

**the
bounce
back
book**

**building resiliency skills
in your preschooler**



introduction

We've all experienced life's ups and downs. Things don't always go our way or as planned. Ever wonder why some people have difficulty moving forward after a challenging situation, while others seem to be able to overcome their difficulties and carry on?

How well we cope with hardship and change is based on a concept called resiliency. Resiliency is the ability to bounce back from setbacks and cope with adversity. In other words, it is our ability to react positively and adapt well to change when things go poorly.

There are a number of factors which influence resiliency, many of which are beyond our control such as the family in which we grew up, the conditions in which we live, the amount of money we have to live on and/or loss of our health or loved ones. However, skills associated with resiliency give us the ability to control our reaction to these events and our attitudes towards them. Also, people who are resilient are more likely to have the confidence to seek support from

others in times of trouble. Children who are resilient typically have at least *one* significant person in their life – a parent, family member or other caregiver. You may be that significant person.

You as the parent or caregiver play a vital role in helping your children respond well – even flourish – when life throws them a curve ball. *The Bounce Back Book* is designed to help you nurture your children to be strong and resilient. Helping children develop self-confidence, problem solving skills, emotional regulation and empathy skills will equip them to be successful in life.

So what are you waiting for? Have fun with these activities! Get silly with your kids! Build resiliency in your children that will last a lifetime.

A few tips before you begin:

- The best teaching tool for your child is a strong relationship with you. When you provide loving care and help meet your child's needs you create an emotional bond that gives your child the strength, trust and security he or she needs to take on life's challenges.
- Play is not only fun, it is the best way for children to learn to solve problems, build relationships and foster learning and well-being. Play is how children cope with and understand their world.
- All children are unique. Know your child's temperament. Some are quiet and sensitive. Others are boisterous and courageous. Tailor activities and ideas in this book to match your child's individual and unique personality.

Note: For ease of reading, this activity book is worded for parents; however, it is also intended for all caregivers of toddlers and preschoolers.



Being a resilient parent

Parenting is one of the most important roles in our society. Like any other important work, staying healthy, balanced and connected with others will help you be a flexible and resilient parent. Here are some tips to ensure your own health and well-being:

- Keep in touch with other parents and make time to connect with friends and family members (even if it's a phone call at naptime).
- Look for resources in your community to learn more about fostering resiliency. Check out the Alberta Mental Health Board website for additional resources and information: www.amhb.ab.ca.
- Like other important roles, parenting and caregiving can be stressful. Little breaks and small vacations on a regular basis may be just what you need to keep going, re-energize and practice self-care.
 - Get enough sleep, exercise and eat well.
 - Arrange for a babysitter on occasion.
- Find community programs that teach resiliency.
- Don't take on too much – too many structured activities for your toddler and preschooler are not necessary and can wear out you and your child. Play and free time are very valuable to both of you.





Table of contents

Let's Build... Self-Confidence 6

● Starting at Age 2

- Wall of fame 8
- Cuddle on the couch..... 8
- Copy cat games 8
- Dance, dance, dance..... 9

● Starting at Age 3

- Four seasons of fun..... 10
- Storytime 11

🌐 Starting at Age 4

- Widening the circle..... 12

Let's Learn... Problem Solving 14

● Starting at Age 2

- Hide & seek 16
- Rolly polly ball..... 16

● Starting at Age 3

- Little shopper 18
- Pieces of the puzzle 18

🌐 Starting at Age 4

- Grouping and sorting 20
- Take-a-turn storymaking 21

Let's Teach... Emotional Regulation ... 22

● Starting at Age 2

- Word wizards 24
- Cookie faces 25

● Starting at Age 3

- Double bubble the fun..... 26

🌐 Starting at Age 4

- Animal crackers..... 28

Let's Learn... Empathy 30

● Starting at Age 2

- If you're happy and you know it .. 32
- Feelings, feelings, everywhere..... 33

● Starting at Age 3

- Helping around the house 34

🌐 Starting at Age 4

- Playhouse puppets..... 36
- Arts & crafts time 38

let's build... Self-Confidence

Introduction

Children who have self-confidence have a strong, realistic belief in their abilities. How young children feel about themselves is largely driven by relationships with important adults in their lives. It is vital for children to feel valued, loved and that they matter to you. All of us, children included, need a sense of belonging and acceptance. This starts with family and extends to school and community.





Giving children opportunities to do tasks they are capable of helps build their self-confidence. It is important to provide children with opportunities for trial and error, age-appropriate decision-making, free-play, and to give genuine, specific praise to acknowledge their talents and abilities.

Self-confidence is important to toddler and preschooler development because it helps children cope with challenges, take risks (such as reaching out to new people or trying new activities), and get along with others.

starting at age 2

Wall of fame

Create a space in your home to showcase the unique accomplishments of your child. This can be a bulletin board or the side of your fridge – anywhere you see fit.

This dedicated space will be a place to showcase your child's special talents and traits. You may choose to hang or display his or her artwork, homemade crafts, photographs, pictures, awards and certificates.

Noticing your child's accomplishments helps him or her feel motivated by his or her successes. Recognizing when your child acts in a way that is appropriate and offering praise – “Hey, I saw you share – good job!” is also important. Children thrive on adult attention and approval.

Cuddle on the couch

Share your time and attention with a cuddle on the couch.

Part of your daily routine should include a cuddle or some other quiet time together.

Copy cat games

Take a break from being the leader. Let your child direct the play!

When you see your child having fun alone, join right in by copying whatever he or she is doing. This could be as simple as mimicking his or her actions to playing with toys.



Dance, dance, dance

Tune into your favourite radio station or put in your favourite CD – it's time to dance!

Turn up the music and dance with your child. Throw on a costume if you like – a hair brush or wooden spoon for a microphone, sunglasses, hats, scarves, ties, dressy shoes, whatever! Follow your child's lead.

This opportunity for free-play helps children develop their individual interests and competencies and protects them against stress.

starting at age 3

Four seasons of fun

Turn off that TV and get outside!

These fun outdoor activities provide opportunities for preschoolers to play with you and their peers. This helps them develop social competence (such as the ability to share and take turns) and strengthens their interpersonal skills.



Spring

Take time to:

- fly a kite (a little extra help may be needed)
- take a walk
- jump through puddles
- plant a garden
- have a 'pretend' parade
- ride a tricycle



Summer

Take time to:

- run through the sprinkler
- have a picnic
- build a sandcastle
- help out in the garden
- kick a beach ball
- colour with sidewalk chalk



Fall

Take time to:

- rake leaves and jump in them
- find different coloured leaves for your scrapbook
- go for a wagon ride
- throw a ball around
- go to the park



Winter

Take time to:

- sled, skate, ski
- shovel snow together
- build a snowman
- jump in the snow banks
- make snow angels



Storytime

At bedtime, instead of reading a book, tell your child a funny story about adventures or things you did with your friends when you were little. Share stories or legends you heard from your parents, grandparents and other relatives. Talk about the things you admire about your family and community. Look at photos of grandparents, places where family members lived, special traditions and practices in your family or community.



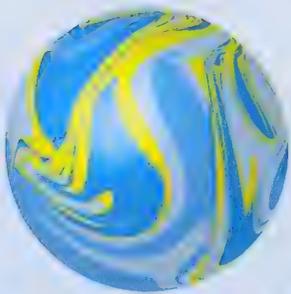
Starting at age 4

Widening the circle

Make a point to visit grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins and ask them to tell you and your child stories about their life, where they grew up, their favourite toys or things they liked to do. Ask them to tell you and your child who was special in their lives and what they learned from their parents and family.

Extended family not close at hand?

- Help your child mail handmade pictures to grandparents (and read out loud letters mailed in return) or to call relatives on the phone.
- Help your child to connect with neighbours or other close family friends.



Fears

- It is normal for toddlers and preschoolers to develop fears from time to time.
- Fears can be real or imaginary. Some common fears at this age include: animals, insects, the dark, doctor/dentist visits, heights, robbers, storms and imaginary dangers such as monsters.
- You can help by: giving reassurance without acting overly concerned, providing information to help your child develop understanding, encouraging your child to talk about fears and helping your child remember previous times he or she overcame fears.
- Don't dismiss fears ("Don't be silly, there is nothing to be afraid of") or try to talk your child out of them. Instead, support your child in learning how to cope with fear and allow your child time to gradually let go of the fear.

How to give praise

- Pay attention to your child's accomplishments
- Take Notice: "I see you built a tower all by yourself!"
- Be Specific: "I like the way you put away your crayons and paper."

Let your child make choices

Children need to feel they have some control. Whenever possible give them choices to make. Two choices are enough – and you should be comfortable with either option offered.

For example, ask them: "Which shirt would you like to wear today, the yellow or the green?" "Would you like to go to the park or play in the yard today?" "Macaroni or soup for lunch?" Do not offer choices in situations where an adult's decision is needed or where there is no real option.

A useful strategy when your child is disappointed is to recognize his or her feelings and then offer alternatives. "I can see that you are upset that we can't go swimming, but would you like to run through the sprinkler or go play on the swings?"

How to give direction

- Talk about behavior rather than the child as a person
- When possible recognize your child's strengths

For example, when giving direction, you may try: "Good job picking up all your blocks. I noticed there are some toys that are still on the floor. Could you please put them away?"



Let's learn... Problem solving

Introduction

Problem solving is the way in which we work through life's difficulties and challenges. It is important for children to develop good problem solving skills for when they enter school and begin interacting with peers.

Like adults, all children face challenges, have to make decisions, have conflicts and handle stress. They need to practice problem solving skills for themselves to build their self-confidence, learn right from wrong, and learn realistic thinking habits.

To help your child learn problem solving skills you can:

- Give him or her choices that are appropriate for his or her age:
"Would you like cereal or eggs for breakfast?"
- Provide consistent limits so he or she begins to understand that there are predictable consequences for his or her actions.
- Offer help before the problem gets too frustrating for your child.
- Suggest appropriate solutions when necessary. For example:
"Ask Sam if you can play with the truck when he is done."
- Help your child develop realistic, positive thinking habits.
(see how to develop realistic thinking, p. 17)



Here are the basic steps of the problem solving process:

- Acknowledge your child's feelings:
"You look mad."
- Accept the feelings but limit the actions:
"It's OK to be mad. It's not OK to hit. Hitting hurts people."
- Define the problem:
"I see two children who want to play with the same toy."
- Invite your child to suggest solutions:
"What can we do so both children will be happy?"
Help with ideas, if needed.
- Together, decide on a solution and try it out.
- See if it works. If not, try another solution.
- Offer praise for problem solving efforts and positive behaviour.



If you repeat this process often your child will have lots of opportunity to practice the problem solving steps. As your child gets older, he or she will be able to do more of the process with less help from you, and will be able to apply it to more situations.

starting at age 2

Hide & seek

This activity is Hide & Seek with a twist!

Hide a small toy in a room. Ask your child to look for the item as you give clues along the way. For example, hide a teddy bear behind a sofa cushion. Give your child the clue: "Can you find the little bear? She's hiding behind something that is soft and blue."

Then let your child hide a toy and give you clues to find it.



Rolly polly ball

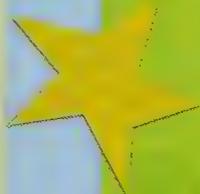
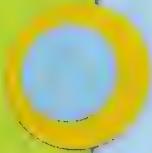
Turn-taking is an important and challenging problem solving skill for children to learn. With toddlers you can start teaching turn-taking by using simple ball games. For example to play *Rolly Polly Ball*, sit on the floor with your toddler, and say: "my turn" when you roll the ball to the child; say: "your turn" or "Emma's turn" when she rolls the ball back to you.





How to develop realistic thinking

By about age four your child will be ready to learn realistic thinking.

- Remember that it is not the problem itself, but the way your child thinks about it that determines how he or she behaves.
 - To help your child develop accurate and flexible thinking:
 - Acknowledge his or her feelings, or: "I can see you are feeling excited." As you identify and clarify feelings your child will come to understand his or her emotions better.
 - Assist your child to identify the thoughts that are causing his or her current feelings. Try phrases such as: "What are you thinking inside your head?" "What is your head telling you?"*
 - Gently challenge unrealistic thinking. Specifically, question your child's false belief patterns that suggest that:
 - he or she is always or never the cause of problems
 - the problem will last forever
 - a particular problem affects everything in his or her life
 - By listening actively and asking open-ended questions, you will better understand why your child engages in certain behaviours.
 - Your child will also get a chance to practice identifying and communicating thoughts and feelings and will feel valued and special.
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**Jennifer Pearson & Darlene Kordich Hall, 2006. Reaching IN...Reaching OUT Resiliency Guidebook—'Bounce Back' thinking skills for children and adults. Child and Family Partnership. p. 45. Available Online: <http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/guidebook-videos.htm>*



Starting at age 3

Little shopper

Make a list and check it twice... you're going grocery shopping.

Make your grocery list as usual. Flip through your local grocery store flyer and cut out easily identifiable items such as bananas, cereal, bread and toothpaste. Paste these items onto a blank sheet of paper to make a grocery list especially for your child.

At the grocery store have your child find these items and put them in the cart. Remember to say: "Good job!" and other encouraging comments each time your child finds an item.

Pieces of the puzzle

Turn an empty cereal box into some learning fun!

Cut out the front of an empty cereal box. Then cut the picture into five or six large puzzle pieces. Ask your child to put the picture back together. If needed, you can give clues to your child by pointing out which pieces go where.



Starting at age 4

Grouping and sorting

Sometimes simple activities are the most fun for your child.

Find a plastic container and gather little things from all around the house such as coins, buttons, paper clips and beans. Ask your child to sort them out into different categories. For example, you might sort buttons by colour, size or number of button holes. You can also ask your child to choose the largest and smallest, or identify which pile has the most items. This game can be played outside as well – with items like pebbles and stones. Sort these by colour or by smoothness.

Note: If you are playing this activity with younger children, ensure that the items you choose are larger objects that cannot be easily swallowed.





Take-a-turn storymaking

**Silly voices make a story come to life.
Create a story with your child for this dynamic activity.**

Invent a story with your child by taking turns adding sentences or story parts to the story. Add to the fun by making up funny voices for the characters in the story. This is a good game to involve more than one child in. It creates a good opportunity to teach your child how to take turns – an important problem solving skill in social situations.

For example:

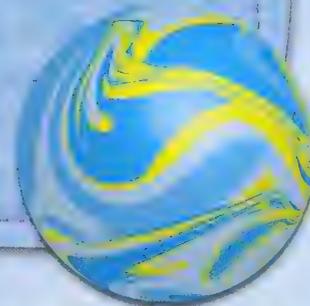
Mom: "There once was a crocodile that lived in a swamp. Every morning, he would get up and ..."

Child: "Eat his breakfast!"

Mom: "What would he do after breakfast?"

Child: "He would go to visit his friend the frog."

Mom: (said in a silly voice) "Well hello Mr. Crocodile. Ribbit, Ribbit!"



Other turn-taking games

By taking time to play games with your preschooler you can support and guide your child in working on turn-taking skills.

Games such as *Memory* or *Go Fish* are a fun way to learn this skill – but other games work too!



let's teach... emotional regulation

Introduction

Emotional regulation is how you manage your emotions and ensure you act appropriately and responsibly. Children's understanding of emotions grows as they do. At age two toddlers start to understand that other people can have different feelings than they do. By age three they begin to realize that feelings exist in the past and future as well as the present. By age four they begin to understand and experience positive and negative feelings about others. As well, preschoolers begin to be able to tell the difference between fantasy and reality.



It is important for children to learn how to manage their emotions so they can develop successful interpersonal skills. This will help them have healthy, positive peer relationships as children and adults, and will prepare them for the social aspect of school.

The parent-child relationship plays a significant role in the development of emotional regulation in toddlers. All children need adults to help them learn how to deal with their thoughts and feelings. Modelling a positive and supportive attitude, expressing negative emotions appropriately (see how to be a good role model, p. 29), and providing a consistent daily routine will help your child better manage his or her emotions.

By doing the following activities with your child you can help him or her learn to recognize, label and control emotions instead of being overwhelmed by them.



Starting at age 2

Word wizards

Encourage your child to use his or her words to express thoughts and feelings, rather than relying simply on emotional displays such as crying, whining or throwing tantrums. For example, you can help your child to learn words for basic needs such as food, bottle, or hungry and to use these words to let you know when he or she wants something. Learning to use words will help your child to communicate successfully and will reduce emotional outbursts.

Cookie faces

Whip up a batch of your favourite cookie dough.* Use a round cookie cutter or the rim of a glass to cut out circular shapes that will be used to create different faces. Using assorted candies (see suggestions) create all kinds of cookie faces: happy, sad, mad, silly, etc. Use this activity as an opportunity to discuss emotions with your child.

Suggestions for making candy faces: string licorice, your favourite chocolates and candies, sprinkles, coconut, candied fruit or anything your heart desires!

*Not really a baker? No problem! Head to your local grocery store and pick up pre-made cookie dough.

This is a fun, interactive activity that reinforces what your child is learning about identifying emotions – not to mention it's a great excuse to indulge your sweet tooth!



Starting at age 3

Double bubble the fun

Breathing exercises are a classic calming and relaxation technique. Relaxation is one way to help manage emotions. Preschoolers are capable of learning controlled breathing.

Make some homemade bubble solution or purchase some at the local discount store.

For homemade bubble solution mix together:

- 1 Cup Water
 - 2 Tablespoons Glycerin*
 - 4 Tablespoons Dishwashing Liquid
- Let solution sit overnight before use.*

*Wondering where to buy Glycerin? Look for it in the baking aisle of the supermarket.

Note: Bubble wands can be purchased from your local discount store – or be creative and make your own wand!

Next time your child exhibits signs that he or she is angry, frustrated or extremely excited, break out the bubble solution and help him or her through this exercise. Your child will understand best when instructions are given one step at a time with pauses in between and when you both say and model what you are teaching.

- a) Take your child to a quiet space and sit down so you are at eye level with him or her.
- b) "Take a slow, deep breath."
- c) "Pull air SLOOOWWLY down deep into your chest/tummy... all the way to your belly button."
- d) "Pucker your lips like a fish! Blow out through the little hole in your lips."
- e) "Watch the bubbles float away."
- f) Repeat until your child has calmed.

Note: If blowing bubbles is too difficult for your child, remove the bubbles and continue to practice the slow breathing on its own.



Starting at age 4

Animal crackers

This game is played like freeze-tag. At the start of the game, let the children pick an animal, such as a dog, tiger, elephant, and so on. They will be the animal of their choice throughout the game.

The person who is "it" chases the other children and tags them. Once a child is "tagged," he or she can only be unfrozen by acting out an emotion – happy, sad, mad.

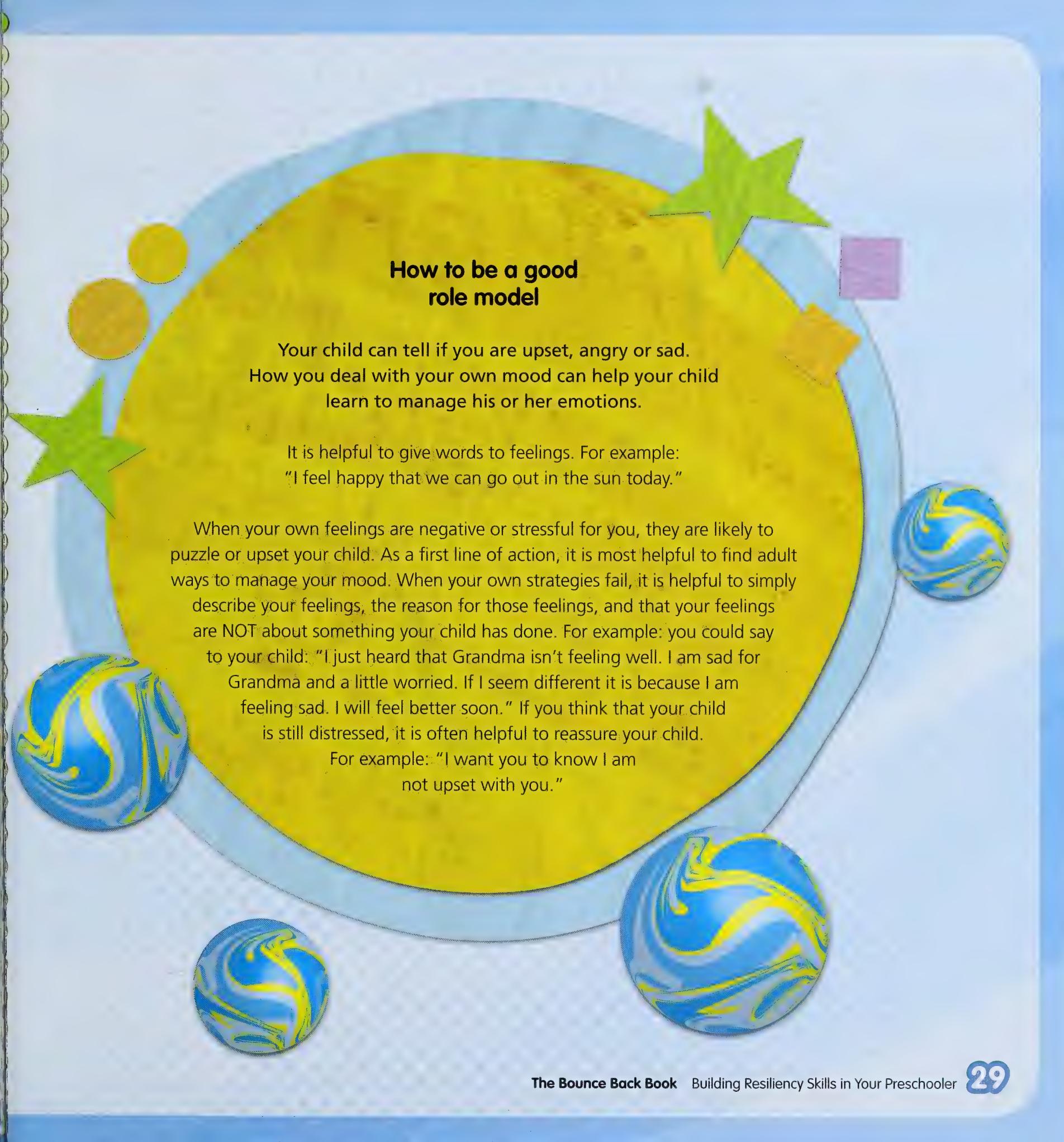
For example, Lindsay (who has chosen to be a dog) is tagged. She freezes. She thinks up an emotion – like happy. Now she must act like a happy dog. For example, "I'm a happy dog, WHOOF, WHOOF!" She is then unfrozen and continues the game.

Remember to periodically stop the game and change the person who is "it." This way everyone gets a turn!

Not only is this a great opportunity to get outdoors and get some exercise, this game reinforces how to identify and express emotions. Also, by asking children to "stop and freeze," this game helps children learn self-control.

Parents, don't be shy! Take part in the game too.





How to be a good role model

Your child can tell if you are upset, angry or sad. How you deal with your own mood can help your child learn to manage his or her emotions.

It is helpful to give words to feelings. For example:
"I feel happy that we can go out in the sun today."

When your own feelings are negative or stressful for you, they are likely to puzzle or upset your child. As a first line of action, it is most helpful to find adult ways to manage your mood. When your own strategies fail, it is helpful to simply describe your feelings, the reason for those feelings, and that your feelings are NOT about something your child has done. For example: you could say to your child: "I just heard that Grandma isn't feeling well. I am sad for Grandma and a little worried. If I seem different it is because I am feeling sad. I will feel better soon." If you think that your child is still distressed, it is often helpful to reassure your child.

For example: "I want you to know I am not upset with you."

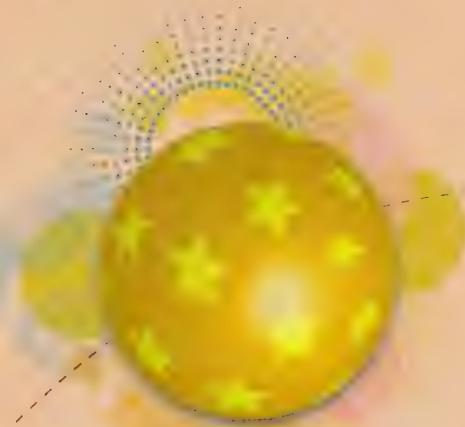
let's learn... empathy



Introduction

Empathy is the ability to see the world through someone else's eyes and to understand the needs of others. Other words to describe empathy: care, compassion, sympathy and kindness.

It is normal for toddlers and preschoolers to believe that they are the centre of the world, that everyone else thinks like they do and that everything belongs to them. Adults can help young children learn empathy by helping them identify and express different types of emotions and helping them learn skills to be kind, cooperative and a good friend.



It is important for children to start learning empathy so that they can build healthy, stable and solid relationships with other people. This ability to develop relationships with other children and adults is also vital to school readiness.

It is important for adults to model empathy for children. When you respond to children by acknowledging their feelings, by comforting them when they are in distress and when you are kind and cooperative with your family, friends and in social situations, you are modelling empathy.

The following activities are fun ways that you and your child can learn about empathy.

starting at age 2

If you're happy and you know it

Have fun with this classic children's song!

Mix it up with verses such as:

"If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands, **CLAP, CLAP!**" (Clap hands)

"If you're sad, and you know it, cry out loud, **BOO, HOO!**" (Blow nose)

"If you're angry and you know it, stomp your feet, **BOOM, BOOM!**" (Stomp feet)

"If you're confused and you know it, scratch your head, **SCRATCH, SCRATCH!**" (Scratch head)

"If you're silly and you know it, dance around, **DANCE, DANCE!**" (Dance around)*

Can't remember the tune or the song? Don't worry! If you have access to a computer (public libraries offer free Internet access) you can tune into Baby Karaoke, from the Raising Children Network, an Australian parenting website: www.raisingchildren.net.au. Join in on the animated fun as you learn this song and other popular children's songs.

*Run out of ideas? Take turns choosing an action.



Feelings, feelings, everywhere

Grab your child's favourite storybook off the shelf or get one from the local library. As you read the book together, talk to your child about what each character is feeling. For example, in the story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, you might say:

"Baby bear just lost his chair. Look at it – all broken in pieces! I think baby bear is sad because his favourite chair is broken."

OR

"The bears just found Goldilocks in the bed! Look how fast she is running out the door. She is running fast because she is scared."

Your child needs help identifying emotions. In addition to using stories, you can also point out emotions in real-life situations. For example, "Michael is crying. He can't find his bottle and he is sad. Let's help him find his bottle."

Starting at age 3

Helping around the house

Assign a special household task to your child. Explain to him or her that this is his or her responsibility as part of the family. This will encourage a sense of personal competence, foster cooperation and create a sense of inclusion.

Age appropriate responsibilities include: Helping to feed the family pet; helping to water the plants; setting the table for dinner; picking up toys after play time; and putting dirty clothes in the hamper. At this age, your child is still in the early process of understanding the concept of empathy. As he or she continues to grow and develop, he or she will be better able to grasp the idea of empathy and fairness.





starting at age 4

Playhouse puppets

Build a cast of characters based on your family and friends!

Using the cut-outs on pages 40-41 create your family in puppets. Use your creativity to colour the characters. Using the perforated lines, punch out the characters. Then glue them onto popsicle sticks, straws, pencils – or whatever you find around the house. Have fun acting with the puppets behind a table, chair or in a cardboard box puppet theatre (see how to build your own puppet theatre, p.37). If you need more puppets, photocopy these pages first and cut around the characters.

Now take to the stage! Get ready to act two scenes:

ACT 1: An adult is shopping in the grocery store. The child asks for a chocolate bar.

The adult says: "No, honey, not right now. You're going to have to wait. We'll eat one after dinner." The child says: "No, I want it now!" The child then starts to scream and yell.

Ask your child: "How do you think the little boy/girl feels?" Why do you think the little boy/girl feels that way? Is this a good way for the little boy/girl to behave/express feelings? How can the little boy/girl make himself/herself feel better in a situation like this?"

ACT 2: An adult is shopping in the grocery store. The child asks for a chocolate bar.

The adult says: "No, honey, not right now. You're going to have to wait. We'll eat one after dinner." The child says: "But mommy I'm hungry. I want to eat right now." (Does not raise voice or throw a tantrum). The mom replies: "Thanks for telling me you're hungry, let's have supper as soon as we leave the store."

This activity demonstrates to your child that there are many ways to react to each and every situation. Explain to your child that feeling mad, sad or upset is okay, but not all behaviours to express these feelings are okay.

Don't forget to encourage your child to create his or her own scenes!

How to build your own puppet theatre

1. Find a sturdy cardboard box.
2. Open the top and bottom flaps.
3. Turn the box on its side so that one open end is facing you.
4. Fold the bottom flap in to create one half of the theatre floor.
5. On the top flap sketch a scallop trim (see picture below) and cut it out.
6. Sketch a curtain shape on either of the side flaps and cut out.
7. Turn box around so that the other open end is facing you.
8. Fold the bottom flap in to meet the other half of theatre floor.
9. Fold the top flap in. Cut off the side flaps and discard.



Arts & crafts time

Put on your creative hat – it's time for a picture party!

Prior to the party, purchase a few inexpensive photo frames from the local discount store (or make your own out of popsicle sticks!). Invite two or three of your child's friends over to your house to make fun, creative and personalized photo frames.

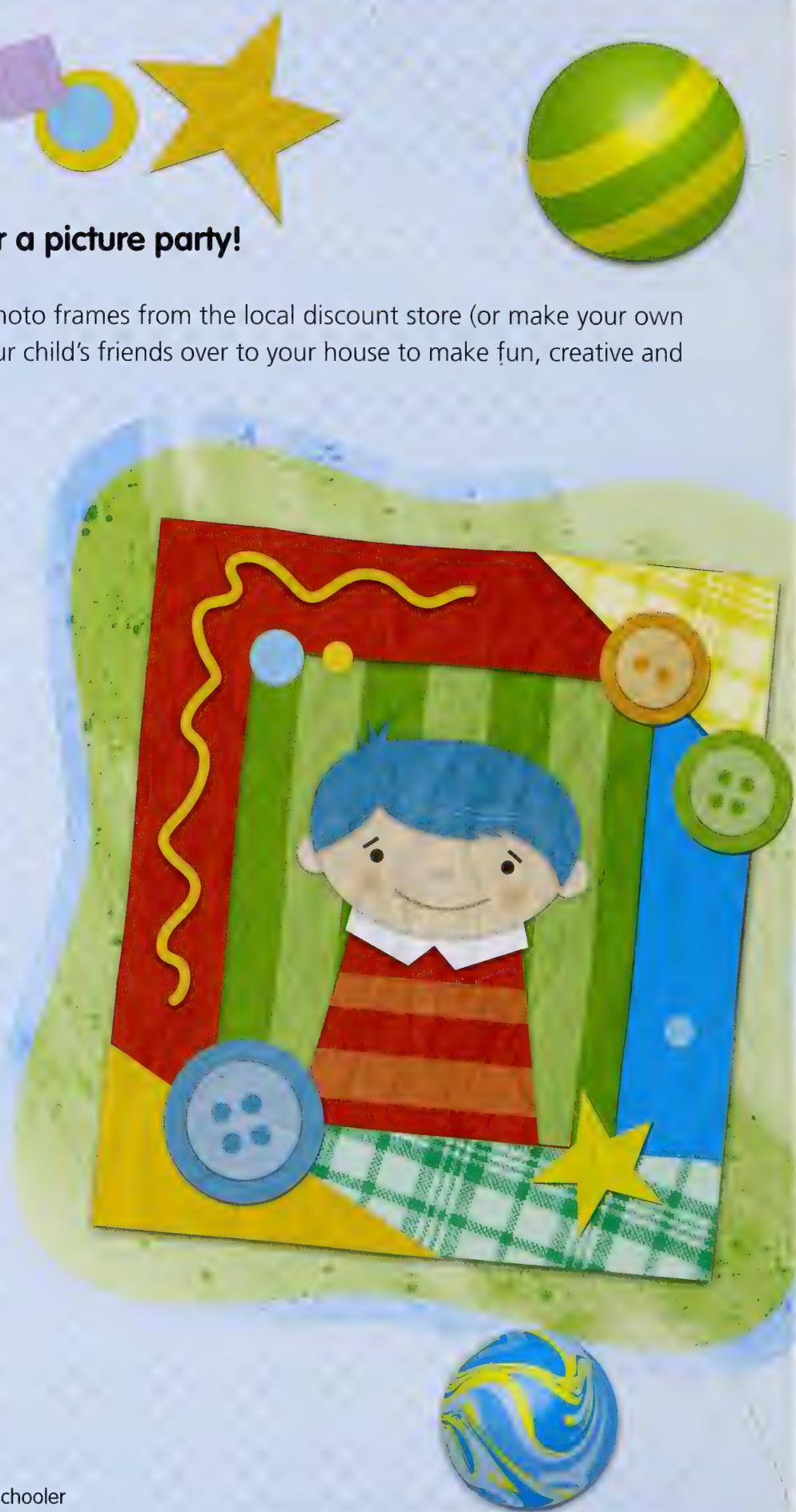
Step 1: Have the children draw a picture of one another or use a picture taken at the party!

Step 2: Have them place their favourite pictures into the frames.

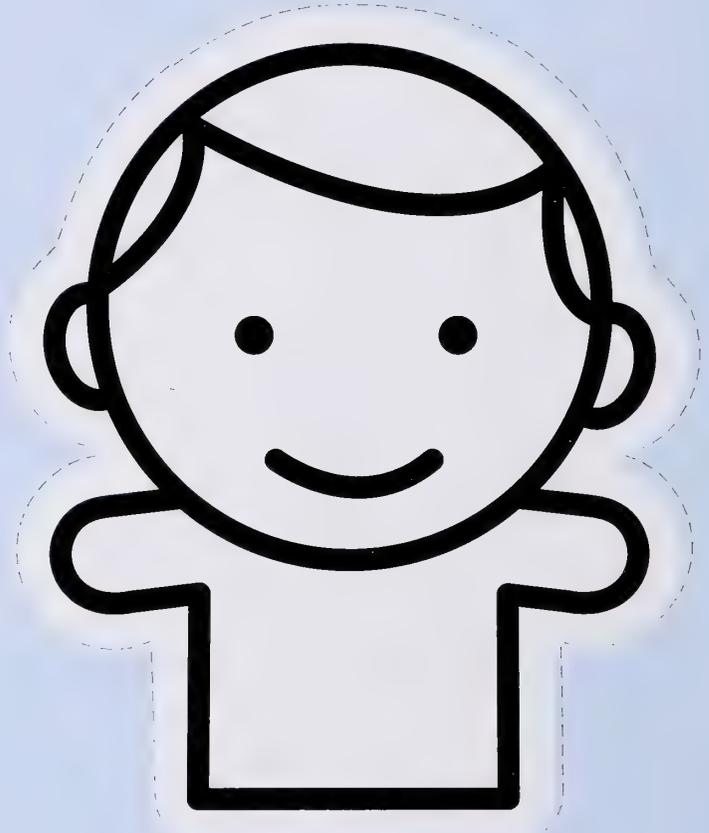
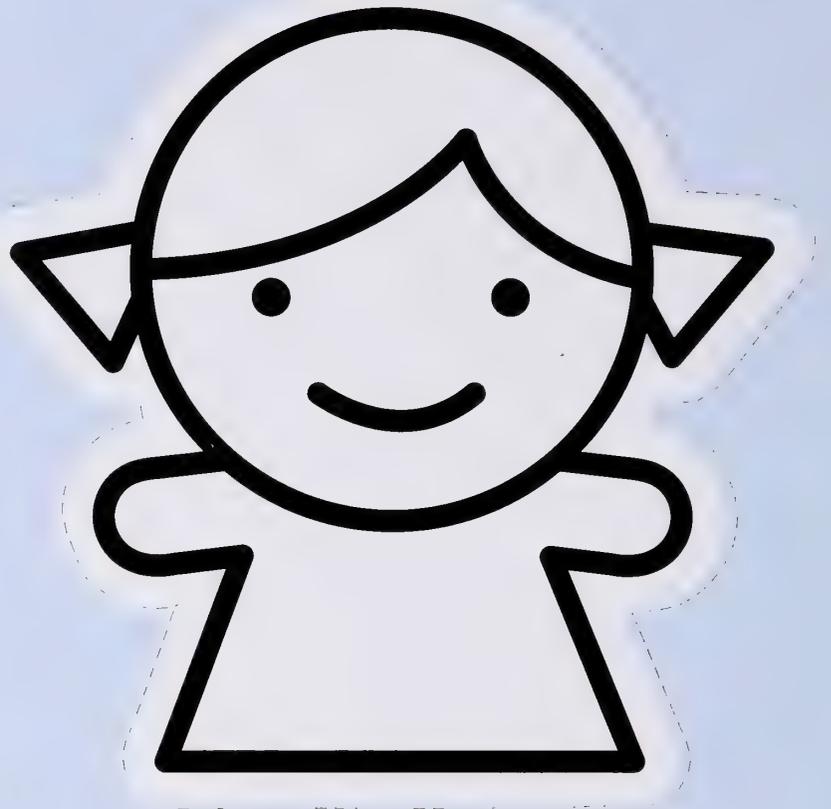
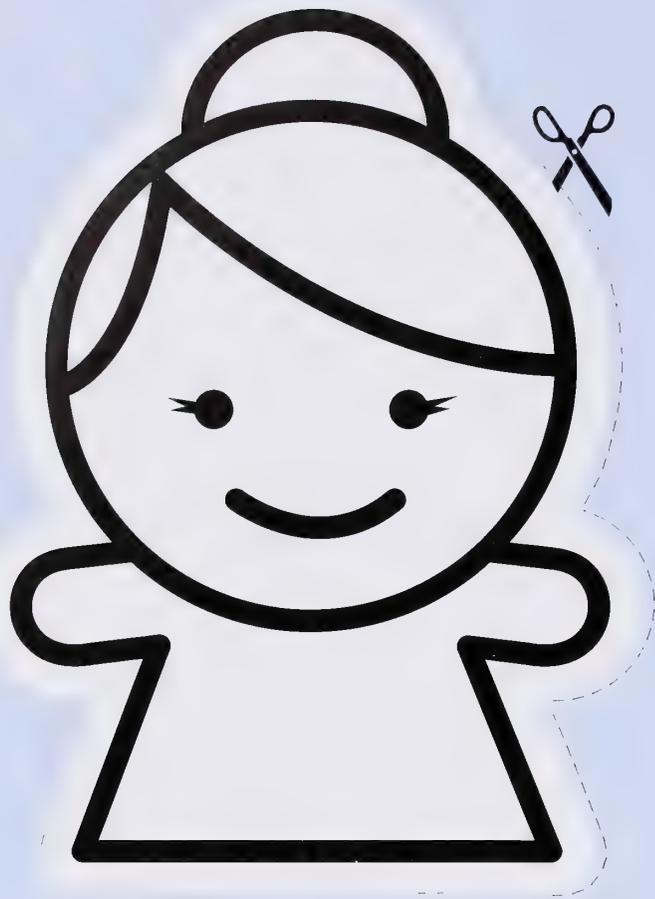
Step 3: Decorate the frames in a way that shows off their unique personalities, characteristics and tastes!

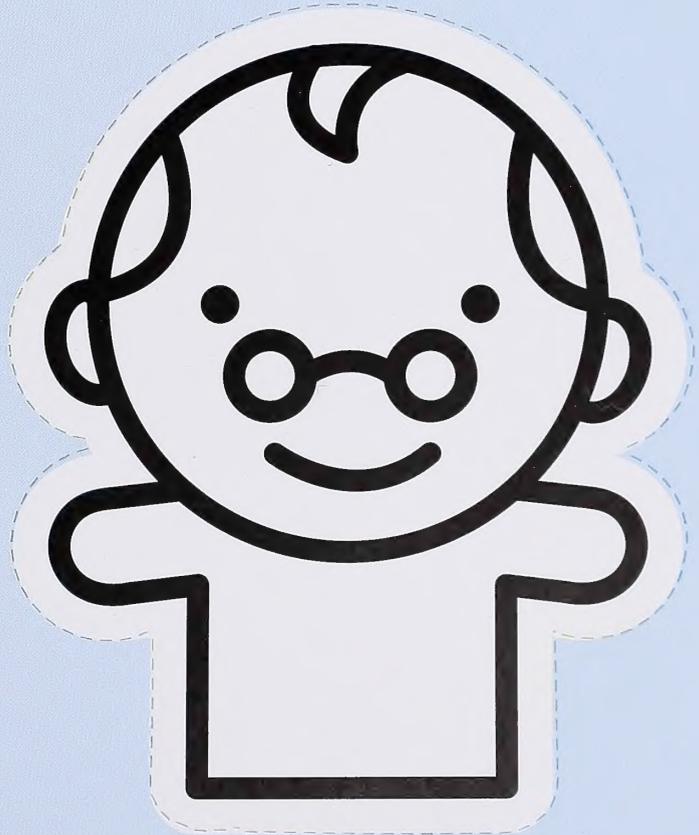
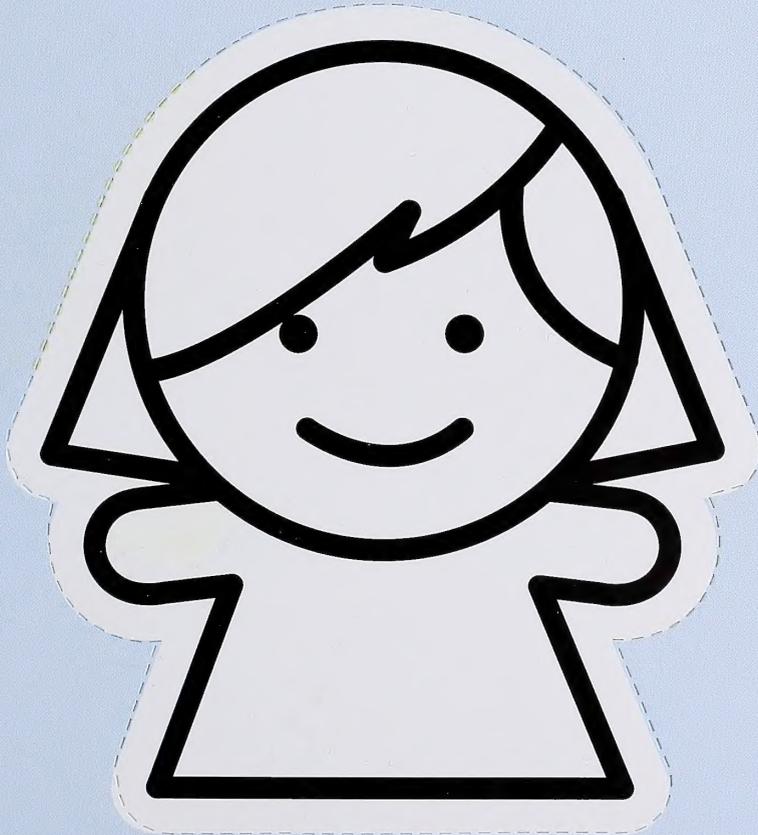
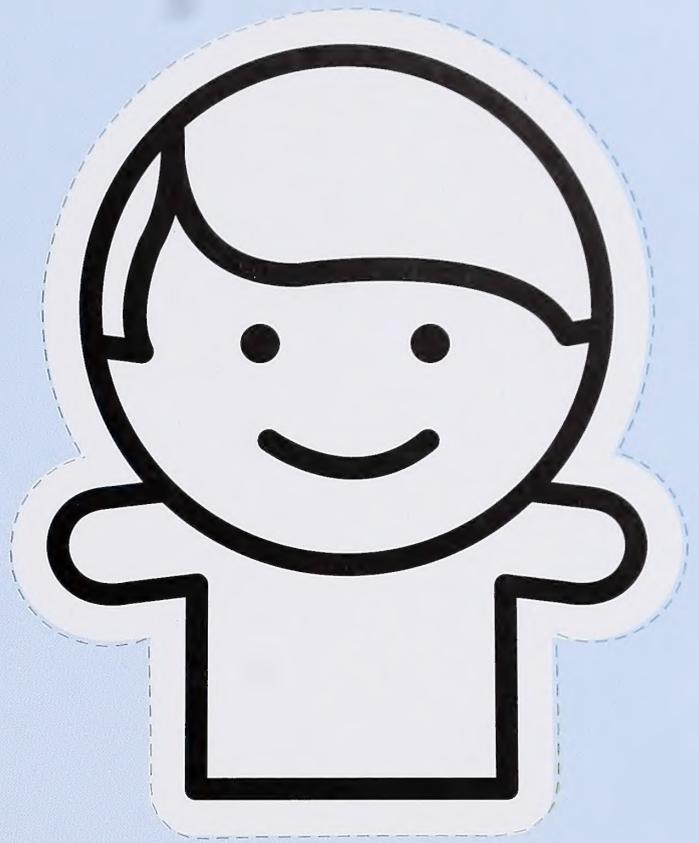
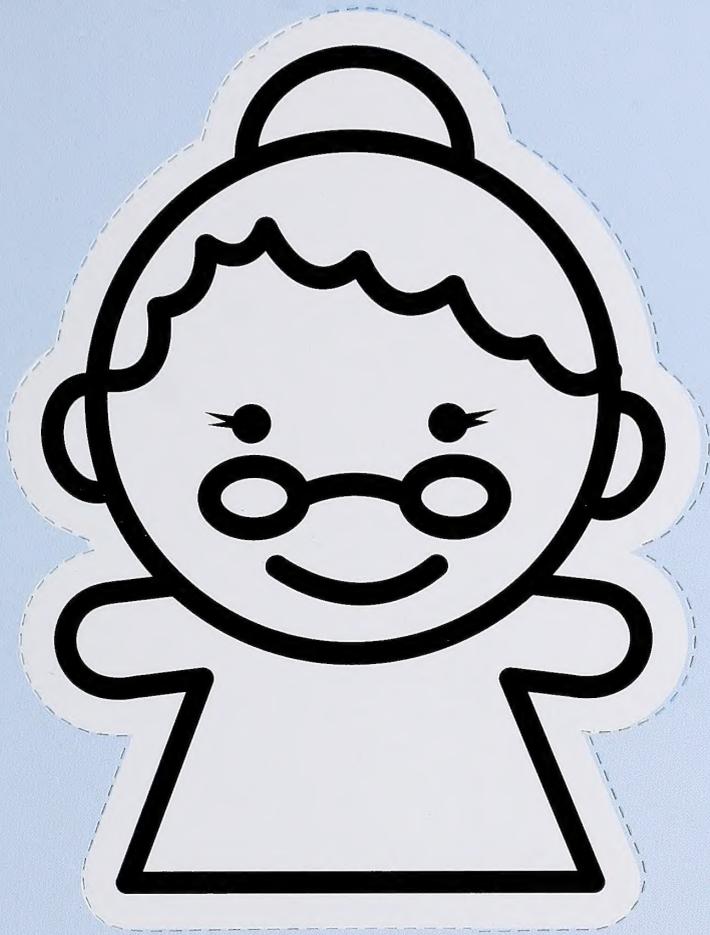
Suggestions for decorations: Scrap pieces of fabric, string or yarn, feathers, big beads or buttons, markers, crayons, paint and glitter.

At this age, your child begins to establish friendships with his or her peers that may last several years or longer. Help foster his or her relationships by encouraging healthy interaction with others.

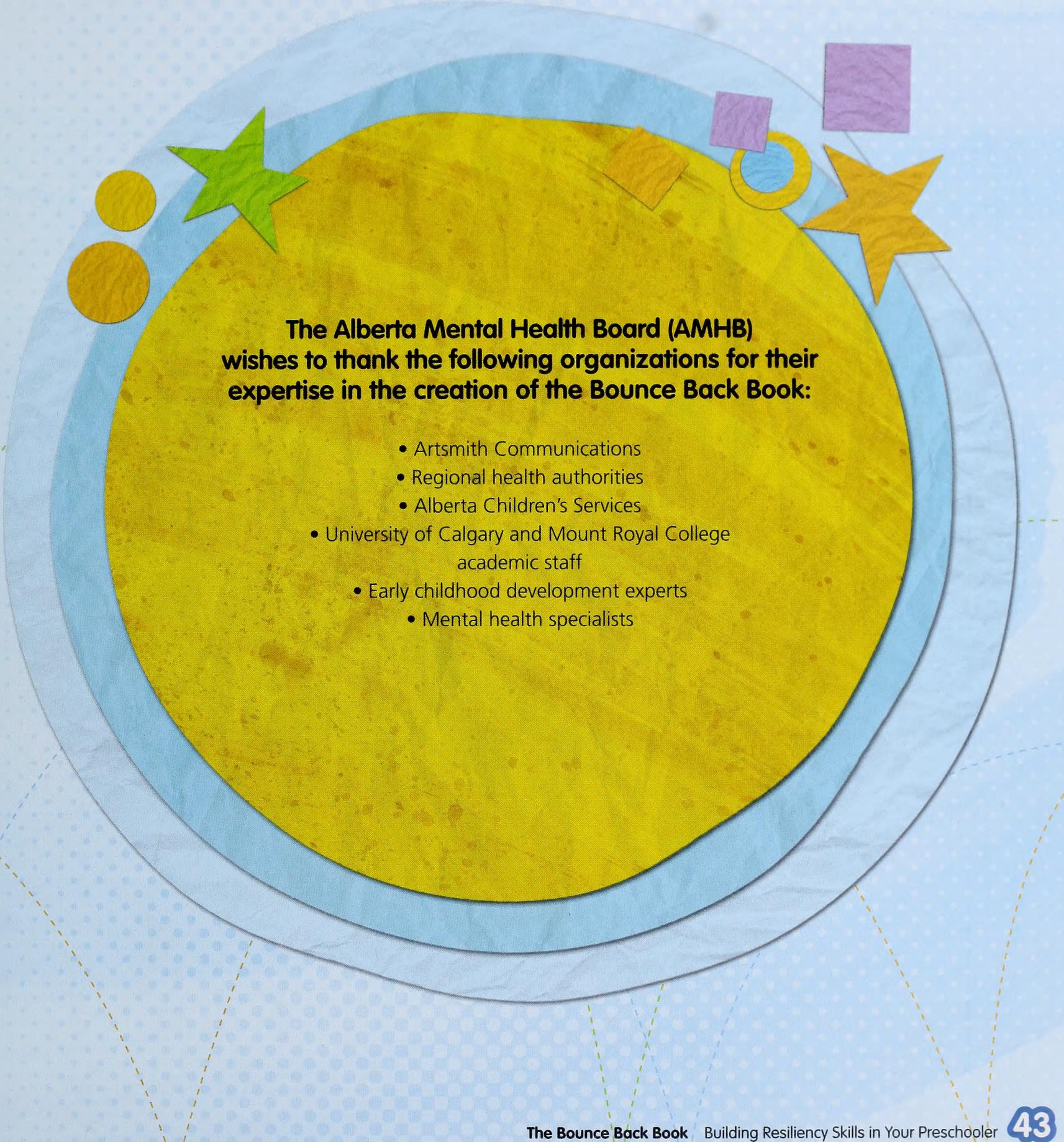












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