



SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH BIG EMOTIONS

Become An emotions detective

Rather than seeing only the external behaviours, an emotional detective looks beyond the physical behaviour to the emotions and feelings underneath, to see what is driving the behaviour.

Consider:

- The situation
- The trigger
- The emotions/feelings /brain development or stage of development
- Then the behaviour that is being displayed

Look at the above 4 areas for both the child and the adult.

- **What are children communicating to us through their behaviour?**
- **What are we communicating to children through our own behaviours (ie our behaviours in response to their behaviours)?**
- **What are children's underlying needs during their big emotions?**

They need an adult who can regulate themselves first, is calm, centred, a good communicator, caring and leans into empathy.

How to approach challenging behaviours:

1. Regulate yourself first
2. Connect with the child
3. Communicate with the child

Let's look at these in more detail.

Regulate Yourself

Being able to calm ourselves, de-stress, and find balance day to day, helps us to have enough space for when we are faced with challenging behaviours. This is a daily practice to weave into our lives and make a priority. It's not a nice to have – it's a must have. E.g. mindfulness, going for a walk, enjoying a cup of tea without scrolling, breathing, journalling, surfing, gardening etc...Whatever it is for you that you need to help ensure you cup is not running on empty.

Activity:

- Ground yourself to the earth, close your eyes and take some deep breaths
- listen, be present and notice
- Place your hands on your heart and ask yourself: How do I feel and what do I need

How can you find calm in your day-to-day life:



Explore how you can get to that centred / calm place that a child needs when they are having big emotions e.g. a couple of deep breaths, an affirmation to support you staying regulated and calm, stepping away for a short moment if they are physically safe etc...

How can you find calm when a child is having big emotions (in the moment):

Develop Connection

Connection is the next step after centring ourselves. This is about day-to-day relationship building so that when a child is having some big emotions, you already have some connection time in the bank and you have some strategies to use during children's big emotions. You can think of it like an Emotional Bank Account.

This will look different for parents and teachers as to how you build stronger connections.

How can you connect with your children or students on a day-day or week-week basis?

For parents quality 1:1 time, rough and tumble, being playful, time in nature together, active listening and being present, playing games together.

For teachers it is really important to spend a good two weeks at the start of each year developing that whanaungatanga. Taking the time at the start of the year and getting to know each of your akonga will build a really important foundation of connection that will make the rest of the year run smoother. Through the year taking an interest in all of your students, what's happening at home, on the weekends, after school and speaking with whanau at pickup helps to strengthen those connections.

How do we connect during challenging behaviours?

- Regulate first
- Anticipating the behaviours – knowing your child and knowing that transitions are hard, so prepare them.
- Remember that the behaviour is communicating something else – this is where we apply that rapid emotional detective process.
- When we have an idea of what is going on underneath the behaviours we can lean into empathy and connect first.
- Connection before correction.

In your role as a parent or teacher, how could you connect better with your child/students day to day?



Communication

If you try and go straight to communication i.e. solving the problem when the child is still in fight-flight and having big emotions, the child won't be ready nor are they able to as they have moved into their limbic brain (emotions). This means that all logic and reason are out the window until their brain can be regulated.

Here are some ideas of how to communicate once you have centred yourself, you have connected with the child and the child has calmed down. Hint – sometimes this might be later in the day or the next day

- Paraphrasing and I statements
- Problem-solving (use HELP below)
- family meetings
- loving limits

Group / sibling challenge

H – offer some help

E – ensure safety and set boundaries if needed

L – Listen, paraphrase and normalise

P – problem solve for a solution

P can come later when the prefrontal cortex is back online.

If your communication is not working, your child is resistant or 'not listening', pause, return to centre and connect.

Your child's reaction to your communication can be a cue to centre and connect. It's often only when the child becomes reactive to your attempts to communicate, that you might remember to centre, return to the connection and communicate more clearly, respectfully and compassionately.

Genevieve Simperingham

Information is gathered through training under Genevieve Simperingham, www.peacefulparent.com and study of child development through the work of Gordon Neufield, Dr Justin Coulson, Dr Ross Greene, Dr Bruce Perry, Dr Peter Gray, Alfie Cohen to name a few.

Celia Hogan

Little Kiwis Nature Play

www.littlekiwisnatureplay.com