

# Healthy Minds

Nurturing Emotional Wellbeing in Sheffield Schools

## EMOTIONAL WELLBEING GAMES FOR CHILDREN

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*This guide contains a list of games and activities that can be used in school to help children experience attunement/emotional regulation and improve emotional wellbeing*



## Introduction

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At the heart of a child's emotional wellbeing is learning how to build relationships with others and how to regulate their emotions. By taking part in the structured games and activities in this guide, they not only develop these skills in a safe environment such as school, but also *experience* them, building emotional resilience that they will then take forward into their future lives.

## Emotional regulation

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Many of the games in this guide are designed to calm the child down or excite them (or both!). When they experience this change in emotional intensity in a structured, nurturing environment, they learn that it is OK to feel such changes and ultimately build their own internal ability to regulate (bring back to an optimal level) their emotions when faced with difficulties in their subsequent everyday life.

## Tips for getting the most out of the games/activities

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A lot of the games may be familiar to you already, however there are some important considerations that will help ensure you are supporting the child's emotional development as fully as possible:

- Consider those children who may struggle to take part in the games – they may need some extra support to help them engage
- Ensure that instructions are clear and the games are simple enough for the children to understand – they don't have to be complicated!
- Consider practicalities – where will the game take place, when will it take place, what equipment if any is required?
- Many of the games can be done in a group, but can be adapted to working with individual children or pairs if necessary
- Agree simple and clear rules and boundaries for the games – e.g. when it is OK to talk, who is leading the games
- Do not associate the games with behaviour management, rewards or sanctions – try to include all children as developing emotional wellbeing is important for every child
- Remember to have fun!

## List of emotional wellbeing games and activities

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### Welcome games

- **Hello teddy**

Stand in a circle. The leader throws a teddy to someone, says 'good morning' and their name. That person throws the teddy to someone else and so on until everyone has had the teddy and it goes back to the leader. The leader then repeats the same loop (throwing to the same people), introducing another teddy after about 2 people have thrown (and then another if the group can cope). Aim is to get all the teddies back to the leader.
- **Imaginary object good morning**

Stand in a circle. The leader throws an imaginary object (e.g. a wet fish) to someone, says 'good morning' and their name. That person has to catch it as though it were real. Then they choose a new imaginary object and throw it to someone else in the circle, saying 'good morning' and their name. This is repeated until everyone has had a go and it comes back to the leader. The leader then reverses the direction, throwing back the imaginary object that they have just received to the person who threw it, who throws back the object that they received and so on until the leader is thrown back their original object.
- **H to the ello**

Stand in a circle. The leader shakes hands with the person to their left and says 'H to the ello' followed by the first letter of their name (e.g. 'C'), 'to the' and the rest of their name (e.g. 'atherine' – so 'C to the atherine'). That person then repeats the process with the person to their left and so on around the circle.
- **Pass a handshake**

Stand in a circle. The leader shakes hands with the person to their left. That person then does the same handshake with the person to their left, but also adds another handshake (e.g. a high five). Carry on around the circle, with each person adding a new handshake until it gets back to the leader.
- **Hobby demo**

Stand in a circle. Go round the circle with each person saying their name, other info (e.g.

age, class) and their favourite hobby. The next person repeats the process, but also has to act out the hobby of the previous person. Repeat around the circle until it returns to the leader.

NB most of the welcome games can also be adapted to become 'goodbye' games

## Other games

- **Rainstorm**

Stand in a circle. The leader starts by rubbing their hands together and the person to their left copies, then the person to their left copies and so on until it has got back round to the leader. The leader then changes the action to clicking fingers, which is passed round as before, with no one changing until the person to their right has done so. The leader repeats the process with the following actions: clapping, clapping on knees, stamping feet, clapping on knees, clapping, clicking fingers, rubbing hands, putting finger to lip and saying 'shhh', then holding palms out in silence.

- **Extreme thumb wars**

A normal thumb war game, except that people join hands together in the middle in a group. The rules are that on the count of three, the winner is the first person to trap any person's thumb.

- **Pizza making**

Stand in a tight circle and everyone turns 90 degrees to their left. The leader calls out instructions for making a pizza and for each one, the person has to draw it out on the next person's back. Example instructions: knead the dough, spread the sauce, sprinkle cheese, add different toppings, put into oven, then cut into slices.

- **Weather report**

Stand in a tight circle and everyone turns 90 degrees to their left. The leader describes a weather report and for each item, each person has to draw it out on the next person's back. Example weather report: sunny, cloudy, rainy, thunderstorm, lightning, windy, snowy, hail, rainy again and back to sunny.

- **Pass the squeeze**

Hold hands in a circle. The leader squeezes the hand of the person to their left, who then squeezes the hand of the person to their left. The squeeze is then passed around the circle back to the leader. The leader can then pass the squeeze around in the other direction, pass a rhythm of squeezes, or pass a squeeze in both directions, with the

person who gets them both at the same time saying 'bing bong'.

- **Chinese whispers**

Stand in a circle. The leader whispers a phrase in the ear of the person to their left, who then repeats the phrase to the person to their left. This continues around the circle until it gets back to the leader, who reveals the original and final phrases (and if they are similar!).

- **Lycra games**

Stand in a circle holding a large piece of lycra. Ball games: balance ball in middle, pass ball to a named person, pass the ball around the edge of the lycra, bounce ball ten times, hit the ceiling and catch the ball. Popcorn game: put pieces of cotton wool in the middle and shake lycra until all have 'popped' and jumped off the lycra. Keeping one hand on lycra, everyone to pick up the cotton wool from the floor.

- **Pass hoop**

Hold hands in a circle. The leader starts with a hula hoop over their shoulder and the aim is to pass the hoop around the circle without letting go of hands. Repeat with 2 hula hoops in opposite directions.

- **Zoom erk**

Stand in a circle. The leader turns to the person to their left with a 'running' action with their arms and say 'zoom'. That person repeats the process to the person to their left and so on until it goes around the circle back to the leader. Another option is introduced where someone can raise their hands to the person who has passed to them in a claw like motion and say 'erk', which then reverses the direction back to that person. A third option can then be introduced, where you can pass to someone else in the circle with a throwing action and saying their name.

- **Feather blow**

Stand in a circle. The leader blows a feather from the outstretched palm of their hand to the palm of the person to their left. The feather is then blown around the circle in the same way, aiming to not touch the floor. Can then pass one feather around in both directions at once.

- **Finger grab**

Stand in a circle. Everyone holds out their right index finger pointing down onto the outstretched palm of the person to their right. When the leader says go, the aim is to capture the finger of the person to your left whilst not getting your finger caught by the

person to your right.

- **Finger count**

Stand or sit in a circle of 3-5 people. At the count of 3 everyone holds out 0-5 fingers on their right hand. The aim is for the group to add up to 11 fingers in total. Keep trying until reaching 11. No talking in between goes is allowed!

- **Count to 10**

Stand or sit in a circle. With eyes closed, the task of the group is to count up to 10, but if two people talk at the same time or a number is repeated, the group has to start again from 1. Keep going until the group reaches 10.

- **Handstack**

Stand or sit in a small circle. The first person puts their right hand face down in the middle, then the person to their left puts their hand on top and so on around the circle. Continue making a handstack upwards, also using left hand and then replacing hands from the bottom of the stack in order. When the group have reached a certain height, reverse the process to get the handstack to the floor. Can then repeat either as quickly or as slowly as possible.

- **Hand tangle**

Stand in small circle of an even number of people. Each person reaches out with their right hand and grabs the right hand of the person opposite. Then everyone repeats with their left hand, with a different person. Task of the group is then to untangle without letting go of any hands.

- **Drawing pass round**

Stand in a tight circle and everyone turns 90 degrees to their left. The leader draws out a picture on the back of the person in front of them, who then passes on the same drawing to the back of the person in front of them. The drawing is passed around the circle to the leader who reveals the original and final drawings (and if they are similar!).

- **Pass the cream**

Stand in a circle. The leader puts some hand cream on their finger and passes it to the finger of the person to their left. The cream is then passed around the circle, aiming to get as much back to the leader as possible.

- **Cushion race**

Stand in a circle of an even number of people. The leader numbers everyone 1 or 2

alternately, clockwise. The first number 1 and first number 2 people are given a cushion. When the leader says go, the 2's have to pass the cushion round the circle. One second later, the leader will say go and the 1's have to do the same and catch the 2's before it has gone around the circle 3 times. Then reverse so that the 1's are chasing the 2's in the opposite direction.

- **Fish and chips**

In pairs, one person says 'fish' and the other person has to say 'chips' in exactly the same way. Repeat, varying pitch, tone, volume, length, deepness etc.

- **Mirroring**

In pairs, one person leads by moving different parts of their body. The other person has to 'mirror' what they are doing exactly. The leader can do it slowly, use facial expressions, body movements and other actions.

- **Back up**

In pairs of similar heights, sit back-to-back with feet flat on the floor and legs bent. Link arms with hands facing forwards. Task is for both people to stand up together without hands coming to the floor or arms unlinking.

- **Pass around a smile**

Stand in a circle and the leader smiles to the person to their right. That person has to return the smile, then repeat the process with the person to their right. Carry on around the circle until it returns to the leader.

- **Transitions**

Consider creative ways of transitioning from one place to another (e.g. dinner hall to classroom) – such as silently, pretending to be a long train/animal/superhero, hopping, in pairs with one person having their eyes shut etc