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Toolbox Activity #1:

Things That Upset or Stress a Child

What bothers or upsets your child?

What can your child tell you about what bothers or upsets them?

Strategy:

Find a time when you can spend 10 to 20 minutes with each child. Ask the child about times when he or she feels worried, upset or stressed.

Ask:

- What do you worry about?
- What upsets you?
- What do you do when you're feeling upset?

Or:

Use a sheet of paper and ask the child to write down (or ask you to write down) things that bother them. Older children (4- and 5-year-olds) may wish to draw them or discuss their ideas.





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Toolbox Activity #2: Stop! Look! Listen!

Creative Ways to Communicate with Preschoolers

It's important to know what bothers and upsets the children in your care. Don't wait until you think a child is stressed. Ask them, when things are calm, what they worry about. Then listen very carefully. Try not to finish their sentences or interrupt. Stop, Look and Listen!

Stop!

- Often practitioners find that the best time to talk to children is when they are doing an activity together, such as an art activity, circle time, when reading a story, or during dramatic/imaginative play.
- It's important to choose the moment. Find a time when you are relaxed and not feeling rushed and can be together without interruption.
- Set the climate. You might say: "I know there are things that upset you sometimes. Can you tell me about them?" Give the child time to finish what they're saying. Don't interrupt. Encourage them to continue by nodding, and listen to their words and the feeling in the words.

It's important to give the child time. Resist the impulse to finish his sentences. Even if you think you know what he is trying to say, give him time to put it into his own words.

Look!

Once a day, casually check the child's face and body language. Make sure you're at her eye level, either by kneeling down or by holding the child in your lap. To show you're really interested in the child and what she is saying, sit facing her or side by side. When you look into her eyes, does she look back at you or do her eyes dart around? Does her jaw seem tense and tight? Is she smiling and happy? Does she seem relaxed?

Listen!

Listen without speaking. Nod your head and give other nonverbal encouragement. Remember that the tongue works more slowly than the mind and sometimes it can seem to take forever for a young child to say something. It can take even longer if the child is trying to say something difficult, confusing or upsetting.





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Toolbox Activity #3:

Quick Ways to Relax

Kid Cuddle (self-soothing)

Standing or sitting, stretch arms out wide, wide, wide. Slowly bring arms forward and cross in front. Each hand holds onto the opposite shoulder. Squeeze, rock and cuddle the kids in your arms.

Cloud Push (to stretch tight muscles)

We are going to practice stretching up and pushing the clouds away. Stand tall. Place your hands on your hips. Bring one arm way up over your head and stretch it straight up. Try to reach a cloud and push it away. Push, push, push! Now let your arm float slowly down to your side. Bring the other arm up and push the cloud. Push, push, push! Now let your arm float slowly down to your side. Lift both arms up. Clasp hands together; turn your palms up and push and bounce the cloud. Slowly, slowly let your arms float gently down to your sides.



Deep Breathing (to slow down the body and quiet the mind)

Imagine you have a balloon in your tummy. Place one hand below your belly button. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose to a count of four. Feel the balloon fill up with air. When the balloon is full, breathe out slowly, using a count of four, to let the air out of the balloon. Your hand will feel your tummy going up and down as the balloon fills up and empties out.

1. Slowly blow up the balloon until it's full... 1... 2... 3... 4...
2. Now, slowly blow out and let all the air out of the balloon... 1... 2... 3... 4
3. Repeat five times, then open your eyes and breathe normally

Go Tight – Go Loose (to reduce body tension)

Get into a comfortable position, either lying flat or sitting comfortable with both feet flat on the floor, and if you like, close your eyes. We are going to practice breathing slowly and deeply.

Stand up straight, with your hands at your sides, and your fingers pointing down. Make a fist with each hand. Squeeze your hands tight. Squeeze... squeeze, squeeze... relax. Now, while you squeeze your fists again, tighten your arms to squeeze your body. Squeeze... squeeze... squeeze... relax.

Now, this time also squeeze your legs together while making a fist and squeezing your arms tight. Squeeze... squeeze... squeeze. Relax. Let's do this again. Shake out your hands, arms and legs. Enjoy the feeling of relaxation in your body.

Remember to breathe out as slowly as you breathe in. Breathing in deeply without relaxed, slow exhalation can lead to dizziness or hyperventilation.



Toolbox Activity #4:

The “What If?” Game

Sometimes children are upset by situations at home or in the early learning and care environment. The “What If?” game is a fun way to think about what to do in different situations. Playing the game with children helps them to learn to anticipate, to think ahead and come up with ideas.

Make sure some of the “What If?” situations are playful and fun. Encourage children to make up some “What If?” situations for parents and caregivers to answer. Give children time to think about what they might do.



Ideas for children under 5 years old

- **What if** someone is playing with a toy you want?
- **What if** someone takes a toy away from you?
- **What if** someone pushes over the tower you have been building?
- **What if** it rains and you can't go outside?
- **What if** you break someone else's toy?
- **What if** you could borrow an animal from the zoo today?
- **What if** you don't want to sleep at naptime?
- **What if** you don't like grape juice and that's today's drink at snack time?
- **What if** a big kid tells you your jacket is ugly?
- **What if** you don't want to do what the rest of the group is doing?

If needed, you might prompt with some suggestions. Be patient and don't focus on the answers themselves – they don't have to make sense.

Make up your own “What If?” questions based on the age and interests of the children. Or try the “What Else?” game, which may be more appropriate for the slightly older children. It builds on the “What If?” game by asking “What else could you do?”, teaching children that there are many possible ways of responding and thinking about a situation.





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Toolbox Activity #5:

Problem-solving model

It helps to break a problem down into small steps to help children work through what is bothering them and come up with potential solutions. This activity is a simple and useful problem-solving model for young children. A more detailed form of problem solving can be introduced as children grow older.

Step One: Identify the problem

- Ask the child: What happened? What's the matter?

Step Two: Assess the problem

- Ask the child: How big is the problem? How does the problem make you feel?

Step Three: Generate possible solutions

- Ask the child: What could you do about it?

Step Four: Consider potential outcomes

- Ask the child: What might happen?

Step Five: Evaluate solutions

- Ask the child: How well did it work? If it didn't work, would you like to try something else?





Toolbox Activity #6:

A Child's Life in the Early Childhood Program

Complete the following checklist for every child who shows indicators of stress on an ongoing basis.



Things That Can Help Reduce Stress for a Child	Every Day	Most/ Some Days	Plan to Change
• Has a consistent positive arrival routine			
• Receives greeting and support from practitioner			
• Has peers that laugh and enjoy being with the child			
• Has individual time with practitioner to share good times and problems			
• Receives hugs and signs of affection			
• Gets enough exercise and free time to play and unwind			
• Is offered a variety of familiar, healthy, well-balanced food in social, unrushed time period			
• Has choices about what food to eat and in which order			
• Receives support and acceptance for strong emotions			
• Has access to personal objects that are soothing			
• Is taught acceptable strategies for expressing emotion			
• Has a regular rest time routine with time to relax			
• Has alternative quiet activities if doesn't sleep			
• Receives positive guidance rather than negative consequences for challenging behaviour			
• Has choices about participating in routine and group or adult-led activities			
• Knows what alternatives are available when alone-time is needed			
• Feels competent to carry out tasks and routines and meet expectations			

Remember...

Feeling in control reduces stress.

Feeling out of control escalates stress.





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Toolbox Activity #6:

My Child's Life

Things That Can Help Reduce Stress for My Child	Every Day	Most/Some Days	Plan to Change
• Gets enough exercise and free time to play and unwind			
• Is offered a variety of familiar, healthy, well-balanced food			
• Receives positive guidance rather than negative consequences for challenging behaviour			
• Has individual time with parents to share good times and problems			
• Receives hugs and signs of affection			
• Receives support and acceptance for strong emotions			
• Has a regular bedtime routine with time to be quiet and calm down			
• Gets enough sleep			
• Gets organized for the next day before bedtime			
• Has a family that laughs and enjoys being together			
• Lives with an adult who shows how to manage stress in a healthy way			

One new thing I would like to try with my child this week is...



Toolbox Activity #7:

Taking Care of Me

When I'm feeling tense and upset I can:

- sing, jump, dance
- choose a sensory activity: play dough, sand or water
- stomp on a stomping mat
- find a comfortable spot
- play with a comfy toy
- look at a book or draw a picture
- tell a teacher
- talk to someone I like
- listen to music
- (add your own favourite things to do).



To help myself feel better, I can:

- take some time out or enjoy quiet time
- talk to my stuffed animals
- talk nicely to myself
- find something fun to enjoy each day
- do stretching or deep breathing to calm down
- punch or snuggle a pillow
- ask an adult for a hug or help
- (add your own favourite things to do).





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Toolbox Activity #8:

Talking Nicely to Myself – My Two Voices

Children learn by example. When adults use their own positive voice out loud this encourages children to do the same.

Imagine that you have two little people, one on each shoulder. One is a friendly little buddy who cheers for you, says good things about you and sticks up for you. The other is a mean, critical bully who points out all your mistakes and calls you nasty names.

When you hear your friendly buddy, listen carefully and repeat the words out loud. When you hear the mean bully say things like “you’re stupid” or “you’re bad at drawing”, don’t agree with what you hear. Say, “No, that’s not right!”

Remember to be your own best friend. Best friends are kind. Best friends are understanding. Best friends encourage us when we have disappointments. Best friends help us celebrate our successes.



Using your positive “buddy” voice

- When you do something very well, say to yourself, “I did a good job. That was great. I knew I could do it!”
- When you do something okay, say, “That was okay. I’m doing all right.”
- When you do something you’re not happy with, say, “That wasn’t my best work. I can do better. Next time, I can try harder. I can learn from this.”
- If I took out too many toys, and can’t tidy them all up in time, I could say, “I tried my best. I need some help.”
- When I can’t sit beside my friends at group time, I can say, “That’s ok. I’ll play with you later. Sarah is fun to sit with too.”
- If you want a toy your friend has and you don’t have one, say, “I really want a toy like Lee’s but I don’t have one. I’ll ask Lee to come over and bring his toy and we can play with it together.”
- If you accidentally spill your drink, say, “I feel sad about making a mess. I’ll get a cloth to clean it up.”

Think of other situations where you could practice your positive voice.



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Toolbox Activity #9:

Have a Ball with Your Kids

Physical activity is more than fun and games – it's a great way to help manage stress, boost energy (or spend it!) and has many benefits including a longer, healthier more fulfilled life. Playing together, being active as a family, reducing sedentary time and making physical activity part of your "together time" sends a powerful message to your kids – and makes for fun times!

Active kids tend to stay active for life, so here are some practical tips* to help you and your kids discover the joys of physical activity:



Make physical activity a fun, regular part of every day

- Take your child to the playground and encourage him/her to climb, swing and play. Make it a social event by inviting other friends along.
- Too wet or cold? Put on some music and dance.
- Make a tradition out of after dinner walks – it's a great way to unwind and makes for some quality family time.
- Yard work can be fun – little family members love to dig, rake, shovel or pick up sticks. Getting dirty is fun!
- Check out programs and opportunities in your community. Most offer a range of affordable programs for kids and families and often host free events like family swim and skate times.
- Think active when buying or making gifts for kids and other family members. Think about how much fun it is to fly a kite or ride a bike, bounce a new ball or throw a Frisbee in the fall.

Be a good role model. It's great for you and your kids!

- Display a positive attitude that being active is fun and feels good.
- Build a family physical activity into every weekend. Go for a hike, ride a bike/trike, build a fort ...
- Participate as a family in community events such as a charity walk.
- Find out what your kids' favourite activities are. Let everyone have a chance to involve the family in their favourite activity.

Encourage your kids to join a sports team or club

- Sport clubs geared to young children are fun-focused and can help develop the physical skills and positive attitudes.
- Many communities offer sport related clubs at little cost or provide subsidies to ensure that all kids can play.

Did you know?

Promoting these three key household routines helps promote children's health, learning and general well-being:

- **Limiting TV/screen time** – aim for no more than two hours per day and none for those under 2 years of age
- **Eating meals together** – research shows that family meals play an important role in child development, family functioning, and nutritional choices
- **Getting adequate sleep** – preschoolers need 11–13 hours of sleep per day

*produced by ParticipACTION www.participaction.com



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Toolbox Activity #9:

Fun and Easy Ways to Get Moving

Here are a couple of fun activities adapted from Busy Bodies* and LEAP BC,* great resources for those working with young children.

It's a Zoo Out There

Have one person be the "zookeeper". The zookeeper calls out an animal and everyone moves around the room just like that animal. When the zookeeper says "feeding time", everyone moves back to the zookeeper imitating their animal and waits for the next animal to be called.

Walk and Roll

Go for a walk. Try a "different walk": walk slowly, quickly, with heavy loud steps, on tiptoes, with long strides, with tiny steps, in a straight line, and in a zigzag. Run, skip, hop, step and jump.

Bubble Chase

Blow some bubbles and invite your children to chase them. Invite them to pop the bubbles using different actions, such as clapping hands or a karate chop. Try to catch the bubbles using different body parts.

Hit the Target

Invite your children to help set up some throwing targets to knock down such as empty milk cartons or some paper targets on a wall at different heights. Give the children several objects to use for throwing (e.g., a bean bag or a paper or sponge ball for indoors, a tennis ball for outdoors). Invite the children to choose a target and try to hit it by throwing one of the objects.



*For more information go to:

www.eatrightontario.ca and

Hop™ Early Learning Practioners Resource. www.2010legaciesnow.com/leap.bc/

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