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ISSUE 20

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2022



Photo by Dolly Redfern

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Hello Belper & beyond,

BOOM... it's our 20th edition of Boom Magazine and for it we are highlighting this year's **Children's Mental Health Week**, taking place on **7-13 February 2022**. The national campaign aims to shine a spotlight on the importance of children and young people's mental health. This year's theme is **Growing Together** and so we have asked some of Amber Valley's experts for some helpful articles to support you and your children after what has been an unsettling couple of years during the pandemic.

Debbie, a local NLP therapist, writes directly about this year's theme, focusing on growing emotionally. Bridge The Gap Children's Mental Health CIC in Derby have shared articles around the benefits of nature for children and some 'anxiety-busting' tips. A local well-being author and councillor tells us about her new children's book centred around 'Courage' with some lovely ideas to help your children to be courageous in uncomfortable situations. Plus, we also hear from Fiona Holiday, a play therapist who reminds us of the importance of play even during uncertain times.

With very few events on this time of year, our centre spread instead gives you lots of inspiration for 'Winter Days Out' and we also have a super article written by a local mum with tips for taking your baby swimming.

As always, we give you the updated timetable of classes and groups for 0-5s in Belper and we are forever grateful to our sponsors and hope you will enjoy browsing through what they have on offer locally. Happy New Year and may 2022 be a great year for all of our readers!

Jo & Sascha.

Editors

Sascha Landskron and Jo Leigh

Editors of Boom Magazine and local mums

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Front Cover Stars: Edward & Albie
Photo by: Delly Redfern



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GROWING TOGETHER

Debbie Kinghorn, NLP Therapist



Do you measure the height of your child/children? For many of us we carry this out against a door frame or wall chart, small pencil etchings plotting our child's ascent. Each year we're able to see their physical progress. Strangely though, this is one of the few times we measure our children's growth against themselves in a way that they can see and understand, and it's not even something they have control over!

When I was told about this year's Children's Mental Health week topic, I was so pleased as it provides so much potential to support wellbeing and increase confidence and self-esteem. I've thought about this in more detail and believe it's predominantly focussed on the following three areas...

Personal Growth

When children start school, their progress becomes plotted against others. This can often have a difficult effect on our child's emotional wellbeing. They may become anxious at the thought of not making it further up the ladder or, if they're high up on a scale, anxious of losing that status. Alternatively, they may give up, believing that they're never going to be better than those who do occupy the 'top spots' and so why bother?

So, let's bring our kids back to the real concept of personal growth and help them acknowledge their own progression and understand skills that come naturally to them. One way to do this is to start the year by

creating visuals for the wall or a little book of growth showing some of the things they achieved within the last year. As a family, you can review this monthly to show their progress. The more we're able to see and acknowledge our progress (however small), the more willing we are to keep progressing.

Wellbeing Growth

We've just talked about how we measure physical and academic growth, however, how we nurture and progress our wellbeing is often forgotten. It's regularly considered a by-product of our day to day lives. Let's take the opportunity of the new year to spend more time actively nurturing and monitoring our wellbeing.

Things we can spend time on include: learning about different emotions, eating healthily*, getting to bed on time, walking in nature, learning calm/mindfulness techniques. These are all ways we can help our children improve and grow their own wellbeing. We're also able to acknowledge our progress with these activities as we have done with others. Consider creating a picture showing each new food your child tries or highlight on a local map all the different places they have walked. You could even add a photo from each walk as a reminder. As we've already discussed, visual aids of our progress are hugely rewarding and have a big impact on our confidence.



Growing Together

There is nothing more empowering and confidence building than the ability to share our skills. We as parents/ carers/teachers are used to that familiar feeling when we've successfully shared some of our knowledge or skills. Sometimes, though, we forget that our children need to do the same, not only to give them the opportunity to rehearse what they have learned but also to meet their need to contribute to the world around them and build solid connections with others.

So, as we're growing together this year, let's put our children in as many situations as possible where they're able to show you their new skills. Some examples of this could be... counting money out at the shop (the real-life shop, not the one set up in the playroom), teaching the dog a new trick, writing a sign for the home using new letters they've learned, making sandwiches for the family – the list is endless. As they learn new skills, find ways of helping them integrate them into your day to day or let them teach you how to do it (even if you know already). You could even increase the togetherness level and create a monthly 'skills share night' where everyone in the family is able to demonstrate the new skills they have gained in the last month.

The new year is a perfect time to reflect on progress over the last year and incorporate new habits to show our increased skills throughout 2022 – let's show our young ones how they're growing and how we're growing together:

*Just a little reminder, while we're on the topic of eating healthily, you can now buy a copy of Boom House Books newest release "A is for Apple" from: www.boomhousebooks.co.uk

Debbie is an NLP Master Practitioner, who specialises in coaching and therapeutic support for ages 5 years to adult. Debbie works with young people to help them manage unhelpful emotions, thoughts and behaviours to create and sustain inner confidence and the ability to reach their true potential.



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WHAT IS ANXIETY?

By Bridge the Gap Child's Mental Health CIC



BRIDGE THE GAP

Many children struggle with anxiety. It's a growing problem as the pressure on our children is getting greater – socially, academically and personally.

Worrying about things is normal. Worry helps us sort in our minds the things we might need to do something about. Anxiety is the physical response we can sometimes experience as a result of our worries.

And it can be frightening! Both for the child, and us as parents to witness. We can feel so helpless and frustrated. Especially when the cause of the anxiety is something that seems irrational or trivial to us.

But it's not to them. It's really not.

Anxiety & Your Child's Brain

What's important to understand about anxiety is that your child has no control. They are not doing this deliberately!

Our ability to reason - and behave rationally - lies in the Frontal Cortex of the brain. This doesn't develop fully until we are around 25 years old. So even before we add anxiety into the equation, our children are still figuring all this stuff out.

The Amygdala is the source of anxiety problems. It is the part of our brain that keeps us safe. It controls the 'flight, fight or freeze' reaction. We need this! It serves us brilliantly when we are in danger and sends signals – in the form of chemicals – our body needs to act to keep us safe.

Anxiety happens when the Amygdala tells us that something is a 'danger'. Our brain is screaming RUN or HIDE, but the people around us, our environment, even our own experience, is telling us not to be silly. The Amygdala has gone into overdrive – warning of a danger that isn't really a threat.

That's utterly confusing, and the fear remains real.

The physical symptoms our child is experiencing are a result of those chemicals being shipped frantically around the body. So how can we help our children through these anxiety attacks – through the physical symptoms – to a place of calm?

Tip 1: Breathe

The fast, shallow breathing that appears panicked is your child's body trying to get as much oxygen into the system as possible - the oxygen needed to pump muscles and leg it! Your child doesn't actually need that right now.

The aim is to slow your child's breathing. Children rarely respond to requests to "breathe slower"! What they might respond to is a fun distraction that has the same effect. Blowing bubbles is often a winner, even for older children. You can start things off by blowing them yourself and they will probably want to join you.

Another game you can try is to blow a ping pong ball, a feather, or just a scrunched-up piece of paper, across a surface to a target. The very act of doing this encourages slow, deliberate breathing as you aim and guide the object with your breath.

Tip 2: Move

Some children become physically frantic when they are anxious. They might pace, kick or hit out, rock or move around in other ways.

The idea here is to make a space and a place for that movement, in a safe way that gradually allows them to vent and exhaust the adrenaline that's coursing through their body.

You could kick a football, bounce a basketball, or any other sporting activity that might appeal to them.

You could offer a trip to the park and go on the swings (as HIGH as you DARE!), or take them into the garden if you have something they can climb or swing on.

They might like tickling – so play tickle chase! Or a play fight with a carer or an older sibling.

Tip 3: Listen

Some children, particularly older children if their anxiety is based on something we 'probably wouldn't understand', just internalise. They might be obviously anxious to you, because you know them.

They might be agitated or talking rapidly but insensibly. They might be screaming and ranting and trying to explain what the problem is. In any of these cases, you can just 'be'.

If they are not in danger of hurting themselves (and so need a 'safe' movement outlet), they may be willing to continue to express their fear this way. The temptation - as an adult who cares about them - is to try and 'fix it' or make them feel better.

You CAN'T!

Just to reiterate (because it's actually incredibly liberating once you realise this as a parent): your child is reacting to a flood of chemicals including cortisol (the stress hormone) and adrenaline that's been pumped into their body.

YOU can't get rid of it. Your child's body will do that - in time - so you just have to keep them safe and let them know they are okay.

That doesn't mean "everything is going to be alright", or "you've got nothing to worry about". Those messages just add to the confusing messages that your child is already dealing with!

Your only job is to be there, be still, be quiet, and be a safe space.

You can acknowledge what they are going through, acknowledge that YOU don't know how THEY are feeling right now.

Tell them it looks really tough, and that you're here for them.

Your child might want to be held, or you could get them a soft toy or something from a relaxation box if you have one. The main thing is you can literally just be their ROCK. This will pass. Let them know that. Let them know that you will still be there. That this is all okay and it will pass.

Support For You

None of this is easy. None of it. Bridge the Gap Child's Mental Health CIC based in Derby can give you all the support you need to get through this.

You can look through the free resources for coping strategy ideas; take our 'parenting an anxious child' course or include your child by bringing them along to one of our light-hearted creative sessions. <https://www.jwbridgethegap.com>

And please remember:

Make time for yourself whenever you can
- they drink from your cup!



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WHY NATURE IS AWESOME FOR KIDS

By Bridge the Gap
Child's Mental Health CIC



There is no denying that some days are made for the sofa. A feel-good film, a snack and a snuggle works wonders for the gloom, inside and out.

So when you're ready for a stretch, a glimpse outside the window and breath of fresh air, just look at what a walk in the woods can do for you and your child...

Belonging

One of the hardest things to negotiate is our place in the world. Adult or child, we are constantly reassessing our relationships with friends and family and those around us. But no matter what's happening in our home, with our friends - we can KNOW we belong to the world around us! We come from the same stuff as the leaves and the frogs. No tree will judge us and no squirrel cares whether we match up to their ideals. We belong unconditionally: whatever we look like, however we feel, whatever we're thinking.

Physical Restraint

The urge to scream and stamp is strong at times, isn't it? Restrained by our belongings, by people and politeness, venting is tough indoors.

But the natural world is tough. Grass won't scream if we stamp on it, stomping across a field in fury. Trees can take a whack from a stick when all we want to do is lash out (pick a big one!). Kicking up leaves and throwing stones in a river brings a fantastic release with little harm done when you pick your spot sensibly.

Sensory Delight

Whether you want to escape somewhere quiet, or a change of scenery for extra stimulation, the natural world won't let down.

Find trickling water and birdsong for a relaxing, calming relief from the madness at home. Visit public gardens for a world of colours and smells. Explore wild places and the textures and sounds of crunching through a woodland!

Movement

Some of us just HAVE to move. There is no limit to where you can take your body when you get outside. Hang and swing from branches, climb fallen logs, jump and crawl and roll down hills! Wear old clothes and shoes and let the world become 4D again!

Calm

Sometimes it's all just too much. We slam a door behind us, shove a pillow over our head and wonder how we'll ever get through this day.

Throw everyone's coat and shoes on, shove some snacks in a bag and head for your nearest green space.

The natural world is not quiet. Far from it. But it can be calm and soothing. If you can, sit and be still. Give a child permission to dig a hole or ferret in some undergrowth and you'll get yourself at least 10 minutes. See what happens inside and out.

Courage

Reaching beyond our comfort zone is a hard thing to do. Acknowledging a fear, accepting we have what it takes to overcome it, then having the courage to do so can be exhausting.

The beauty of being surrounded by the natural world is the invitations that come thick and fast. A log that shouts 'look under me' despite the icky bugs; a tree that begs to be climbed, despite the fear of heights; a bush that holds a nest, despite a fear of what's going to fly out!

Instead of 'Be careful!' or 'You'll fall', try out 'How can you do that safely?' or 'You'll be fine, just go slowly'...

Exploring new things, outside and in builds huge amounts of resilience. Getting scratched and scuffed, surviving, and that awesome sense of achievement is the very heart of self-esteem. I CAN do it. Go me!

We hope this gives you some ideas and insight into just a few of the ways that the natural world can be a wonder for you and your child!

Have a good look through Bridge the Gap's website to find out more about grounding techniques and mindfulness activities to assist you on your outdoor adventures www.jwbridgethegap.com

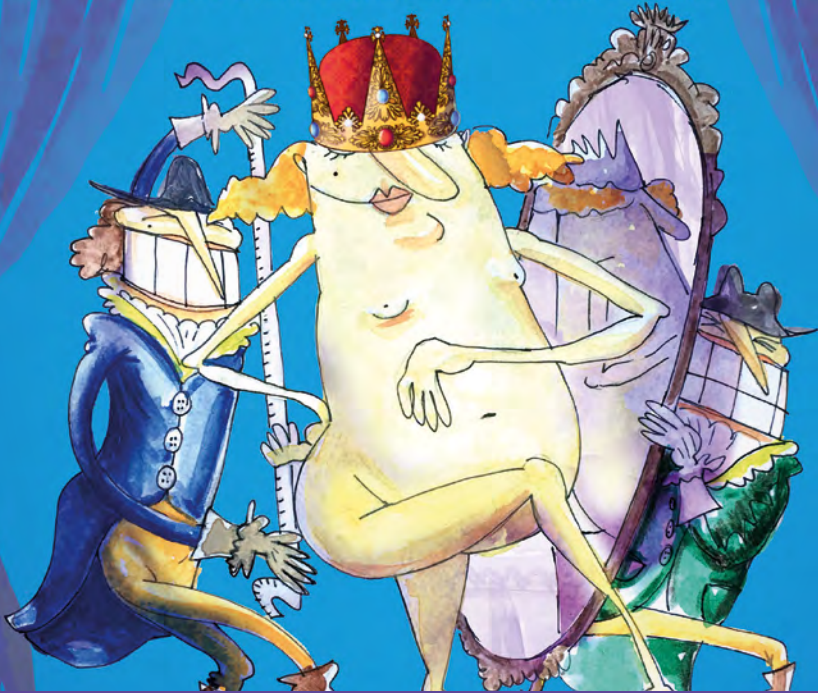


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Inspiration for Winter Days Out

Here's a list of **FREE** or lower cost (under £5) activities to keep little ones entertained in the winter months!

FREE

- Derby Museum & Art Gallery
- Silk Mill - Museum of Making, Derby
- Pickford House Museum, Derby
- Erewash Museum, Ilkeston
- Wirksworth Heritage Centre
- Story Time at Belper Library
- Hassop Station Bike Trail and Café
- Matlock Meadows Farm (Fri-Sun)
- Monsal Trail, (perfect for bikes, prams and wheelchairs)
- National Stone Centre and High Peak Trail, Wirksworth
- High Peak Junction Trail (wheel-friendly and with railway carriages to climb!)
- Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield (just pay parking)

Under £5*

- Denby Pottery Village 'Play with Clay' experience
- Bluebells Farm (Free for under 2 years)
- Matlock Bath Aquarium (Free for under 5 years)
- Nature Tots Playgroup, Carsington Water
- Swimming - at your local leisure centres (FREE for young children - age limits vary)
- Jumping Clay Thursday FREE Story Time (with optional themed craft session at Markeaton Park Craft Village)
- Jumpin Fun Inflatable Park, Derby
- Oxygen Freejumping Derby: 'Little O's Toddler session
- Matlock Farm Park

*Cost listed is for entry for one adult. Prices correct as of December 2021.



Woodlands

Here are some of our readers' favourite woods to explore.....

- Shining Cliffs Woods, Ambergate
- Allestree Woods
- Heritage Wood, Ashbourne
- Dukes Quarries, Whatstandwell
- Bow Woods, Cromford
- The Chevin, Belper to Milford
- Holbrook Woods

Winter Walks

For family-friendly walks around Amber Valley, Derby and the Peaks check out our Family Walks for Little Legs.

It's a walks guide jam-packed with 24 easy to follow walks, just head to www.boommagazine.co.uk to get yours for just £7.99+ PP



Soft Play Centres

Here are some of the most local and our readers' favourites.....

- Dinky Dinos, Heanor
- The Playmill, Bonsal
- Peak Adventures, Rowsley
- Injoy, Intu Centre Derby
- Lanky Bills, Langley Mill
- Treetops Activity Centre, Riddings
- Scotland Nurseries Garden Centre, Tansley

Parks and Play Areas:

- Croots Farm Shop: play area with sandpit, tractor and playground with outside tables for café cakes and coffees
- Allestree Park: beautiful lake to toddle or scoot around and woods to explore
- Carsington Water Reservoir: two playgrounds, sailboats, ducks and museum
- Elvaston Castle: playground and circular walk with plenty of climbing opportunities
- Darley Park: sensory garden, play area and café
- Three-Corner Rec, Belper: modern play equipment
- Ashford-in-the-Water: play area and river nearby to explore and feed ducks
- Youlegreave: picturesque river walk to a play park with a view
- Markeaton Park, Derby: play area with a huge pirate ship!
- Bargate Road Rec: climbing wall, zip line and space to run
- Belper River Gardens: ducks, swan boats, café and playground
- Hall Leys Park, Matlock: lovely tended green areas and playground
- Shipley Park: trim trail and diverse areas to explore
- Chatsworth: adventure playground and farm

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If you are a new group and wish to be listed in later editions...
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All non-mobile (pre-crawling/barely crawling) babies welcome
No. 28, Market Place
Thurs
1-3pm
PAYG £3

Twistin Tinies - Babies 0-18m (non-walkers)

@ Belper Community Hall
Mon 12:30-1:30pm
Tues 12:30-1:30pm
Fri (now running in Ripley)
Weekly or Block Bookings

Twistin Tots - 0-5yrs

@ Belper Community Hall
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Tues 9:45-10:30am & 11-11:45am
Fri (now running in Ripley)
Weekly or Block Bookings

TriFit Exercise Class (Babies Welcome)

Ritmo Studio
Wed
10:30-11:15am
BOOK on a weekly basis

Nest & Nurture

@ Nest & Nurture Studio, Belper
North Mill

Hatchlings (6wks-5m)

Mon & Thurs 11:45am - 12:45pm
BOOK

Nestlings (4/5m - crawling)

Mon & Thurs 10-11am
BOOK

Tree Babies (newborn to approx 12 months)

Outdoor baby sessions in local woodlands
Wed (time tbc)

Nest & Nurture Tea Club - -

Twice a month social and support group for expectant and new parents in Belper and surrounding area.
Tues 10.30am - 12.30pm

Prams & First Shoes Meet-Up

St Mark's Church
Thurs 9:30-11:30am (0-3s)

Gymkids - 'not just Gymnastics'

Belper Leisure Centre
Wed 9:15, 10:15 & 11:15am
3 classes available for movers to pre-schoolers
BOOK

Sunshine Forest school Toddler Group (0-4yrs)

Wed 10am-12pm
High Woods, off Sandbed Ln
BOOK

Belper Early Years Centre

Toddler Group: Mon 10-11:30am,
Fri 10-11:30am
Tiny Tuesdays - Under 1's Baby
Group: Tues 9:45-11:15am
No need to book (£1 donation)

B.E.A.R.S. Breastfeeding Support Group

Please contact the BEARS team via Facebook/messenger for details of zoom meet. See Fb page for breastfeeding support and upcoming announcements of face to face sessions

Derbyshire Toy Library Stay & Play

Belper Community Hall
Wed 9:30-11am
Kilburn Village Hall
Thurs 9.30 - 11am
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Click and Collect or Click & Browse Service:
Strutts Community Centre
Wed 9.30am - 12pm Strutts Community Centre
Fri 9.30am - Express Party Package Collection & Return
Sat 12-3pm • See fb page for ideas and to book a slot for pick up
New database available: www.derbyshiretoylibraries.org/shop

Little Church

St Peter's Church
Wed 1:15-2:45pm

Messy Church

St Swithun's Church
2nd Sat in the month 4-6pm.

The Little Baby Sanctuary @ Sage Yoga Studio

Baby Massage (6wk - crawling)
Fri 1.30-2.30pm

Baby Yoga (8wk - crawling)
Thurs 10-11am
BOOK

Inspirational Languages Spanish classes

"Caramelo" Baby & Toddlers
Mon 11.15am - 11.45am - Online
Mon 1.40pm - 2.40pm - Heanor
Tues 9:30-10:30am - Belper (venue TBC)
Fri 9:45-10:45am - Vanessa's School of Dance, Belper
BOOK

Nursery Ballet (3-4yrs)

Vanessa's School of Dance
Mon 4-4:30pm
BOOK

Phonics with Robot Reg

Vanessa's School of Dance
Fri 9:45am Mini Class (1yr+)
Fri 10:45am Preschool Class (2.5-4yrs)
BOOK

Baby Sensory

Lion Hotel
Wed:
9:45-10:30am (Birth-6m)
11am-11:45am (6m-13m)
12:15-1pm (Birth-6m)
1:30-2:15pm (6m-13m)
BOOK

Post Natal Pilates

Fit Pit
Post Natal Reformer (babies welcome)
Thurs 10:30am
Pregnancy & Post Natal Pilates
Wed 6.15-7pm
Fri 10:30am
BOOK

** Please note that this information was correct at the time of publishing. The current COVID-19 situation may change when, where and how these groups are available. Please check all details before attending.

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SWIMMING WITH YOUR BABY

By Katherine Farson,
local mum and swimming enthusiast.



When I was pregnant I decided that I wanted to take my baby to swimming lessons. I love being in water and I wanted to share my joy of swimming with my baby.“ Katherine Farson

We took our first family trip to the swimming pool when my first daughter was around 10 weeks old. By 12 weeks of age, she was in her first swimming lesson. I've seen her confidence and swimming skills grow since then with weekly swimming lessons, as well as frequent visits to the pool as a family, now with second daughter in tow!

I was delighted that my daughter learnt early swimming skills, but I was even happier to see how much she enjoyed the experience. She wasn't a natural from the beginning, and it has taken her time to want to get her face wet, but we are gentle and supportive, allowing her to go at her pace.

Swimming is great for physical and mental health. It gives lots of lovely cuddle time, it provides opportunities for kids to interact with others at similar age points, and it also encourages confidence, coordination, balance and muscle strength. Nevertheless, it can feel daunting to take your child swimming for the first time. Questions such as: “What do they need to wear?”; “Will they be warm enough?”; “Which pool is best?” and “What do I need to bring?”, often arise. Then as my daughter got older, I also began to wonder about other things like, “How do I get dressed when I have a baby who wants to crawl around?”

To help you to have a worry-free and fun experience, I would

like to share with you what I've learned.

What Should Baby Wear?

- A Swim Nappy (disposable or washable)
- Swimming shorts/costume (optional)
- Swimming wraps/tops (for cooler pools)

A swim nappy is different from a normal nappy, which would become too heavy in the water. Don't be put off trying a washable swim nappy versus a throw away swim nappy. They work just as well, save you money in the long run and help you do your bit for the planet! We particularly liked the reusable Pop-In Swim Nappy Liner.

I also recommend the Happy Nappy system (which many swim schools require). This is a neoprene legged swim short or costume with a disposable or washable swim nappy underneath. The Happy Nappy system has withstood the explosions that we have had in the pool! Yes, even the big ones!

Not sure where to find these?
Try www.splashabout.com

Choosing Your Pool

An ideal pool temperature for young babies is 31 or 32°C, any cooler than this and it's definitely worth investing in longer swimwear to keep them warm. It is also worth considering the depth of the pool. Shallow pools are great for toddlers, but can

be tough on parents' knees if kneeling for long periods. If both mum and dad are going, a pool with 'changing villages' is ideal, rather than separate male and female changing rooms, if there's one near you. These 'villages' are usually equipped with changing tables, and some even have toddler seats, as well as larger family changing rooms. Additionally, I started to prefer cubicles with walls that reach the floor once our little one started to explore. I nearly lost her once when she tried to roll under a cubicle! Another time she even managed to snatch a wet swimming costume from a neighbouring cubicle!

Extras to Bring with You

- Spare Changing Mat (in case changing tables are occupied)
- Towel for baby and separate towel for grown-ups
- Wipes
- Fresh nappies
- Warm Clothes (to bundle into after swimming)
- Snacks and drink (good for keeping them busy while you change)

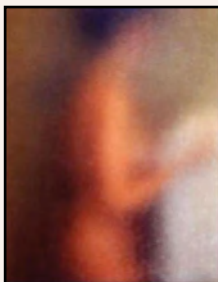
If you're at a pool with an onsite café or seating area, it's worth a moment to sit and catch your breath while you consider your swimming accomplishments. So what are you waiting for? Get that cozy on and let's get splashing!

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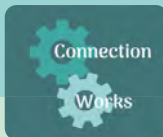
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PLAY IN PANDEMIC TIMES

How play will help us recover?

Fiona Holiday, Play Therapist - Connection Works



It's been a difficult couple of years. Covid 19 has turned our lives upside down and we are still living with the uncertainty of what might happen next.

For young children, this means that they might have missed out on some experiences like visiting a wide range of places or spending lots of time with extended family and friends. Some may have missed school or pre-school, or perhaps not been able to mix with as wide a group of friends as usual. There is a lot of stress in the world at the moment, and we need to think about how we can support ourselves and our children to cope.

Luckily, children are naturally drawn to a way of supporting themselves which will help.

Play is a great way to relieve stress. It allows sensory experiences which will soothe the nervous system. Stamping in mud, hanging from monkey bars, swinging, pushing and pulling are all things which give our bodies feedback and allow a release of energy. The enjoyment of taking small risks, the exhilaration of the wind in our faces and connection with nature are all so helpful.

On a smaller scale, when playing with water, sand, play dough or clay children can choose which things feel good and use them to release tension and keep them in the here and now.

Freely chosen play is the way children will find what they need. Playing is the way we have evolved to learn about the world. All animals play and the more playing that happens, the better the survival rates and the larger the brains. Play gets our brains into a relaxed but engaged place where learning happens easily. The enjoyment is the motivation.

As well as the sensory and soothing properties of play, it also provides important social and emotional learning. When we play scary games like monsters or hide and seek, we practice feeling big emotions in a safe way. We feel scared, but we also laugh. And laughter is the best medicine: it is a workout for our lungs and gives a sense of connection and belonging.



Playing with friends and families, in mixed-age groups is great for all children – it means the younger ones have role-models and the older ones practice empathy. It helps children learn to get on with each other; to sort out arguments and learn to take other peoples' feelings and ideas into account.

We adults can make great playmates too if we let children take the lead. We get a unique view into their world and, most importantly, we build connection. When we play with them, we can let them know how much we value their ideas.

If things are feeling tricky, allowing some space for play is a good idea. It's not a reward or a luxury; it is essential to development and wellbeing. Where can you fit some more play into your week?

If you'd like to find out more about play and creative arts therapy, you can get in touch to arrange a consultation.

Fiona Holiday is a Certified Play Therapist. She is a former teacher and local authority advisor who delivers training and consultancy to early years settings, schools and other organisations.



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BUILDING COURAGE IN CHILDREN

Jessica Bowers - Wellbeing writer, Counsellor and Psychotherapist

When my son was younger, he used to feel nervous and worried about walking into school on his own, joining in social events and starting new activities.

After some trial and error (and plenty of frustration on my part) I learned two important things. Firstly, the more relaxed and confident I became that he would do these things sooner or later, the better he responded and the better the outcome. Secondly, I could help him grow his courage little by little. Fin has always loved dinosaurs, so we made up a little mindful exercise where he'd imagine becoming his favourite dinosaur to grow his courage.

This proved fantastically effective, especially the more he got into it. His choice of character changed as he grew, but by embodying courageous characters, he was able to find his own inner courage. We also talked about his feelings and normalised them for him – his Daddy told him things he was nervous about, and how he overcame these feelings. Fin continues to develop his courage and resilience and his confidence continues to blossom.

My experiences with Fin inspired me in my work as a Counsellor and Psychotherapist. Over the last 20 years, I have worked regularly with helping adults and children to process their emotions. I strive to normalise difficult feelings and empower young children to support themselves, as well as offering strategies for parents to use too.

Here are some tips to help you support your children with overcoming challenges, fears and worries:

- Fear and worry are normal, healthy feelings that we all experience, so instead of trying to 'get rid of' these feelings, focus on building courage to help your child overcome them.
- Reassure your child that building courage takes practice, and courage is like a muscle that develops over time.
- Make a plan to help your child; it might help to break a task down into smaller, more manageable stages.



- You can use creative imagery to help children grow their courage. You can also talk about courageous characters from books and films to inspire them.
- Reassure them that it is ok if they fail; we all fail and we can learn from it and move forward.
- Celebrate any successes with your child, even the small ones as it will encourage them.

I recently found out that the word courage comes from the Latin word 'cor' which means heart. So courage originally meant to speak from your heart. I think it is important to create a safe space for your child to speak from their heart and share their worries with you – and praise them when they do. After all, reaching out for help and speaking our truth is a very courageous thing to do.

That's why I chose to write my book 'Fantastic Fin' to support other children with facing their fears and growing their confidence. This book is a product of my experience with Fin, as well as the experience I've gained through my profession and contains a wealth of information for parents about how to support your children's mental health and development.

In addition to this, there is also a free 17-page resource pack on my website, to help children with building their courage. It is available to download at www.jessicabowers.co.uk.

You can also follow me on Facebook and Instagram @ [jessicabowerswellbeingwriter](https://www.facebook.com/jessicabowerswellbeingwriter) and on Twitter @ [@bowerswellbeing](https://twitter.com/bowerswellbeing). I am continuing to develop resources for schools and parents so please do subscribe to my website and keep up-to-date with these.



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