

Activities related to Pro Social systems

Sand Play

Step by step guide

Step by step guide

1.

1. In preparation for the activity have the sand trays and play figurines and objects ready on the tables. It may be that you will need to do this activity in groups rather than with a whole class depending on how many sand trays and resources you have as each child will need a sand tray to participate in the activity.
2. It is important to be completely alongside the children in reassuring and allowing them to feel that you are with them completely in the sand play. Help the children to find a sand tray to use and enable them to begin to explore the objects, the sand and the figurines, noticing how they begin to explore and play with the sand, what figurines/ objects they choose to bring into the tray. Notice and express the children's experience... e.g. "oooooh I can see it might be it's tickly through your hands..... I can see you smiling as the sand is slipping through..... perhaps it's feeling cold.....I'm imagining it is swirly.... Or silky....." (watch and notice the child's expressions and how they seem to experience the sensations so that you are able to wonder and notice out loud what their experience might be.)
3. Make sure that you are present with the child and that they feel you alongside them in noticing, experiencing and mirroring their sensations and experience.
4. Use language and phrases that validate the experience but doesn't make an assumption about what they are doing..... 'wondering' language e.g. I'm imagining..... I was wondering if..... I might be wrong but I can see....."
5. Try to provide a running commentary on what the child is doing in the play
6.
 - The position of the objects in relation to each other
 - The size of the objects chosen
 - How close the objects are to the edge
 - The actions the figures are making.....

7. At the end of the activity time help the children to put the figurines back and to close the tray. If they are struggling to put the figurines back, take a photograph of the sand tray so that they can have a picture of what they created so that it isn't lost.
8. Enable the children to have another chance to play with the sand tray. They may want to re-create the previous play. Repetition is an important part of emotional growth and exploration so it is essential to allow children many opportunities to recreate and develop their play.
9. The key is in naming the sensations and noticing and matching the sensual experience the child is having. This is about connecting and attuning with them also so that they feel understood, safe and free to be in the moment in the sensations they are experiencing and to have the adult able to wrap the language around the experience.

Resources

Sand

Sand tray

Figurines, objects or toys

Sand Play

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2. It is important to be completely alongside the children in reassuring and allowing them to feel that you are with them completely in the sand play. Help the children to find a sand tray to use and enable them to begin to explore the objects, the sand and the figurines, noticing how they begin to explore and play with the sand, what figurines/ objects they choose to bring into the tray. Notice and express the children's experience... e.g. "oooooh I can see it might be it's tickly through your hands..... I can see you smiling as the sand is slipping through..... perhaps it's feeling cold.....I'm imagining it is swirly.... Or silky....." (watch and notice the child's expressions and how they seem to experience the sensations so that you are able to wonder and notice out loud what their experience might be.)
3. Make sure that you are present with the child and that they feel you alongside them in noticing, experiencing and mirroring their sensations and experience.
4. Use language and phrases that validate the experience but doesn't make an assumption about what they are doing..... 'wondering' language e.g. I'm imagining..... I was wondering if..... I might be wrong but I can see....."
5. Try to provide a running commentary on what the child is doing in the play
6.
 - The position of the objects in relation to each other
 - The size of the objects chosen
 - How close the objects are to the edge
 - The actions the figures are making.....
7. At the end of the activity time help the children to put the figurines back and to close the tray. If they are struggling to put the figurines back, take a photograph of the sand tray so that they can have a picture of what they created so that it isn't lost.
8. Enable the children to have another chance to play with the sand tray. They may want to re-create the previous play. Repetition is an important

part of emotional growth and exploration so it is essential to allow children many opportunities to recreate and develop their play.

9. The key is in naming the sensations and noticing and matching the sensual experience the child is having. This is about connecting and attuning with them also so that they feel understood, safe and free to be in the moment in the sensations they are experiencing and to have the adult able to wrap the language around the experience.

Resources

Sand

Sand tray

Figurines, objects or toys

Friendship Hands

Step by step guide

Step by step guide

Connecting

Play the connecting game hedgehogs. The children move around the room to music. When the music stops the children curl up on the floor like hedgehogs and close their eyes. Place a blanket over one of the children so that they are hidden and ask the children to then stand up and guess who is under the blanket. Then ask the children to share things they like about the child who is being the hedgehog. Repeat the game a few times.

Exploring

Help the children to get into pairs and invite one of the children to draw around their partner's hand. On each finger ask the child to write a word to describe what they like about their partner e.g. kind, friendly, smiley, funny. Ask the children to swop over and then give them time to decorate their partner's hand drawing.

Reflecting

Help the children to notice how it felt to be in partners and to draw around their partner's/friend's hand. What descriptive words did they come up with to describe their friend? How did it feel to hear the words your friend chose about you? Which is the word you liked best that most describes you? Share ideas and then end the session with a circle round....What I like best about my friend is.....

Resources

Cosy Blanket
Paper
Pens

Spa Experience – Hands

Step by step guide

Step by step Guide

1. Ensure that there is a positive and safe atmosphere in the room. If you are able to, it is worth considering the lighting, soft background music, a relaxing atmosphere.
2. As a one to one activity ensure the child/ student feels safe with a thoughtful key adult and be aware of ensuring there is safety and containment for the child. Be aware of those students who find touch difficult and help them to feel acknowledged, safe and understood. If this is done as a small group activity, make sure there are containing adults and that the children/ students feel able to participate in the activity.
3. Give the opportunity for the child/ children to smell the different essential oils and to choose the one they like the most. A couple of drops can then be added to the bowl of warm water and encourage them to smell and breathe in as they relax with the breathing and the smell. Notice, name and match the mood, response of the child with a warm, caring and open face. Use words to describe.... E.g. 'mmmm smell the lavender... or citrus smell', 'it feels tingly in my nose... I wonder how that sensation is in your nose, in your tummy and I can see you smile as you breathe in the aroma....' Be aware that sometimes there isn't the need for too many words but you match and validate the child's experience with your eyes, smile and presence.
4. Invite the child or the children participating to put their hands into the warm essential oil water and to enjoy the sensation of the water trickling over their hands or absorbing their hands in comfort and warmth. The children may be working in pairs or with an adult to a child or one to one an adult and a child. It is essential that there is a safe and containing atmosphere in the room.
5. Offer a hand scrub to gently exfoliate the skin and to then wash this off in the warm water. Allow the child to be absorbed in the physical sensation of the water, hand scrub on their hands.
6. It may be that the sensation of the water and the oils is enough for some students/ children within this activity but offer the opportunity for a manicure where the adult can then dry of the child's hands and gently files the nails.
7. Nail varnish could then be applied if the child is open for this as part of the activity. Again, acknowledge and validate how the child is feeling and the sensations that they might have by using wondering descriptive language but also just containing and validating their expression in your presence alongside them in the activity.
8. The adult notices and names the sensations and the experience for the students understanding that they may be unable to name and think about the experience

and need the adult to name and give them the language to shape their experience.

9. Enable there to be a light and positive atmosphere in the room so that everyone feels safe and valued. The key is in naming the sensations and noticing and matching the sensual experience the child is having. This is about connecting and attuning with them also so that they feel understood, safe and free to be in the moment in the sensations they are experiencing and to have the adult able to wrap the language around the experience or simply to just be with them in the moment, containing, reassuring and safe.

Notes

Don't presume that this activity is just for girls. Be prepared for students not to have the nail varnish or offer nail tattoos instead. Follow your instinct and be relaxed. Make sure the young person is not allergic to any of the products.

Resources

Hand lotion

Essential oils

Hand scrub

Candles

Soft music

Towels

Nail varnish

Warm water

Nail varnish remover

Nail file

Cotton wool pads

Cuticle remover

Transitional Objects

Step by step guide

Step by step guide

1. For children in the initial stages of forming attachments and trusting relationship with adults, or for children who have experienced the loss of security in relationship through domestic violence, illness, separation or bereavement, being away from their significant adult is both painful and unbearable.
2. Transitional objects can help maintain the sense of connection and alleviate the panic of separation, giving the child a continued sense of attachment in the absence of physical presence.
3. When we are present with another, all of our senses are involved in creating that sense of connection. Where possible, a transitional object should be multi-sensory to recreate this.
4. It is often helpful for both the adult and the child/young person to have similar objects so that the sense of connection is reciprocal – two marbles, two shells or two worry dolls for example.
5. In preparation for a time apart, share the two objects with the child.
6. Ask the child to hold one in their hand whilst you, or the significant adult, holds the other. Talk about the things that you or the significant adult enjoys. Notice about the child and comment on how as you are speaking, the object in your hand is getting warmer as you think about the child.
7. Tell the child that every time they are apart, feel anxious or worried, they can use the object. They can hold it in their hand and remember all the things they have enjoyed together, and the object will warm up in their hand
8. It may help for the child to know that when they touch the object and remember, the adult will also be doing the same thing, reinforcing the sense of connection.

Notes

This is a useful activity to use with children and young people who have experienced domestic violence within their family. Often separation from the home environment can cause great anxiety and panic regarding the parental victim, particularly when leaving them to come to school. It can also be used to support a child/young person when a trusted adult is absent from school. Consideration should be taken in the size and visibility of objects used for older children in the Secondary age phase, ensure these can be discreetly accessed in a pocket, or sewn inside a cardigan or jacket. Ensure that class teachers or subject teachers are aware of the significance of the objects and that these are not removed from the child or young person.

Resources

Pairs of objects that can be given one to the significant adult and one to the child or young person.

An object belonging to the significant adult that the child can keep.

Musical Moment

Step by step guide

1. Help the children to move into a circle. Encourage, help and enable children to sit together with sensitive adults placing a kind hand around a child that needs reassurance or a sense of containment. Be aware of those children who find touch difficult and help them to feel acknowledged, safe and understood.
2. The adult then reveals a special box in his / her lap and gently and with a calm, reassuring voice that also is interested and wondering out loud about what is inside, gently opens the box to reveal some musical instruments.
3. Notice the sounds the children make and 'answer' their responses by mirroring and modelling surprise, interest, excitement and a sense of anticipation.
4. The adult then shows some of the instruments and hands some of them out so the children begin to explore the sounds they make. It is important for the adult to acknowledge the children's responses with lots of open, smiling, encouraging facial expressions and care to help the children to discover the sounds.
5. This activity can be totally exploratory and organic, allowing the children's curiosity to explore and enjoy the sounds the instruments make, or the children can be encouraged to tap a pulse and to feel a heartbeat rhythm.
6. Notice the sensations and expressions the children make and again validate, notice, model and mirror their responses with an openness and reassurance, and a response that shows the children you are completely with them in the moment.
7. The children can then be encouraged to hear the pulse and then for other rhythms to be echoed over the pulse. Some of the children can be encouraged to hold the pulse while others mimic back a rhythm that the adult or one of the children presents.
8. This activity enables the adult and child to begin to make safe and reassuring eye contact and for the child to experience an adult who is completely emotionally available to them, caring about their response, responding sensitively and openly. It is important that the adult's face is open, kind and compassionate to enable the child to feel safe and nurtured through this activity.
9. While the children are involved in the activity, the adult will need to notice and name the sensations and the experience for them, understanding that children may be unable to name and think about the experience and need the adult to name and give them the language to shape their experience.

Resources

Range of different instruments – maracas, triangle, tamborines

Hand Massage

Step by step guide

Step by step guide

1. Ensure that there is a positive and safe atmosphere in the room amongst the students. It is beneficial to have a group charter that provides a sense of respect and collaboration within the group but also be aware of those students who may find being part of a group difficult and ensure that the students have a chance to step back from some of the connecting activities that they may find too difficult to engage with initially.
2. Help the students to move into a circle. Encourage, help and enable them to sit together with thoughtful key adults reassuring students who are more reluctant and need a sense of containment. Be aware of those students who find touch difficult and help them to feel acknowledged, safe and understood.
3. The adult then shows the hand lotion and puts a blob on his/her hand..... naming how it feels, the sensations with an open, friendly voice..... e.g. "ooooh it feels smooth and shiny....."
4. See if some of the students would like to have some and gently place a blob on their hands. Be careful to notice the sensation and the responses of the children as they try and watch as they rub it in or smell it and add the language for them... "I see how it is cold on your hand....." "ooooh I wonder if that is smooth and silky..." "I can see you smiling and notice how it feels nice to touch..."
5. The adult can then show how to rub or massage the hand lotion into their own hand or on the hand of a student who doesn't mind having a go..... and the adult notices their experience or their body language and names it..... "I can see how you are a little reticent... maybe it's a bit cold at first on your skin..... I wonder if you are noticing the smell of the cream.....? You are even beginning to smile as I'm smoothing the cream on your hand..."
6. Invite the group to join with a partner and have a go at massaging each other's hands but be aware of those children who aren't keen.
7. Be aware of the students that will find it hard to allow another to touch their hand and keep them safe with noticing this out loud and offering for them to feel the sensation themselves without being with another person. Keep them nearby and in mind as they explore the sensations of the cream on their skin.
8. The adult notices and names the sensations and the experience for the students understanding that they may be unable to name and think about the experience and need the adult to name and give them the language to shape their experience.
9. Enable there to be a light and positive atmosphere in the room so that everyone feels safe and valued. The key is in naming the sensations and noticing and matching the sensual experience the child is having. This is about connecting

and attuning with them also so that they feel understood, safe and free to be in the moment in the sensations they are experiencing and to have the adult able to wrap the language around the experience or simply to just be, to just be with them in the moment, containing, reassuring and safe.

Notes

Be aware of students who may have allergies to particular hand creams.

Resources

Hand lotion

Animal Play

Step by step guide

Step by step Guide

1. Together with the child, choose an animal for the child to spend time with (e.g. chicken, dog, guinea pig).
2. While the animal is in a safe place away from, but visible to, the child, discuss the activity and what needs to be considered before working with the animal, for example, how to behave safely around the animal, how the animal may react to the child's behaviour.
3. Be attentive to the child's emotional state, so that you can be as fully responsive and emotionally regulating as possible before introducing the animal: for example, encouraging and reassuring a fearful child and/or calming an overexcited one.
4. Define the boundaries of where the child needs to be: sitting or standing in a certain place, to ensure that they don't chase the animal in excitement.
5. Introduce the animal to the child.
6. With the child, observe, notice and comment on the animal: what it looks like, how it's behaving, what you think it might be feeling at this point. Do not force interaction at this stage.
7. Observe, notice and comment on how the child seems to be too, both physically and emotionally, and regulate where appropriate.
8. Talk about what the animal might need in terms of care and attention: draw parallels to what the child needs, and what humans in general, need.
9. Gently encourage interaction and engagement between the child and animal and notice out loud what the child may be feeling and even the animal and name this, adding language to the experience for the child.
10. Involve the child regularly in the day to day care of the animal if possible. Notice, comment on and praise the child's increasing confidence and skills in learning to care for the animal and how their relationship with the animal is deepening.
11. As the child's capacity to be in relationship with the animal increases, shine the light on the child's capacity to care and praise their growing understanding of and capacity to meet the animal's needs.

Notes This activity is best done with a responsive animal but could be adapted for use with stick insects etc. See also PLAY outcomes.

Resources A willing, engaging and safe animal.

Hand Massage

Step by step guide

Step by step guide

Connecting

Play squeeze. With the children and the adults all sitting in a circle, join hands and ask the children to close their eyes. The teacher then gently squeezes the hand of the child next to them and that child then passes the squeeze onto the next person and so on around the circle.

Exploring

With the children sitting in a circle, place a little blob of hand lotion on each child's hand and ask them to rub it in and to smell it. Be mindful of those children who don't want to have the hand lotion on them and allow them to just watch, noticing out loud that they don't want to have it on them and acknowledging that that is fine. Ask the children to share how it feels, what it smells like and if they like it.... Share ideas with an open, smiling and supportive face that allows the children to explore and notice their sensations.

Ask for a volunteer who would like a hand massage and show the children how to massage the lotion into a friend's hand.

Help the children to get into pairs and invite one of the children to massage their friend's hand using hand lotion. Ask them to share how it feels and what sensations they might have. Value each child's contribution and enable them to feel safe and able to be with their partner. The children can then swop over so everyone has a turn

Reflecting

Help the children to notice how it felt to massage each other's hands. Use a round to describe a feeling word that you felt while your hand was being massaged.

I felt..... (e.g. calm, tickly, nice, smooth, bumpy...etc)

Resources

Hand lotion

Bubbles Inside Bubbles

Step by step guide

Step by step guide

1. In preparation for the activity have the washing up bowls, washing up liquid and straws etc ready on the tables. It may be that you will need to do this activity in groups rather than with a large group depending on how many resources you have.
2. Ensure that there is a positive and safe atmosphere in the room amongst the students. It is beneficial to have a group charter that provides a sense of respect and collaboration within the group but also be aware of those students who may find being part of a group difficult and ensure that the students have a chance to step back from some of the connecting activities that they may find too difficult to engage with initially.
3. The adult then shows them the bubble game – a bowl of water with washing up liquid inside it and encourages the students in pairs to have a go at blowing into the water with a straw. As the bubbles emerge and swarm, the adult models the fun and the laughter and matches the expression of the students as they blow the bubbles and see them emerging.
4. The adult shows fun in their facial expressions and matches the noises and exclamations that the students make, then naming the experience for them....
“wow... look! There are loads of bubbles!!” “Bubbling up and out of the bowl.”
The adult models, matches and laughs whilst naming the sensation... “those bubbles are like when I’m nervous or when I’m excited in my stomach....” Bubbles of fun.....”
5. Encourage the students to see how many bubbles they can make together. Allow them to have a go... to just be in the moment with the activity and to be together in blowing the bubbles bigger and bigger as they begin to raise up and fill the bowl.
6. It is important to be completely alongside the students in holding the atmosphere as fun and open and explorative in a safe and calm way. The students can then just go with the activity enjoying the sensation, the flow of the bubbles and the safety of the activity.
7. Notice and express the student’s experience... e.g. “oooooh the bubbles are rising and coming up out of the bowl..... eeeeeek.....’ ‘ I can see you taking in big breaths as you blow..... ‘ I am noticing.....’
8. Watch and notice expressions on the faces of the students as they concentrate, or play or laugh.... and wonder out loud what their experience might be.
9. Encourage them to notice their breathing and to change it ... what effect does that have on the bubbles and on their experience?

10. Then offer them the challenge of seeing if they can blow a bubble into a bubble...
11. Be alongside the students and share in their experience and the 'just being' in the moment of the fun of the bubbles.

Resources

Washing up/ or mixing bowls
Water
Washing up liquid
Straws

Feather Faces

Step by step guide

Step by step Guide

1. Help the children to move into a circle. Encourage, help and enable children to sit together with sensitive adults placing a kind hand around a child that needs reassurance or a sense of containment. Be aware of those children who find touch difficult and help them to feel acknowledged, safe and understood.
2. The adult then reveals a colourful small box in his / her lap and gently, with a calm and reassuring voice that also is interested and wondering out loud about what is inside, gently opens the box to reveal some colourful feathers. Notice the sounds the children make and 'answer' their responses by mirroring and modelling surprise, interest, excitement and a sense of anticipation that feels safe and calm. The adult shows in their response that it is ok to wonder about what is inside the box, to stimulate and mirror the children's responses so that they feel recognised and responded positively to.
3. The adult then shows the children some of the colourful feathers and begins to stroke one along his / her hand naming how it feels, the sensations and openly shows the delight or tickly feeling or sensation with an open and expressive face. "Ooooooh it's a tickly feel," "It feels silky..... I can sense a softness as it brushes over my hand."
4. Invite the children to touch the feathers and to have a go at stroking them along their hand / arm by giving some of them out or inviting the children to choose a feather from the special box. Notice the sensations and expressions the children make and again validate and notice, model and mirror their responses with an open face, reassuring and a response that shows the children you are completely with them in the moment.
5. When the children have had a chance to feel the feathers on their skin, the adult can then model the sensation of the feather on their face and again name the sensation – the tickle of the feather, the softness, the prickly sensation of the feather.
6. The adult can then see if one of the children is willing to allow the adult to demonstrate imaginatively painting their face with one of the feathers. Gently and softly brush the feather around the face of the child around the eyes, the cheeks, the mouth. Watch and notice the reaction and name the sensation that the child seems to be showing. "I can see how you are smiling when I brush your cheeks...." "oooooh I can see how that tickled you a bit too much as you pulled away but then you moved closer again for me to have another go." "I'm wondering how that might be feeling soft on your face and silky....." Notice, name and reassure, showing the child all the time that you are there with them in that exact moment. (This activity enables the adult and child to begin to make

safe and reassuring eye contact and for the child to experience an adult who is completely emotionally available to them, caring about their response, responding sensitively and openly. It is important that the adult's face is open, kind and compassionate to enable the child to feel safe and nurtured through this activity.)

7. The children could then be encouraged to have a go in pairs to paint each other's faces with the feathers. Be aware of the children that will find it hard to allow another to touch their face. Keep them safe with noticing this out loud and offering for them to feel the sensation themselves without being with another child. Some children might just want to have their hand or arm brushed instead of their face, and ensure that you enable this to happen so that the children feel safe and not in a situation which is uncomfortable for them. Some children may just want to watch or to brush the feathers on their own skin and again, make sure you notice this and help them to do this. Keep the children who need adult reassurance nearby and in mind as they explore the sensations of the feathers on their skin.
8. While the children are involved in the activity, the adult will need to notice and name the sensations and the experience for them, understanding that children may be unable to name and think about the experience and need the adult to name and give them the language to shape their experience.

Resources

Colourful feathers

Links

www.theraplay.co.uk

Band Leader

Step by step guide

Step by step guide

1. Ensure that there is a positive and safe atmosphere in the room amongst the students. It is beneficial to have a group charter that provides a sense of respect and collaboration within the group but also be aware of those students who may find being part of a group difficult and ensure that the students have a chance to step back from some of the connecting activities that they may find too difficult to engage with initially.
2. Help the students to move into a circle and ask one of them to be the 'heart - beat' by using the drum to play a steady pulse or heart- beat rhythm.
3. Invite other students to then choose an instrument and to join in the heart beat rhythm. Encourage the students to be aware of their breathing and whether it is in time with the pulse or heart beat rhythm. Notice, name and verbalise the sensations that the students may be aware of and the atmosphere within the room.... if it is calm, hearing the pulse, noticing how it feels inside your body.
4. Then invite another of the students to be the 'band leader' and to tap out a rhythm in time to the heart- beat rhythm. The other students are then encouraged to copy it and echo it back.
5. Give different students the chance to be the 'band leader' or the heart beat rhythm.
6. Enjoy the activity.... keeping it safe, relaxed and noticing the breathing, if it changes with the rhythm, how it feels inside your body as the rhythm changes. Notice and name out loud what you think might be the sensations for the students and also use wondering language... e.g. 'Im wondering if your breathing is faster... slower..... feels calm.... Feels energised.....?'

Resources

Percussion instruments:

Drum

Tamborines

Triangle

Maracas etc..

Sand Exploration

Step by step guide

Step by step guide

1. In preparation for the activity have the sand trays, figurines and objects ready on the tables. It may be that you will need to do this activity in groups rather than with a large group depending on how many sand trays and resources you have as each student will need a sand tray to participate in the activity.
2. It is important to be completely alongside the student in reassuring and allowing them to feel that you are with them completely in the sand play. Help them to find a sand tray to use and enable them to begin to explore the objects, the sand and the figurines, noticing how they begin to explore and play or manipulate the sand, what figurines/ objects they choose to bring into the tray. Notice and express the student's experience... e.g. "oooooh I can see it might be it's tickly through your hands..... ' I am noticing that it feels hard to select things to use in the sand..... ', I am noticing you you smiling as the sand is slipping through..... perhaps it's feeling cold.....I'm imagining it is swirly.... Or silky....." (watch and notice the child's expressions and how they seem to experience the sensations so that you are able to wonder and notice out loud what their experience might be.)
3. Make sure that you are present with the child and that they feel you alongside them in noticing, experiencing and mirroring their sensations and experience.
4. Use language and phrases that validate the experience but doesn't make an assumption about what they are doing..... 'wondering' language e.g. I'm imagining..... I was wondering if..... I might be wrong but I can see....."
5. Try to provide a running commentary on what the child is doing in the play
 - o The position of the objects in relation to each other
 - o The size of the objects chosen
 - o How close the objects are to the edge
 - o The actions the figures are making.....
6. Be aware of sometimes needing to be just being quiet and allowing the child to explore with you present, alongside and reassuring but not intrusive.
7. At the end of the activity time help the students' to put the figurines back and to close the tray. If they are struggling to put the figurines back, take a photograph of the sand tray so that they can have a picture of what they created so that it isn't lost.
8. Enable them to have another chance to play or explore with the sand tray. They may want to re-create the previous scene. Repetition is an important part of emotional growth and exploration so it is essential to allow them many opportunities to recreate and develop their play or exploration.

9. The key is in naming the sensations and noticing and matching the sensual experience the child is having. This is about connecting and attuning with them also so that they feel understood, safe and free to be in the moment in the sensations they are experiencing and to have the adult able to wrap the language around the experience or simply to just be, to just be with them in the moment, containing, reassuring and safe.

Resources

Sand trays

Small world figurines –some that are could appeal to more difficult feelings e.g. skulls, villains, super heroes etc...

Range of objects

My Hideaway

Step by step guide

Step by step Guide

Creating a safe space

1. For this activity you may want the children to work in groups to create a den or this could be an activity that an adult does alongside a child who is more vulnerable on a one to one basis. The activity is about providing containment and safety and helping the children to know where they can go if they need to feel safe. The activity can be done to create spaces that are just for the duration of the activity time or can be left as spaces that can be accessed in a classroom or playground or somewhere else within the school that is close by, a specifically identified place that can remain accessible to the children at other times beyond the activity time.
2. In preparation for the activity have a range of den making materials available for the children such as large pieces of material, sheets, cushions, fabric etc.
3. Sensitively help the children to form into groups being aware that all children feel included and safe to work with others. (It may be that some children will need to work directly with an adult to be able to participate in the activity and be observant and careful in noticing the anxieties of the children in your care).
4. Help the children to find a space whether you are working in a classroom or another area of the school and give them time to create and build their own dens using material, blankets, rugs, sheets. Notice how the children are absorbed in the activity and give them time to bring cushions, rugs or special things into the den once they have made it.
5. The children may like to research ideas to help make it feel cosy and safe e.g. cushions, sensory toys, rugs, larva lamps etc.
6. Consider creating different play lists of music that can be available to listen to in the hideaway.
7. Allow the children the chance to enjoy being inside the dens once they are made and perhaps play a game with their group or have a snack time in the den.
8. This activity as a class or group experience is about fun as well as creating containment and safety. It is important to recognize that some children will need a special individual den or safe space somewhere within the school that they know they can go to so it is important that individual 1-1 time is given to create a specific space for identified children.

Notes

If there is no space within school the hideaway could be created outside. Some forest school services can help schools create waterproof places in the grounds of the school.

Resources

A space within school that can be used as a safe space for students

Soft lights

Bean bags to sit on

Cushions

Throws and blankets

Paint or pictures

Links

www.youtube.com/watch?v=156fNfM6dM0, www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0gY0Rak-sk

Mirror Game

Step by step guide

1. Help the children to move into a circle. Encourage, help and enable children to sit together with sensitive adults placing a kind hand around a child that needs reassurance or a sense of containment. Be aware of those children who find touch difficult and help them to feel acknowledged, safe and understood.
2. Share the 'mirror game' with the children by choosing a child to show how it works and have the child with the adult in the centre of the circle. The child is 'the mover' in the game and the adult 'the mirror.' Invite the child to put their hands up palms outward by their chest and the adult mirrors their hands as if they are the mirror image. The child can then move their hands in circle movements or to the side or up and down and the adult 'mirror' follows the movement. Allow the child to move their hands for a few minutes and then swap over so the child becomes the mirror in the game.
3. Ensure that the adult is calm and friendly in the way they engage and encourage the child to participate in the activity. Then show the children some variations of the game how it can include a leg moving or funny facial expressions. (This activity enables the adult and child to begin to make safe and reassuring eye contact and for the child to experience an adult who is completely emotionally available to them, caring about their response, responding sensitively and openly. It is important that the adults face is open, kind and compassionate to enable the child to feel safe and nurtured through this activity.)
4. Then encourage the group of children to join in pairs to have a go at the game. Be vigilant to ensure all children have a partner with whom to play the game and that children are helped sensitively to be with a partner and not feeling left out or vulnerable. Some children may need to be with a specific adult that they trust to be able to have a go at the game.
5. It is important that the children feel contained and safe and able to be with their partner in the game. The adults can notice the sensations and expressions the children make and again validate and notice, model and mirror their responses with an open face, reassuring and a response that shows the children you are completely with them in the moment.
6. While the children are involved in the activity, the adult will need to notice and name the sensations and the experience for them, understanding that children may be unable to name and think about the experience and need the adult to name and give them the language to shape their experience.

Resources

Small mirrors

