

How to support young children to regulate their emotions and behaviours during the global health crisis

Hands up who has noticed they are feeling a little unhinged over the last couple of months??!!! We have heard from many families who are noticing changes in the behaviour of their children too. For little people their worlds have been reduced down to a very small space. I heard one parent describe this time for children as “stealing their childhood” which is such a heartbreaking notion. For us to feel unhinged as adults is one thing, but how must it feel for a young person with very little decision making power and agency? Constraining and confusing I would suggest. One experience most of us understand is that when we feel out of control we may find it difficult to manage our emotions and responses. This is the same experience for children but of course it can look different to how adults respond. The following information is research that has been carried out on children’s self regulation and behaviours. There has never been a more prudent time to focus on the importance of helping to learn the explicit skill of regulation....

With Governments around the world asking their citizens to avoid places, activities and gatherings to save lives, this just might be the largest ever international effort to self-regulate our actions against competing desires and impulses.

To achieve this, we must overcome our desire to enjoy the sun and sand, go shopping or to the pub, and even embrace family and friends. Of course, it's not so easy for young children, who must forego activities they previously enjoyed and may be confused by contradictions – like being able to see friends at, but not after, school. But there are ways parents can help children learn to regulate their emotions and behaviours, and to practise these skills.

Why do kids need to learn to self-regulate?

Self-regulation has always played an important role in our lives. It's what underpins our ability to control our behaviours, emotions and interactions, while at the same time avoiding distractions and enticing alternatives. With lower levels of self-regulation, our decisions and behaviours would more frequently be poorly conceived, unnecessarily risky or inappropriate to the situation – often with undesirable results. Even in the early years of life, the ability to self-regulate is important. Pre-school-aged children who have better self-regulation are often better prepared for school and life.

They then tend to:

- have higher levels of academic success
- make fewer risky decisions as adolescents
- and have better health, wealth and productivity as adults.

So, what can we do to support children's self-regulation, especially during this pandemic, when their capacity for self-control already appears to be under strain?

Self-regulation requires at least three things: selecting a goal, problem-solving and working on motivation, and overcoming distraction and impulses.

1. Selecting a goal

Self-regulatory behaviour is goal-directed. That means children must first decide to behave in a particular way.

If a child is unaware of (or forgets) a family convention to wait for everyone to be seated before starting to eat, a child starting to eat before others may appear like a consequence of poor self-regulation. Yet the child never decided to pursue that goal in the first place.

We need to support children's thinking and decision-making around goals, while acknowledging that plans can change and often need to be adjusted. Adults can support children to be more goal-oriented by giving them opportunities to lead and make decisions, as well as encouraging them to devise simple plans, strategies and procedures to achieve goals.

This may be as simple as asking children to decide what they would like to play (building a cubby house), and plan where they would play it (bedroom), with whom (mum, dad, sibling), and what resources they will need (cardboard box, cushions).

2. Problem-solving and motivation

Even when a goal has been decided, the path to its achievement is often not immediate. Children will encounter numerous distractions and competing opportunities along the way. So they need effective problem-solving and motivation strategies. To be an effective problem-solver, children must understand there is more than one way to achieve something. This requires creative and critical-thinking, flexibility and persistence.

As adults we can encourage these by:

Engaging children in brainstorming activities, like finding an alternate ending to a familiar story, such as Peter Pan losing his shadow using open-ended questioning and posing small problems – as in “How might we capture our shadow? What will we need?” Encouraging reflective thinking, such as “I wonder, why don't we see shadows on the ground at night?”

Supporting young children to persist in the face of challenge means taking cues from your child, validating their efforts, reinforcing their solutions and encouraging creative alternatives.

3. Overcome distractions and impulses

Children need to be able to overcome distractions and impulses that are contrary to their goals.

As with most things, this self-regulatory capacity can benefit from practice. This can be achieved in simple, playful ways. One game, played all around the world, is musical statues. Children dance while the music plays and freeze when the music stops. What often happens in this game, though, is children who can't or don't freeze are either left to continue dancing or they are “out”. Those who perhaps could benefit most from the practise get the least opportunity to practise. Instead, if a child doesn't freeze in time, have them try the next round sitting on their bottom, removing their legs from the equation. As they succeed, they can return to standing. Where children can already do this well, why not reverse things so you dance when the music is off and remain still while the music plays? This gives children practice controlling impulses – in this case, to keep dancing when the rule requires them to stop – at an achievable level of challenge. For parents, it gives them unique insight into children's capacities to control their behaviours, and where they may require additional support.

What else do you need to take into account?

Things like stress, tiredness, hunger, fear, sadness and loneliness can deplete children's limited self-regulation resources. Parents should seek to minimise these factors before trying to extend children's self-regulation further.

In the current climate, we can ensure children are operating at their self-regulatory best when we reduce unnecessary demands, ensure routines are not overloaded, are patient and realistic when setting responsibilities.

Lastly, whether we are aware of it or not, children often model themselves on the ways we act and respond. As adults, it's important to reflect on our own behaviours too: do we give up when challenged, yell when frustrated, fight for resources, or preference others in need over our own wants?

How we respond to this “new normal” will set an example for our youngest generation – and they will undoubtedly learn from our responses.

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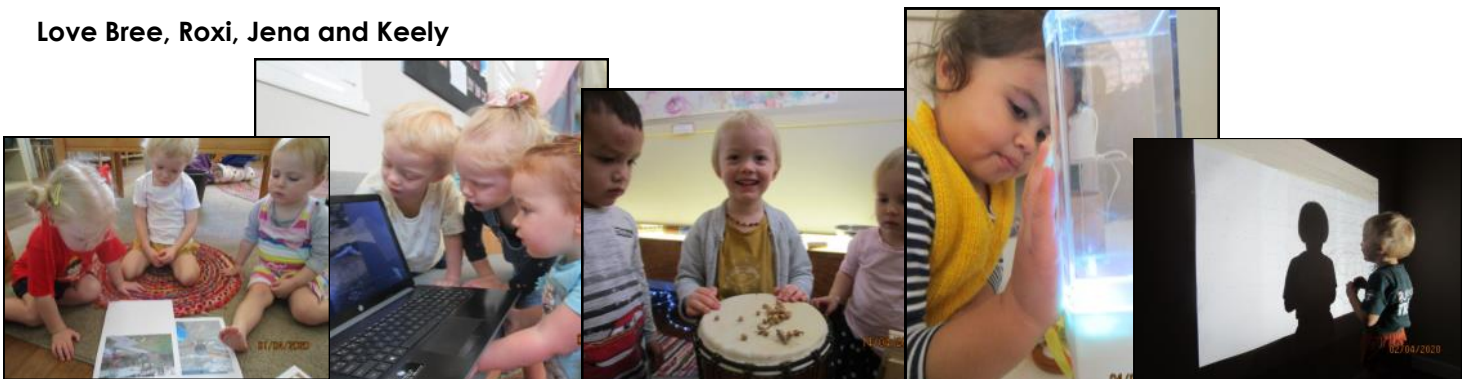
ROOM NEWS...what's been going on in our rooms for March, April & May ????

NURSERY POSSUMS Hello friends...lions and tigers and bears oh my!!! Yes, you would be forgiven for thinking that the Possum room has indeed turned into a zoo. The children are deeply engaged in learning about animals. How they move, what they eat, the sounds they make and the places they live. What the pandemic situation has allowed is a much more global experience of learning about animals as the zoos around the world have been live streaming the animal enclosures. This has provided an opportunity for the children to engage with the animals slowly and intimately albeit digitally through the projected images on the walls of the room. To date the children are enjoying learning about Polar Bears, Elephants, Penguins, Lions and Giraffes. For a more hands on experience we have set up a zoo/animal enclosure in the room for the children to play with our large animal resources and foster a range of creative ideas in their play. Our learning objective of the children expressing their understandings of animals is being documented in different ways and we will have some documentation to share with families in the coming weeks. Thanks for tuning in with us on Facetime for stories, chats and songs over the last couple of weeks. We have loved it and also the photos and anecdotes from home that have been shared. We utilise these photos from home to encourage the children to remain connected with their social groups and to broaden their world view during this time. We are working on creating a family tree to strengthen a sense of community and belonging. We are using photos from home to include in this experience. The children will often take time to stop and examine a photo of their own or their friends family. Please email us a photo of your family to include in the family tree so each child has a chance to enjoy sharing the connection between home and care. **Take care Lauren, Jena, Carley and Olivia**



2-3 YR OLD JOEYS.... Hey there! Whilst flattening the curve we have been still enjoying lots of learning and connectedness. We have loved sharing our daily doings via our emails to families and also our planned Zoom catch ups. Thanks for getting involved, it has been so important to us all. We are glad families have been appreciating the take home packs and our special cards mailed to friends at home. We have certainly seen how our learning can reach beyond the classroom walls. Our memory book is a special highlight for the children, especially now as more friends are slowly starting to come back. The children love to look back and see the lovely times at home. Our project "Transformation" has been so interesting and a true testament to trusting young children's ability to generate their own knowledge building and theory making. Most recently we have been using a speaker on a drum to see how sound transforms to movement. We have used different genres of music to investigate how music and sound transforms our bodies too. We added a water speaker this week to watch how the water moves when responding to the music. This has been a magical learning experience as the children have endless curiosity and ability to continue to experiment confidently. We will be continuing to explore the concept of transformation through clay, paint/art, construction and movement/dance. The community garden has been a wonderful respite for us over the last few weeks too. The children are most interested in picking mandarins to eat and feeding the worms our scraps. We are looking forward to welcoming back our friends over the coming weeks. Thank you for letting us know your plans for May so we can know who will be coming to play :)

Love Bree, Roxi, Jena and Keely



PRESCHOOL WALLABIES.... As we write this news we are joyfully experiencing increasing numbers in the preschool room. Slowly, slowly, ever so slowly and safely we welcome the children back into our shared space of learning and care. Up till now it has been an experience like no other for us in a usually busy, loud and non stop preschool room. At times over the weeks we had 6 children with 3 educators; extraordinary times! So what silver linings did we encounter during this time? The advantage of spending long periods of slow and uninterrupted time with small groups was very beneficial to our ability to really know what the children are interested and engaged in. Being able to discuss topics at length and then make notes to document our continuing project has been an experience of slow pedagogy. We have also then been able to plan ways to include and share this information and discussions through stories and group times with our friends staying at home. For the children at the centre it was an absolute high point of the day to connect with friends who were not physically present. We loved hearing about their news, seeing their photos come in from home and having a rare glimpse into their lives at home. **Learning Project update**—"Inquisitive minds, inquisitive questioners"—we started the year noticing the endless questions and attempts by the children to 'understand why' everything and anything was! Young children are quite the philosophers and at this wonderful stage of their learning lives we want to see and understand what they are truly interested in knowing more about. From gathering lots of data over the first few months, the COVID-19 crisis hit us and everything shifted. We began to notice how the children's questions and wonderings were related to this new lived experience. We collaborated during curriculum meetings and decided that the children were trying to make sense of their new world through unpacking this global issue. It was like a tap was turned on when we broached the subject of the virus gently with the children. They had so much to say, so much knowledge and so much they wanted to know more about. Where we are at the moment with this learning is working towards learning objectives related to this topic which we will be exploring through the hundred languages. The hundred languages refers to the way that children learn in multifaceted ways—through language, music, art, movement, social play, technology and imagination etc. Some of the conversations with the children have been heavily based around the concept of social distancing and we have found ways for the children to further investigate this with clay, measurement, drawing and lots of chatting and playing with this concept. We will have some documentation of this learning to share with families in the coming weeks.

"The need for imagination, a sense of truth, and a feeling of responsibility—these three forces are the very nerve of education" - Steiner.

Wall of Friends staying home—thank you so much for your photos and participation. This wall is a real highlight for the children during this time. Our other special planned experiences for 2020 such as Nature Play at the Creek and Atelierista visits from Jasmine the artist will hopefully resume in a few months once we hear from the health experts what is considered a safe experience for everyone involved.

Stay safe and hopeful—Paula, Ellie, Bec and Donna :)



Equipment Levy 2020

One of the many casualties of the pandemic is our annual equipment levy purchasing scheme. Due to the Early Childcare Relief Package we are of course not able to receive any monies from families and also considering the financial hardship many of our families may be experiencing we will not be applying this levy in 2020. We will endeavour to purchase and replace resources as our budget allows and ensure that we still have wonderful educational equipment for all ages.

Planned Professional Learning— finding new ways to learn as professionals

We have taken advantage of lower numbers of children to spend some quality time on professional learning webinars over the last couple of weeks.

We have found some fabulous online learning opportunities and engaged in the following short courses:

- Documentation solutions
- Working with hope in turbulent times: keeping your spirit alive
- Assessing learning: The what, the when and the how
- I'm a room leader: Now what?
- The healing power of nature and connection

We have also been able to have times where whole room teams have come up to work through the children's project work and other curriculum meetings which has been so great for our connectedness (although safely distanced).

Happy 'Iso' Birthdays to....

Children turned or turning....

March

Jakody 2, Florence 2, Samuel. H 3, Seth 4, Sid 4, Ivy 4, Axel 5, Audrey 5

April

Ella 1, Harry 1, Isla S 2, Claire 2, Maddox 2, Luca F 2, Jonny 3, Penny 4, Lucy 4, Madison 4, Frankie 5

May

Willow 1, Hunter 2, Eve 2, Elliot 3, Hamish 4, and Max C 4

ACCOUNTS—from our understanding the Early Childhood Relief Package will be re-assessed at the end of June, 2020. Until then no fees will be charged and accounts will remain static. Families who have monies owing up to 5 April are welcome to continue to pay those dues. We will advise families if and when this situation changes and fees are again payable. Please be aware that as per usual there will be the normal scheduled fee increase from 1 July of \$2.00 per day effective only when fees are legislated to be paid again and not backdated. Thanks.

Happy Mother's Day to all our wonderful Mums!

We hope you all enjoy special time together celebrating all the things that really matter....each other ♥



To the world,
you are a
mother.
To our family,
you are the
world.

Partnership with Families — reflecting on the value of community participation

At this time of year we normally generate a questionnaire for all families to complete based on some quality areas of our National Quality Standard to measure our performance against. We do this every year so families can have a formal opportunity to share their thoughts, ideas and suggestions for us as an early childhood education and care facility. Amidst the pandemic I made the decision that this could be done at another time in the year when our practices return to some sort of normal. However this has caused me to reflect on the related topic to partnerships with families that I feel has been really evident in the last couple of months; that is the value of community participation.

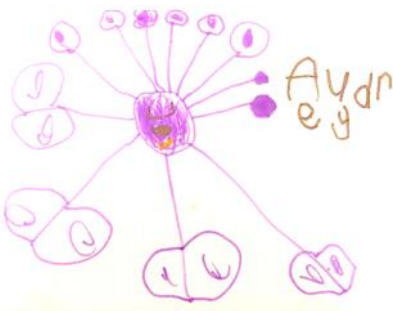
As soon as we understood that a large number of families and children would be disconnected from us due to the pandemic our first priority was to find ways to remain connected. We have been reflecting as a team about how we have and continue to do this and how it makes us feel. We have all agreed that it was vital to our wellbeing to continue to find ways to ensure participation was equitable and meaningful.

We reminded ourselves about the value of the relationships we build with families and how important these are to our role. We also reflected on any stresses we were individually experiencing and that as teachers, educators and leaders, we are mindful of the impact that these relationships can have on the wellbeing and the learning of children. Self-isolation and physical distancing practices are significant and, as we all experience the far-reaching effects of this pandemic, we should ask ourselves, what does this mean for education and our relationships with families? We have found ourselves in un-

charted waters, grappling with the uncertainty that emerges from this complexity. Families may be struggling to assist their child/ren with learning at home, dealing with the impact of their changed life circumstances or suffering from mental health issues, and we as a centre play pivotal roles in creating a space of re-imagined connectedness with the children, families and the communities they are members of. We must always take an ethical approach when we confront new realities.

‘Participation generates and nurtures the feelings and culture of solidarity, responsibility, and inclusion; it produces change and new cultures that contend with the dimension of the contemporary world’.

Indications, REA.



One of the principles of the Reggio Emilia approach is the value of participation and we strongly believe that in all circumstances ‘Participation generates and nurtures the feelings and culture of solidarity, responsibility, and inclusion; it produces change and new cultures that contend with the dimension of the contemporary world’.

Our new reality and consequent daily contexts may look and feel different from what they previously were. Still, opportunities for dialogue and exchange can bolster our communities and provide a sense of strength and comfort.

We hope that families and the children have found comfort in our efforts for participation from afar and the provision of a secure and safe space within the centre. We hope that any families who are struggling would feel comfortable to reach out for support if needed and know that we are here for you in what-

ever capacity you need. The children’s insights and ability to show courage and resilience during this time continue to inspire us. We hope you enjoy some of the joyful photos on our last page of a time in our lives we will never forget ♥





MARCH APRIL
MAY 2020