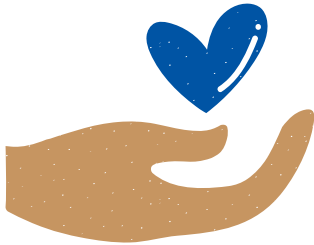


STAYING MINDFUL OF KIDS' MENTAL HEALTH



It's been a hard year. As children return to school, teachers and parents need to remember that students did not learn, play, or interact in ways they typically would over the past year. For this reason, therapists at **EveryChild** have developed some tips for helping the kids in your life through the Back to School transition.

Practice "being with"

"Being with" a child means that you let them lead the interaction without asking questions or taking charge. This is especially important when a child is experiencing strong or negative emotions. **"Being with" conveys I am here, I hear you, and I care.** Key ways to practice "being with" a child is to express empathy by matching their level of affect and tone. You can say things like "You are right, that's a terrible thing that happened," or "I'm here if you need someone to listen." Being present and **allowing children space to feel** allows them the time to process their feelings the way they need to.

Use esteem-building responses

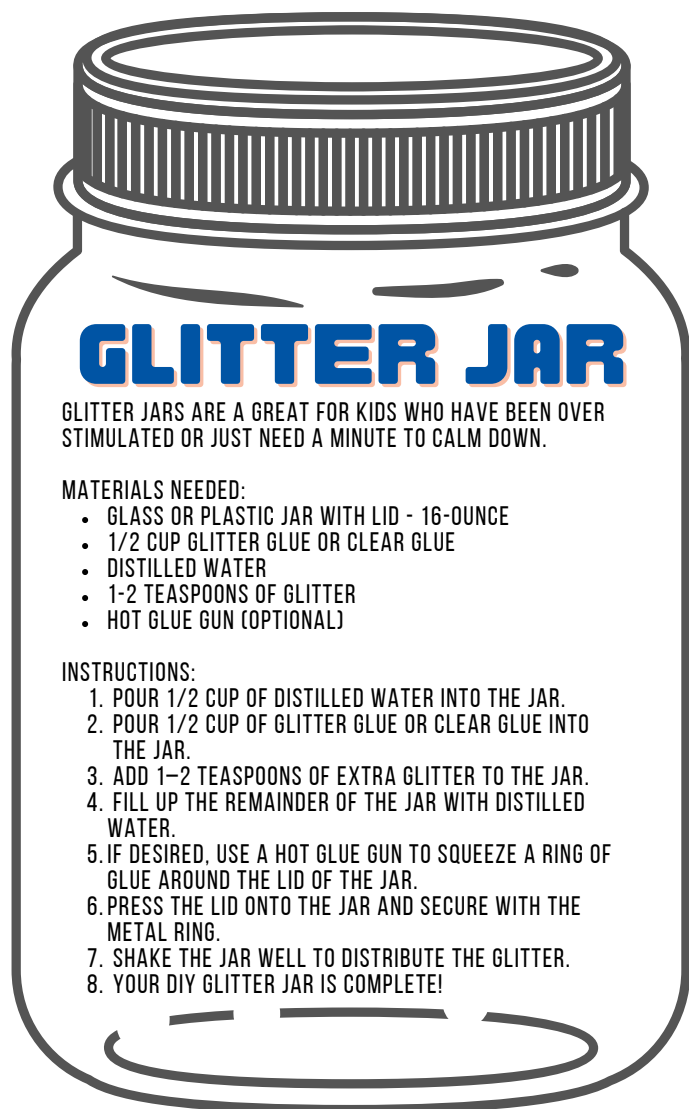
Never do for a child that which they can do for themselves. When you do, you rob that child of the joy of discovery and the opportunity to feel competent. You will never know what a child is capable of unless you allow them to try it. **We can develop a positive sense of self by responding in ways that give children credit for their ideas, effort, and accomplishments.** This encouragement, or **noticing**, is different than praise. Praise teaches dependency on external feedback and often comes paired with a judgement. When a teacher says "Maria, I like the way you're sitting" everyone looks at Maria and tries to copy, because the teacher has determined there is a "right" way to sit. However, some kids might not be comfortable in that position. Instead a teacher might say "You did it! You found a way to make your body comfortable and now you're ready to learn."

Get curious, not furious

Keep your focus on the child, not the problem. **It's important to remember we have not all been in the same boat this year, but we have been through the same storm.** Some kids have had metaphorical yachts while others were fighting to stay afloat in rowboats. How is this experience impacting this child? Why might the child be behaving this way? Is the child scared, hungry, lonely, or tired? It's up to adults to create communities of care. **When we get curious, we don't take the child's behavior personally.**

Have questions about supporting the children in your life? Email EveryChild at info@foreverychild.org or call 309-736-7170

IDEAS TO HELP YOU DE-STRESS AND RECONNECT



ACTIVITIES

- Read a book together
- Color
- Play tag outside (or inside!)
- Dance
- Watch a movie
- Make a snack together
- Go for a walk
- Ride a bike
- Play a game - the more giggles the better!
- Draw with chalk
- Jump, Climb, Run!
- Craft
- Sing
- Blow Bubbles
- Stretch
- Take deep breaths

MAKE YOUR OWN PLAY DOUGH

Materials Needed:

- 1 Cup Flour
- 1 Tbsp. Veg. Oil
- 1/4 Cup Salt
- 2 Tbsp. Cream of Tartar
- 1 Cup Water
- 2 tsp. Food Coloring

Directions:

- Add flour, oil, salt, and cream of tartar to a pan
- Add water and food coloring - combine
- Heat over medium heat
- Stir constantly until mixture forms a ball
- Remove from pan
- Let cool on floured surface or wax paper

WHEN A CHILD - OR AN ADULT - PLAYS WITH PLAY DOUGH, THE BRAIN IS ABLE TO RELAX AND DESTRESS.