

The Center for Innovative Practices

Resiliency Tool Kit | Resource #4

RESILIENCY RESOURCE #4 | Attunement or Feeling Felt

Attunement – Attunement is the capacity of caregivers to accurately read children’s emotional and behavioral cues and respond appropriately. Attunement is an ongoing process that occurs in day to day interactions, not just during intensive experiences. Caregivers need to respond to children’s cues across situations. Encourage and model reflective listening skills; actively hear, validate, and communicate support.

Feeling Charades – Caregiver (or provider) acts out a feeling state; child must guess the emotion. Then switch roles. There are infinite variations of this game: act out what the other person looks like during a specific feeling and have them guess the feeling; pick a feeling together, then act out a situation that might elicit that feeling and have them guess the situation or trigger; act like another person in the family in an emotional state and guess who it is. In all variations, take turns being the actor and the guesser.

Child-directed Play – Encourage the caregiver to offer 15 minutes of individual time to the child each day. Have the caregiver invite the child to play, “It’s our time to play together. You can play with any of these things and I’ll play with you. You have to play gently and stay in this area.” The caregiver must avoid commands, questions and critical statements; simply follow the child’s lead, imitate their play, offer praise of appropriate behavior, and be enthusiastic.

Interventions adapted from Blaustein, M.E. & Kinniburgh, K.M. (2010) *Treating Traumatic Stress in Children and Adolescents: How to Foster Resilience through Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Competency*. New York: Guilford.

Feeling Felt is when someone feels like the other person understands or “really gets” them. When we get upset, angry or anxious, we crave this. It seems more important to be understood, than to solve the situation. In their book, *The Whole-Brained Child*, Siegel and Bryson suggest two strategies to connect first emotionally with your child.

Connect and Redirect—When your child is upset, connect first emotionally (right brain to right brain), by mirroring their feelings and using non-verbals like hugs and empathetic facial expressions to show that you understand. Then, once you’ve connected, you can set the necessary boundary, focus on an alternative response, or even distract them by moving onto something else.

Name it to Tame it—No matter your child’s age, make it a habit to acknowledge and name feelings: *You look so sad. That really hurt, didn’t it?* Then help your child tell the story about what’s so upsetting. By doing this, you are helping them to make sense of their experience and feel more in control.

Contact Bobbi L Beale, PsyD, Senior Research Associate at: Bobbi.Beale@case.edu