would be stepping in to do some of the things that they usually do with you, or when you will be doing those things with them etc.
- **Visual calendars** (refer to the image attached) also build predictability for your child, and help them view the transition more concretely. You can help your child look at the calendar a few days before the transition/once the transition has happened, and strike off each day as you go along.



Refer to the following videos on our YouTube channel to understand more

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGgwr6v3phc>

Grounding Activities:

Grounding techniques are a powerful tool to help kids to connect to the “here and now” when they feel overwhelmed. It helps us to be aware about our body and thoughts at the moment. These can be helpful in calming the child.

Some of the useful grounding techniques are:

- 1) **5,4,3,2,1:** This exercise may be helpful when your child is in an overstimulated state, and is experiencing “big feelings” of worry, upset or anxiety. Ask your child to list:
 - ❖ 5 things they can see
 - ❖ 4 things they can hear
 - ❖ 3 things they can feel
 - ❖ 2 things they can smell
 - ❖ 1 thing they can taste

- 2) **Power Hug:** Giving firm, deep pressure to your child in the form of a hug, cuddles etc. is a simple and effective grounding exercise. It reassures them with a feeling of safety, and being in control in the present moment. If your child feels ready, you could also do a simple tapping exercise with them, wherein you develop a rhythm of “tap” “tap” and “squeeze/pressure”. Place the left hand on the right shoulder for a tap, then the right hand on the left shoulder for another tap, and finally squeeze for a tight hug.



- 3) **Calming Corner:** A calming corner is a designated comfortable space for children to go when they need some space, to calm down their bodies or take a time-in to process big feelings. These spaces are equipped with comforting objects and soothing material that can help children develop emotional regulation.

Note: This space is not used to punish bad behaviour, it's a safe space for processing emotions and help children regain their emotional and physical control.

You can create a calming corner at home by:

- Designating a quiet corner in your home as your child's new calm corner and putting some of these things:
 - A soft rug or floor cushions
 - Bean bag
 - Soft toys and cozy blanket
 - Child's favourite books and quiet toys (building blocks, puzzles etc.)
 - You can also put some fairy lights for dim visual effect.
 - Art supplies



- 4) **Creating a calming jar:** It can be created by a range of coloured material like glitters/sequins/stars along with water. Children are often mesmerized by watching their slow descent and this calms their breathing and helps them regulate themselves and their emotion.



5) **Breathing Activities:** Breath can be an extremely soothing tool and with the use of props we can make it a fun game with kids. For example:

- **Dragon Breathing:**

- Ask kids to close eyes and take a deep breath in through their nose.
- Then open their eyes and mouth wide, stick out the tongue, and breath out through mouth pretending to be a dragon.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djJNgTTPQyc&t=3s>

- **Blowing bubbles**

- **Lying down and placing their favourite toy on tummy:** Ask your child to help their little toy fall asleep by rocking it slowly up and down using their tummies. Breathing in a big breath, right into their belly to make the teddy rise up and slowing blowing the air out again to make the teddy lower down. Do a few of these and then ask your child to check if the toy has become calm and fallen asleep.



Please Note: Consistency in responses to a child emotions is the best way to manage difficult feelings. Staying calm and using repetitive strategies might help the child to learn how to calm and relax themselves on their own. If you are feeling overwhelmed, first calm yourself and then help your child. Ask someone to step in when you cannot manage. Give 4-5 attempts for each strategy to see which works. It might not work on the first trial or other way round, work perfectly on the first attempt and then be ineffective. If you feel nothing is helping and/or your child is continuously struggling with difficult feeling please consult a professional.

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