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Supporting your child's emotional development

The following are tools you can use in any location at any time. These will not only help your child create a stronger self-esteem, feel respected and valued, but will also strengthen your relationship together.

Emotional Support

- Provide opportunities and a safe space for your child to **share what they are feeling or thinking**. Be careful to not make judgments about what your child shares. *Read books about feelings with your child. This helps normalize that all children and people have different feelings, and can help provide an outlet for them to share with you about what they are feeling.*
- **Validate** your child's emotions. *"You are allowed to feel scared."* Help your child understand it is healthy and they are allowed to have different emotions; and that they can learn how to handle the emotions in a safe way.
- Remind yourself that **behaviors communicate** to adults that a child is overwhelmed and needs your help.
- **Listen** to what your child says is their concern, and why they are upset. **Reflect** what they share. *"I hear you are upset because you thought we were going to stop at the park, and now it's raining."*
- Your child is still learning how to calm down; **help regulate** your child externally. *Use a comforting tone of voice, loving touches, hugs, holding, rocking, 'I hear you,' 'I'm here to help you feel better,' sit next to them, breathe.* During times when they are calm, **practice** how to handle challenging emotions or situations. *Have your child help teach a stuffed animal/toy/sibling/parent how to handle the same challenges your child faces.*
- During times when your child is upset, get your child **moving!** Research shows that moving can help reintegrate the brain and increases emotional regulation. *Take a 'snake' breath, do a jumping jack, throw a ball into the couch, stomp their feet, crayon scribbles, stretch.*
- **Self-care**. It is vitally important for you to take care of your own emotional needs. When you are overwhelmed, anxious, mad, etc. it becomes increasingly difficult to support your child. Find something you enjoy doing and incorporate that into your day. It could be taking 5 minutes to work on a cross-word puzzle, closing your eyes and taking a deep breath, going for a walk, talking to a good friend; find something that helps you and make a commitment to yourself (which is also for the betterment of your child) to incorporate this at some level.

Incorporate the following

- Use **choices**. Allow your child to choose between two or three options. This gives a sense of control, yet you are ultimately choosing which options are ok. This is particularly important for children who are experiencing transitions.
- Hold **realistic expectations** for your child's age and abilities.
- **Be predictable**. Using consistent actions and keeping to routines, you decrease the stress of not knowing what to expect. This includes providing consistent meal and sleep times.
- Be aware of your child's **sensory needs**. Do they get overstimulated with bright lights? Are there scents that are calming? Use sensory activities to help meet needs of your child.
- ****Spend 1:1 time** with your child where they get to pick what activity you play - safety and respect are the rules, follow your child's lead. No phones, tv, or computer during this time.