

Play Therapist's Top Tips

Creating a safe, positive learning environment in schools

● Make sure that you are incorporating play into your lessons.

- ★ Children learn through play.
- ★ It teaches them how to engage and interact with others therefore teaching and embedding important concepts such as sharing, turn taking, trust and communication.
- ★ Play is fun and is therefore an easy way for children to learn and practice new skills.



● Create a safe and supportive environment for children.

- ★ Children need to feel safe before they can learn.
- ★ Having consistency and routine creates a sense of predictability and, therefore, safety.
- ★ Having boundaries creates a sense of predictability and safety which in turn fosters a culture of trust and respect.
- ★ A connection and a positive relationship between teacher and child are what forms the foundation for learning.
- ★ Showing a child that you care for them makes them more willing to learn and try new things.



● Mistakes are part of learning.

- ★ By giving a child the opportunity to try, and sometimes fail, you are providing them with the opportunity to build both social and emotional skills.
- ★ Mistakes allow children to build resilience.
- ★ By allowing children to come to the answer themselves you are allowing them to build a sense of self-confidence.
- ★ Remember, you are there to guide and support rather than just to do.



● Knowing the brain and the way the brain develops is vital.

- ★ Our 'logical brains' are not fully developed until the age of 25.
- ★ This means that children may not always think the way we do or respond the way we think they should because they simply are not yet able to!
- ★ Knowing where your child is at developmentally allows us to develop appropriate ways to respond and deal with situations in a way that children will not only understand but also grow from.



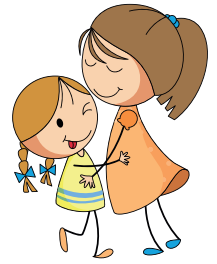
● Be attuned to children's emotional needs.

- ★ Emotions are complex and children may not always have the capacity to describe why they are feeling a certain way.
- ★ Children often express their emotions through their behaviours.
- ★ Before putting a label on a child's behaviour, make sure you investigate the possible reasons as to why the child could be behaving in that way.
- ★ Developing an understanding of where these behaviours are coming from enables us to respond to them in the correct way.



● Think about the way you are disciplining children.

- ★ The way we discipline plays a fundamental role in establishing positive behaviours as well as building important skills such as respect for others and self-discipline.
- ★ Children learn through what they see and what they experience.
- ★ Compassionate discipline focuses on discussing a child's actions with them, allowing them to see the cause and effect of their actions which, in turn, allows them to learn and understand a more acceptable form of behaviour.
- ★ Compassionate discipline puts an emphasis on the importance of the relationship with the child, encouraging communication about why there are limitations and boundaries put in place rather than using the phrase 'because I said so'.
- ★ Lastly, compassionate discipline allows for acceptance of emotions. Allowing children to communicate and recognise their own emotions creates a sense of self-awareness and ensures their wellbeing.



● Promote social-emotional learning.

- ★ SEL gives children the tools to develop everyday social skills and emotional intelligence.
- ★ This knowledge helps children identify their feelings, build strong relationships, make empathetic decisions, and understand and communicate with others.
- ★ These skills can improve a child's performance in class, improve their interactions with other people and build their self-esteem – traits which are all vital to classroom learning.



● Make use of a regulation toolbox.

- ★ Feelings are not always easy to describe in words.
- ★ Trying to get a child to explain how they are feeling or why they are feeling a certain way, when they may not be able to, may leave them feeling more frustrated.
- ★ Children need strategies and tools to help them self-regulate.
- ★ This allows them to have a sense of control over the situation.
- ★ A regulation toolbox, with things they have chosen to put inside that they feel may help them calm down may prevent a situation from escalating.



● Transitions are important.

- ★ Whether its entering or exiting the class or changing from one task to the next, a warning ahead of time and a transition from one activity to the next allows children time to process what they have just done as well as prepare for the next thing, without feeling rushed.
- ★ Verbal cues, such as a ten-minute warning, using visuals such as a timer or simply giving children 5 minutes of downtime between activities are all examples of ways to help children transition.



● Take care of yourself.

- ★ Teaching can be demanding work, so it's important for you to take care of your own physical and emotional well-being.
- ★ This will also allow you to be more effective in the way you reach students.

