



## 5 Ways to Promote Children's Healthy Mental Development

Pediatricians and other pediatric health professionals are **uniquely positioned** to help parents and caregivers promote healthy mental development in their children. Here are some quick tips that you can share with families during a clinical visit.



### 1 Help Parents Learn Emotion Coaching

- **Attend the emotion:** Acknowledge that something is wrong
  - “Wow, I see that you have some big feelings now”
- **Name the emotion:** Put your child’s emotion into words
  - “You look mad/angry/scared/disappointed/frustrated”
- **Validate the emotion:** Emotions are OK, even if behavior is wrong
  - “It makes sense that you feel (EMOTION) because of (REASON)”
- **Meet the need of the emotion:** Foster self-regulation strategies
  - If sadness, then provide comfort
  - If fear, provide security
  - If anger, provide kindness and boundaries

### 3 Reinforce Positive Parenting Techniques

- **Try “sportscasting”:** Provide a “play by play” of what you see your child doing
  - Speak in a neutral to positive tone
  - Conveys to the child: “I see you, I hear you, and I delight in you”
- Teach **PRIDE** skills (**p**raise, **r**eflect, **i**mitate, **d**escribe, **e**nthusiasm)
  - Foster with parent coaching
  - Incorporate into Special Time

### 2 Recommend Special Time with a Prescription for Play

- Dedicate 10–15 minutes two to three times a week for child-led play
  - Name the special time after the child
    - e.g. “Roberto’s Time”
- Set rules for one-on-one time
  - Child chooses activity, no phones
  - Toys that can promote cooperative play and shared joy
- Play with toys together to share joy
  - Set a timer
  - **GOAL** — Play together and have fun
  - Follow child’s lead
  - Make time unstructured
  - Play consistently — not just as a reward for good behavior

### 4 Write a Prescription for Play – Promote Playful Parenting

- **Active:** support autonomy
- **Engaging:** scaffolding
- **Meaningful:** interesting
- **Socially interactive**
- **Iterative:** praise the process
- **Joyful:** play should be FUN

## 5 Teach Relaxation Techniques

- Deep Breathing
  - Slow breath to calm down body
  - Breathe in, and slowly count to 5
  - Breathe out, and slowly count to 5
- Muscle Relaxation
  - Lie flat and tighten sections of the body from toes to the head
  - Hold for a few seconds, then release the muscles
- Imagery
  - Close eyes and imagine a relaxing, happy and comfortable place



### AAP Can Provide Additional Help

- **Professionals:** Contact Your Pediatric Mental Health Care Access (PMHCA) Program
  - The PMHCA program is a mental and behavioral health teleconsultation resource for primary care professionals. Statewide or regional networks of pediatric mental health teams provide teleconsultation, training, technical assistance and care coordination support services for pediatric PCPs
- **Patients/Families:** 988 crisis hotline
  - 24/7, confidential support to those in mental health-related distress

### Sources:

- AAP Pediatric Mental Health Care: Access and Capacity Building in Primary Care ECHO — Session 2, Assessment, Engagement, and Brief Interventions: Early Childhood. <https://downloads.aap.org/ECHO/AAPPMHCASession02.pdf>
- Mental Health Training Intervention for Health Providers in Schools (MH-TIPS)
- <https://thegeniusofplay.org/genius/expert-advice/articles/lets-bring-back-the-simple-joys-of-playful-parenting.aspx>
- <https://hes-extraordinary.com/how-to-use-emotion-coaching-to-teach-children-self-regulation>
- <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/142/3/e20182058/38649/The-Power-of-Play-A-Pediatric-Role-in-Enhancing>



**Scan here for more resources on  
promoting healthy mental development.**