


Connect-Ed



Mental Health Services for Schools


Creative Play to support Parent-Child Bonding



Music & Song


Activity	Target Age	Activity Breakdown	Activity Purpose
Lullabies	0-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage parents to sing to their babies and toddlers, both privately (e.g. a special bedtime song), and in groups with other adults and children (if they enjoy this!) - Ask parents what songs are special to them- what songs do they associate with a feeling of safety or happiness? Are they happy to share? <p>Example: Nigerian lullaby – ‘Yo yo Nikau’ (“however much I rock you and sing to you, you just won’t fall asleep!”). This works beautifully for a group song:</p> <p>“Yo Yo Yo Camo Mono Yono Nikau”</p> <p>The song, in 3 parts, can be learnt here: #StreathamSingsInUnity 2 - Yo yo nikau - YouTube</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Singing promotes attachment and bonding - Helps release parental stress or habitual trauma response- brings joy and connection with others. - Hearing is the first sense to develop in the womb; hearing a mother (or other caregiver) sing to them is hugely calming for infants. - Parents don’t need to be confident singers or even tuneful – their voice is magic to their baby. - Sometimes trauma can flatten emotional expression. We can model this for parents: encourage soft body language, eye contact, smiling, touch, and noticing/mirroring the baby’s gestures and sounds, whilst engaged in song. - Group singing is a lovely activity and can encourage connections between parents and

			children. Singing puts us in touch with breath and body: it can help us feel grounded when 'fight or flight' trauma responses overcome us.
Musical mirrors	0-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Place a selection of small percussion instruments (bells, shakers, drums, tambourines, chimes etc.) in the middle of the room. Soft furnishings/cushions etc. help parents feel comfortable getting down to their child's level, on the floor. - Encourage parents to invite their children to explore the instruments and then 'mirror' back their sounds to them. - This is more about matching the energy of the play than matching the sounds exactly (e.g. it doesn't matter if the child has a shaker and the parent has a drum). - Parent can copy any vocal sounds and movements the child might make too. - Parents can sing as they play (e.g. nursery rhymes, or made up songs) if they wish. - Ideally, this activity generates lots of laughter and silliness! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Young children are developing their sense of self as distinct from their parent. Trauma and disrupted attachment can make this difficult. - One way to promote this is to help the parent show the child that they are 'seen and heard'. Mirroring play supports this. It generates empathy and connection. - Making lots of noise can help the child (and parent!) let off some steam and express some emotional energy.

			
Action Songs	2-4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Children at this age love watching and copying actions to familiar songs (some examples: Twinkle twinkle; Zoom Zoom Zoom, we're going to the moon; Incy wincy spider; Row your boat). - Teach the songs and actions to parents – or have them teach you their own! - This works well as a circle time/group activity- get small puppets or teddies to represent the songs (e.g. a spider, a moon), and place in a draw string bag. Have children pick an item/song from the bag in turns, and then sing as a group. - Add some small percussion instruments for children to join in with if you like 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Repetition of familiar songs (although it can drive parents mad!) helps children build their sense of emotional security. Adults can draw on these songs in times of stress to soothe children, or help them cope with change or unfamiliar situations. - Moving our bodies to the beat, and adding actions to songs, is a whole brain activity- promoting joyful connection and helping override trauma responses.
Peek-a-boo song		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hide a small teddy or other toy underneath a scarf (or similar) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hide and seek/peekaboo games are hugely important for children's development of secure attachment.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To the tune of 'zoom zoom zoom, we're going to the moon', sing "Where oh where, has teddy gone?... 5, 4, 3, 2, 1..." – lift scarf off to reveal! - Repeat, but now asking parents to hide under the scarf (and have children pull it off after the count down)- and then children hiding and parents pulling scarf off, if they wish. - Aim for lovely face to face connections as the scarf is pulled off – lots of warm eye contact and laughter. You can model this. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They need thousands of repetitions of these kind of games to build their sense of object permanence – i.e. knowing that mum/dad/carer still exist even when not in view, and will come back.
<p>Sleeping Bunnies</p>	<p>4-6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teach parents and children the 'Sleeping bunnies' song - Ask children to scatter around the room and pretend to sleep (and then jump/hop) as parents sing to them: <p>"See the little bunnies sleeping till it's nearly noon Shall we wake them with a merry (or silly!) tune Oh so still! Are they ill...? Wake up soon!"</p> <p>"Hop little bunnies, hop hop hop! Hop little bunnies, hop hop hop! Hop little bunnies, hop hop hop! And hop and hop and STOP! Go to sleep again bunnies!" etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transitions can be hard for children who have experienced trauma or who have attachment difficulties. The transition between being awake and asleep is something they have to contend with every day. - Playing this out through an action song can be fun and soothing (children also tend to love the anticipation in this song, the close attention of their parents, and getting to blow off energy hopping around!)



		<p>CBeebies: Something Special - Sleeping Bunnies - Nursery Rhyme - Bing video</p> 	
Build your own band!		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Set up a craft activity, for parents and children to build their own instruments using bits of recycling and other household objects etc. See here for some ideas: 5 instruments kids can make BBC Good Food - Encourage children to showcase their creations, singing and playing with them together. Can they form a band? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A fun opportunity for parents and children to work together to explore sounds, textures and play - Promotes cooperative and child-led play, self-expression, and a feeling of self-agency and pride (creating something together from nothing)
Drum circle	6-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - With a small selection of drums (ideally djembe drums, but could be smaller hand held drums), create a circle involving adults and children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Drumming is a form of bilateral stimulation (getting the left and right sides of the body


		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have the adults create the 'ground' – the steady beat - Allow children to play freely on top, one at a time or together, as they wish. Singing also encouraged! - Try some call and response/copying games with rhythm - Try creating a scene from your imagination – e.g. a thunder storm. Have everyone explore making very quiet raindrop sounds, scratching and tapping the drum skin, and building up gradually to loud thunder! Can they stamp their feet and drum at the same time, to make it even louder? 	<p>working together). This is an excellent way to combat traumatic stress.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Group drumming promotes togetherness (listening & attunement) and a sense of community - Energetic play helps disperse energy and strong emotions - Be mindful that very loud play may be triggering for some- keep an eye out and provide alternative spaces if needed
<p>Silly Dance Off</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Play some music (ideally something you know the children enjoy), with a good, strong beat - Form a circle and have children run into the middle one at the time and do their silliest dance move (wiggly elbows? Wobbly knees?) Adults can model this first if children are shy- the sillier, the better - Everyone in the circle (parents included) then have to copy this! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Moving to a beat supports emotional regulation - Children enjoy the close attention and attunement of parents delighting in (and copying) their moves







Arts & Crafts

Messy Play	0-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Set up stations/trays with various messy play materials: shaving foam; cooked spaghetti; flour; rice; jelly; cornflour/water 'gloop'; water - Place various sensory toys (e.g. plastic balls, funnels) and natural objects (e.g. pine cones, large pebbles) within the trays - Allow children and parents to explore and play freely together - Encourage parents to notice and respond to their child's play, communicating interest, warmth and engagement in their body language and gesture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Children at this age learn and engage with the world through their five senses - Children who are insecurely attached can have a hard time feeling confident to explore the world around them - Providing inviting, high-quality sensory experiences and having parents model that this is a safe and enjoyable activity is delightful for them, and helps boost connections and trust with caregivers
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Mark Marking		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On a large piece of paper, or outdoors on a sunny day, use large chalk, or clay, or paint (e.g. for hand and foot prints) to encourage children and parents to experiment freely with mark-making - You don't need to direct this activity; simply provide the materials and encourage parents to get stuck in alongside their children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promotes self expression, self-agency and exploration - Encourages children to build their confidence to explore the world safely, with parents alongside
Junk Craft	4-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide a selection of 'junk' or recycled items (egg boxes, milk cartons, tissue boxes, lollipop sticks etc.), as well as glue, felt tips, goggly eyes etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No need to direct this activity too much- allow children's imaginative ideas to shine - You can build a few examples for inspiration if needed!



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage children and parents to use their imagination to create magical creatures together - Engage in some imaginative play with the final creations- can they talk/play/sing/dance together? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourages cooperation, play and connection
<p>Pebble Pals</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Get a selection of largeish pebbles, some paints and some googly eyes - Encourage parents and children to paint faces on the pebbles. They could show different emotions, or be different animals- whatever they like. - Have the children hide their pebbles around an open space like a garden, or inside a room- play a game of hide and seek, where adults have to find them and children tell them if they are 'warm' or 'cold' or give clues. - It could be fun to name the pebbles, or give them different characters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creative play with faces/facial expressions can be really helpful to children who struggle to understand or express their emotions, since it externalises the feelings. This can make it safer to explore together - Elements of hide and seek play reinforce attachment and bonding



			
Squiggle Game	6-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parent or child starts by drawing a squiggle on a piece of paper, without saying anything - The next person adds something- another squiggle, or an eye, or a line, etc. - And so on... building a picture collaboratively - The aim is not to talk – and let the picture unfold! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Helps children to relax and build trust with parent/caregiver. - A free, expressive activity: no rules, no lines to colour within, no pressure - Children (and adults) often delighted to see a character, animal or shape emerging from nothing- with no particular plan
Make a special box		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decorate a shoe box, or a plain wooden box, by painting/adding glitter or jewels, or photos - Parent joins in by facilitating, helping prepare resources, noticing and praising - The child ends up with a 'special box,' personal to them, in which to keep their prized items 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Children who have suffered trauma, or displacement, can feel scattered emotionally - They may also sometimes imbue certain objects or objects in general with special meaning – especially, perhaps, where their possessions are limited or where important items have been lost in their travels.


			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Making a special box together is a lovely way to honour this – and to show that their adults want to help keep their things (and by extension – them) safe - It's a nice metaphor for playing with the idea of what's 'inside' and what's 'outside' us – and paying special care and attention to inner (i.e. emotional, spiritual, wellbeing), We can suffer through difficult circumstances but still keep our treasures safe inside.
<p>Life-sized portraits: all about me</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On some large paper, have the child lay down and let the parent draw round their outline with a marker pen - The child is then encouraged to draw or write (as they wish) things that make them special or unique, or things they are interested in, inside the outline of themselves. - Parents assist as directed by the child, and in naming and identifying things they admire about the child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being drawn around is a lovely, calming, sensory activity - A way for parent to show special attention to the child, moving gradually round the body whilst drawing them, as well as supporting the child to celebrate what makes them unique.

Play & Movement

<p>Giant Bubbles!</p>	<p>0-4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Combine six cups of water, one cup of washing-up liquid, and half a tablespoon of glycerine (the magic ingredient, available from chemists). - Tie a piece of string of any length into a circle, dip it into the bubble mix and waft it around to make giant bubbles. - Play some relaxing music in the background; encourage children to pop the bubbles and stop when the music stops. <div data-bbox="772 692 1099 1134" data-label="Image"> <p>A photograph showing a person in a green field blowing a large, iridescent bubble. The bubble is in the foreground, showing vibrant colors like purple, blue, and green. The person is partially visible in the background, holding a string that forms a circular frame for the bubble. The background consists of a grassy field and a line of trees.</p> </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bubbles are an exciting sensory experience for young children: parents will delight in being able to provide this, and watch their children's reactions - Encourages children to develop a secure base (attachment) from which to explore the world playfully
<p>Hand Massage/ Hand Art</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create a lovely atmosphere, perhaps with dim lighting and music - Allow children and adults to massage one another's hands in turn, using essential/other massage oils - If anyone is able to facilitate, using henna to decorate hands in turn is also a lovely activity to try. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on the hands helps with sensory grounding: lovely for both parents and children who have suffered trauma - Promotes caring attention to one another, and connection - Promotes relaxation and emotional regulation

			
The 'bean' game	4-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A silly game in which children and adults impersonate different beans (e.g. runner beans- by running around; baked beans- by pretending to be hot; French beans – by saying 'ooh la la!' etc.; string beans – by stretching out tall) - Allocate one leader to shout out the type of bean, and then all parents/children do the actions. - Swap leader so all children get a turn. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Allows children to move their bodies, use pent-up energy and engage in silly play - Can break down barriers between parents and children locked in cycles of difficult behaviour, when parents get alongside their children in energetic play
Build a den		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indoors: using cushions, pillows, blankets, the table – whatever you have to hand! Encourage story-telling or song inside the den, once created. - Outdoors: How to Build a Den - Kids' Outdoor Activity - Woodland Trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Children feel safe and secure in dens- can help with emotional regulation where children are triggered into a trauma response.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Allows parents to get on the child's level by joining and sharing their space- a lovely opportunity to tell stories or share songs
<p>Straight face challenge</p>	<p>6-8</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The child has to keep a straight face while the parent tries to make them laugh either by making faces or telling silly jokes. - If the child feels comfortable, switch places. Adult has to try to keep a straight face while the child tries to make them laugh. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourages connection through eye contact, laughter, paying close attention and attuning to one another
<p>Mirror game</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Start with the adult and child facing each other, 2 meters apart. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourages connection through eye contact, laughter, paying close attention and attuning to one another

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The child creates gestures/movements and the adult copies the moves as if they were the child's mirror. - For example, the child could start with holding up a hand in a high five, and slowly moving it around in a circle, the adult copies everything the child does. Swap so the adult makes the movements and the child becomes a mirror. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promotes relaxation and builds bonds- the child feels, "I am seen"
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Key Points

- The following activities can be done with individual children and parents, or with children/parents in larger groups
- The 'target age' is just a rough guide. Some children who have experienced trauma might have an uneven developmental profile, appearing beyond their years in some regards, but perhaps presenting with younger emotional needs in others. Some 10 year olds might really benefit from the activities suggested for younger children- use your knowledge of the child, and don't be afraid to try something.
- These are only a few examples. Any creative activity that promotes **connection**, **comfort** and **joy** will promote bonding. Anything that promotes the release of emotion (laughter, energetic movement); involves **mirroring** and close attention/attunement to the child (e.g. copying games); and involves the parent and child being **alongside each other in the play** will work really well. It doesn't need to be very structured or anything fancy- sometimes, just providing lots of materials and a lovely, welcoming space is enough!