

# Mind-mindedness

## Helping children understand and process emotions

Mind-mindedness might be a hard term to say, but it is actually an effective way of helping children make meaning of their emotions – the good and the bad ones. So, how can you be ‘mind-minded’ with the children in your life?

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### Talking through events helps us learn

Children look to the adults around them to teach them about the world – this includes their emotions. Narrating what we see and what children are doing can be an effective way to teach children and to help them understand an experience.

When you are mind-minded, you are creating a narrative that helps organise a child’s emotions that then helps them make sense of what they are feeling. Essentially, you are ‘tuning in’ to what the child might be thinking and reflecting this back to them in a way that gives meaning to their feelings.

### An example

A child is crying because they heard a big noise. You respond soothingly with: ‘Oh, that was a loud noise. It frightened you’. This gives the child a story about their feelings that is easier for them to process and make sense of. By making sense of how they are feeling, you have helped the child to calm down (co-regulate) and showed the feelings themselves are not scary or overwhelming.

If though you had responded with, ‘Stop being a cry-baby!’, the child hasn’t properly made sense of their emotions and their world looks more like a distorted mirror, which leads to a distorted view of themselves. Likewise, responding with too much empathy (pretending to cry yourself) or giving too cheerful a response can also lead to distortion. Giving a balanced, controlled narrative is important. So too is ensuring your expressions match your words.

### Tips

Mind-mindedness can be used from birth and in your daily life. Here’s some ideas:

- ✔ Comment on children’s likes and preferences – ‘You love chocolate cake!’, ‘You seem to enjoy this game’, ‘What colour would you like to use?’.
- ✔ Comment on what they might be thinking and noticing – ‘Do you know what this animal is called? Yes! You do know!’. When re-reading books ask, ‘Do you know what happens next in the story?’.
- ✔ Talk to your child often about how they might be feeling – ‘You seem bored with that toy’. ‘This has been a very exciting day, you must be tired now’. ‘It was scary for you when that person raised their voice’.
- ✔ Be curious and attentive with your child, but be careful not to make too many assumptions. Thoughts and feelings are subjective and we can get it wrong. Allow your child to correct you if you do get it wrong.

The more you make mind-minded comments, the more a child can make meaning of things, develop their emotional literacy and intelligence. This will help them not just now, but throughout their life!



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**Here to help!** Come and talk to the Therapeutic Assessment and Planning Team if you would like to discuss practical ways you can be trauma informed.

Contact your case manager or email [Therapeutic-assessment-OoHC@act.gov.au](mailto:Therapeutic-assessment-OoHC@act.gov.au)

Sources:

> Music, G. (2017) Nurturing natures: Attachment and Children’s Emotional, Sociocultural and Brain Development (2nd Ed.) Routledge: London and New York.



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