

Theme 3: Mental health and resilience – Parent's conversation

Before you start – Remember:

- Remind yourself of the safeguarding code of conduct
- Check with the parent that this is a good time for the call, and remember to ask both the child and parent if they are still happy to take part in the project
- Take notes so that you are able to complete the call log accurately after the call

There are options in red for children with special needs. Always begin with the instructions for typically developing children. Move to option 1 for a modified version of instructions for children with mild difficulties. For children with severe difficulties move to option 2 or 3. Visuals will be attached to this document to be shared with the children and parents. A video call is preferred over a regular telephone call with the child.

Beginning the time together

- Ask about what have been the best parts and most difficult parts of the last week
- Follow up on last week's commitment: did they manage to put it into practice?
- Reminder of the process: what to expect from these calls and how long they will last

If the parent was shy or hesitant, it is advisable to share your experience of the past week at work (e.g., I had a long week at work, but I rested well during the weekend).

Introduce the theme: Mental health and resilience

Today's topic is mental health and resilience – by the end of our call we will have talked about:

- How we manage our emotions and how we can take care of our own mental health
- Understanding our children's emotions and supporting their mental health

Topic 1: Your feelings matter!

Ask: How are you feeling today?

Share: We usually say we are “fine” – but this sometimes doesn’t really show our real feelings. This is a stressful time. We need to take care of ourselves so we can support our children.

Ask: What are some things that have made you feel happy during this time? And what are some of the more difficult feelings you have had during this crisis? Can you think of something that made you feel worried, stressed or sad? What do you do when you have difficult feelings like this?

Share: We tend to think some of our feelings are ‘good’ and others ‘bad’, but actually all our feelings are ok! As parents we might be tempted to try to ignore or push away our feelings, but when we don’t take care of ourselves well, we get gradually worn down and it gets harder to care for our children. Stress can build up and then burst out in unhelpful ways when we don’t expect it!

Mention that parents of children with special needs are more prone to experiencing stress build up.

Ask: What are some of the ways you already try to take care of your own needs? Is there a time in the day where you could take some time for yourself?

Some ideas could be:

- Spend some time outside
- Get some exercise that you enjoy
- Listen to music or watch a movie
- Get enough sleep
- Do something that makes you laugh
- Talk to a friend
- Pray or write in a journal
- Do something creative

Share: Taking some time for ourselves can help us to be calmer, but we will probably still feel overwhelmed from time to time. When we feel overwhelmed it can be really hard to stay engaged in the present – we might find ourselves thinking about what has gone wrong, or unable to focus.

Ask: Do you already have any strategies you have to help you when you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed? Do not prompt the mentee, but note if any of these options are mentioned:

[Take a break or time-out / Breathing exercise / Talk to someone / Exercise/ Other strategy / Don't know or No]

When you feel like this, it's good if you can notice, and pause, and take a moment to ground yourself. You'll see an activity for this on the parenting sheet sent with this call ('Keep calm and manage stress').

Ask: Is there something we've talked about that you want to try to put into practice this week?

Topic 2: Helping my children to cope

Ask: What have you noticed about how your children have responded during this time? If they have been finding it difficult, have they talked about it with you? Or have you seen changes in their behaviour?

Affirm: Children may respond to stress in different ways, such as being more clingy, anxious, withdrawing, angry or agitated. They might seem to move backwards in their development, for example begin wetting the bed again or be unable to do tasks they had been able to do before the crisis.

Share: It can make a big difference to children's ability to cope if we are able to be supportive and reassuring and help our children to feel safe. They may often communicate their feelings through their behaviour, and so it's good to be alert to any changes or patterns.

Ask: What ways have you found already to help your child to be calm and feel safe and supported during this time?

Affirm: These are great ideas! Some other tips are:

- Give children extra time and attention
- Listen to children and speak kindly to them
- Make opportunities for children to play and relax
- Keep to regular schedules and routines as much as possible
- Give children clear information and facts about what is going on and what might happen, and respond to their questions honestly – you can find out answers to questions you don't know together

Parents can also help the child prepare a safe place. A safe place is a place where the child can resort to whenever they feel distressed or anxious.

Option 1: Children can imagine a safe place (e.g., a playground including colorful games and friendly people).

Option 2: Ask the child to color and/or decorate a box in whichever way that they like. Then, ask the child to place pleasant objects inside the box (e.g., scented or soft objects, as well as their favorite photo, movie, candy, or toy). Encourage the child to resort to this box whenever they feel upset and anxious.

Putting it into practice this week

Explain: The game and poster you will send over WhatsApp or in print – if possible.

An activity to do with your child this week is 'I can name and describe my emotions' – a game to explore our emotions together. Think about how you can tell each other how you feel every day at home – could you create a chart together with faces showing different feelings, and then show each other which one you feel each day?

Before starting the game, show the parents a picture of faces presenting different emotions. Point out the different facial expressions of each emotion. Encourage the parent to draw the different faces.

Refer to Picture [3.1] or [3.2]

Confirm: What do you plan to do this week to take care of yourself, and to help your children deal with their emotions?

[Take more time for myself / Talk about my feelings / Talk to children about how they feel / Create a feelings chart / Other]

When will you meet again?

Ask: the parent if they are happy for you to speak to the child now and ask them to hand over the phone.

Theme 3: Mental health and resilience – Child's conversation

Before you start – Remember:

- Remind yourself of the safeguarding code of conduct
- Remember to ask the child if they are still happy to take part
- Take notes so that you are able to complete the call log accurately after the call

Inform the child that they are allowed to take breaks. Agree with the child on a sign or word that represents wanting to take a break when they need one (e.g., raising hand, crossing arms, or saying “break”). Prompt them to take a short break to stretch when you feel necessary.

Beginning the time together

- Begin with your regular check-in questions, such as:
 - What was the best thing that happened this week?
 - What was something funny that happened this week?
 - What was hard about this week?

Share some personal experiences from your week (e.g., the best thing about this week was meeting my best friend. A funny thing about this week was learning a magic trick. A hard thing about this week is not being able to go to the beach).

Option 1: How are you feeling today? What did you do today? Tell me about a game that you played.

Option 2: Ask the child “how are you feeling today” and provide a diagram of emotions. You can prompt them to choose an emotion by reading the emotions aloud (e.g., are you happy, sad, or angry).

- Reminder that these calls are about: checking on how you are doing, giving you a chance to talk and share how you are feeling, and sharing ideas together which can help you and your family
- **Ask:** Are you still happy to be part of this project?

Inform the child that we have many interesting activities and topics to discuss together and make sure that he is happy to continue.

Remember to provide brief breaks when needed (for stretching, toilet break, walking around, or having a snack)

Introduce the theme: My feelings and emotions

Ask: How are you feeling today? Explain that you will start with a quick game about our feelings.

Explain: You will say a feeling (e.g. "scared", "happy") and the child should quickly tell you something that makes them feel this way.

E.g. "Scared" – "Spiders!"; "Happy" – "when my sports team wins a competition"

What is something that makes you feel:

- Happy?
- Sad?
- Surprised?
- Scared?
- Angry?

Let the child also ask you some of these questions and give your answers! Explain that today we'll be looking at how we can recognise our feelings and what to do when we have difficult feelings.

Option 1: We recommend that you point to the face corresponding to each emotions while asking your question. Use Picture [3.1] or [3.2].

Option 2: It is advisable to show the child pictures of different situations and ask them how they feel. For example, *How would you feel if:*

- You were playing with other children that you like?
- Your candy jar was empty and your friend's was full?
- You unexpectedly received gifts that you like?
- You were sitting in the dark? OR You had a nightmares?
- Your friend shouted at you?

Use Pictures [3.3], [3.4], [3.5], [3.5], [3.6], and [3.7] respectively

Topic 1: How do I feel?

Ask: Can you think of something that happened this week that made you feel good? What was it and what feelings did you have? (e.g. happy, excited, joyful) *Be ready to share your own example first if needed.*

Use an emotions chart to help the child identify their feelings. Refer to Picture [3.1] or [3.2].

Ask: Can you think something that made you feel bad? What was it and what feelings did you have? (e.g. sad, angry, bored, worried, scared) *(Be ready to share your own example first if needed).*

Make sure to ask parent ahead of time if any incident took place during the week, so that you can help the child recall the emotions they felt during that time. Use feelings chart to help child identify feelings.

Explain: It's normal to have difficult feelings when we go through a hard or confusing time or lots of things are changing around us.

We might:

- Feel more worried
- Not want to be apart from our family
- Not want to talk to people or play
- Be more angry
- Not be able to stay still and focus
- Do things we used to do like wet the bed or forget things we have learned
- Feel afraid of what might happen

This is totally normal and ok – all of our feelings are ours and we shouldn't feel bad about having them.

Affirm: It's good to talk about how we feel so that others can help us, and understand us better. It can sometimes be hard to say how we are feeling. Can you think of some ways we can share our feelings with our family?

If the child was hesitant or did not answer, try to prompt them. You can suggest that they use drawings or playdough to express how they feel.

Share: It can sometimes be hard to use words to say how we feel. You could work together to make a chart with a picture for each different feeling (e.g. sad, happy, scared, bored, worried, surprised, or others). Everyone can point out which one they are feeling every morning.

Since we already provided an emotions visual, you can say the following: Now that you know what feelings are and how we express them, you can do the following with your parents.

Option 1: Bring a magazine and cut out the faces that express a certain feeling. For example, if a person is laughing, it means that they are happy. You paste the cutout faces on a piece of cardboard. You can decorate the cardboard the way that you like.

Option 2: You can draw yourself on a piece of cardboard. You can use playdough to mold eyes, eyebrows, and a mouth to represent your facial expressions. You can do this every morning or whenever you feel like expressing your feelings.

Topic 2: What can I do with my feelings?

Ask: What do you usually do when you have a difficult feeling (like you talked about earlier) or when you are feeling worried or scared?

Using the emotions chart, encourage the child to point out the difficult emotions while talking about them. Refer to Picture [3.1] or [3.2].

Affirm: It's great if we can think ahead to have some ideas of things we can do when we feel sad, worried or upset. Then we'll be ready to take action and help ourselves to feel better.

Ask: What might be some things you can do that could help you when you have a difficult feeling?

Share: Here are some ideas (if you need them):

- Talk to your parents, a friend, or someone you trust about your worries
- Write down your feelings
- Do some exercise that you enjoy
- Listen to music, dance, or sing
- Do something that makes you laugh
- Play a game together with your family
- Draw a picture of how you are feeling

We recommend that the parents are present next to the child during this activity.

Option 1: Ask the child, what did you do when you felt: (Use Picture [3.1] or [3.2])

- Sad or tired or bored
- Happy
- Worried or frustrated
- Angry or scared

Option 2: The parents can prompt their child to share or remember times when they felt upset and what they did to feel better.

Additionally, we can help the child learn relaxation breathing techniques to calm down. One technique involves asking the child to lie down on their back. Then, they can put a stuffed animal on their belly. Every time they exhale or inhale, the stuffed animal needs to go up and down. Remind them to inhale from the nose and exhale from their mouth.

Another technique involves having the child lie down on their back. Then, tell the child that they need to breathe in while counting to 5, then place a tissue paper on their mouth and encourage them to breathe out as much as they can to make the tissue paper fly.

Wrap up: What can we do together this week?

Ask: What can you do this week to help you and your family share your feelings?

Simplify questions. For example, What will you do if you feel:

- Sad
- Angry
- Scared

Use Picture [3.1] or [3.2] to point out the emotions.

Prompt the child with their previous answers when needed. Remind the child that they can express their feelings using art, drawing, or playdough.

Ask: What is one thing you will do this week if you feel sad/scared/worried/upset?

Make a feelings chart with my family / Talk to someone about my feelings / Try something new if I feel sad or upset / other]

Close the call by thanking the child for talking with you, and explain when you will meet again.

Do not forget to praise the child for the effort. Encourage the parent and child to pin the date of the next meeting on a calendar and ask them to check the shared date on WhatsApp.

After the call

- Share the poster or image over WhatsApp or as a printout if you are able to: 'Keep calm and manage stress'
- Share the game over WhatsApp or as a printout if you are able to: 'I can name and describe my emotions!'
- Complete the call log now
- Contact your supervisor if any safeguarding issues have been raised or if you have any concerns

- Share Pictures [3.1], [3.2], [3.3], [3.4], [3.5], [3.6], and [3.7]

NB – images to share (will be shared with you by your programme supervisor)

Let's Take Care of Ourselves!

Right to Play

I can name and describe my emotions

You need: Nothing

1. Face away from each other. Think of a feeling.
2. Say: "1-2-3 Go!"
3. Turn around. Act out your feeling.
4. Guess the other person's feeling.

Talk

How can you tell how others feel?
How can you tell others how you feel?



3.1



3.2



3.3



3.4



3.5



3.6



3.7