



# Fun activities

to support your child's personal  
and social skills and their  
emotional wellbeing at home  
(2-5 year olds)



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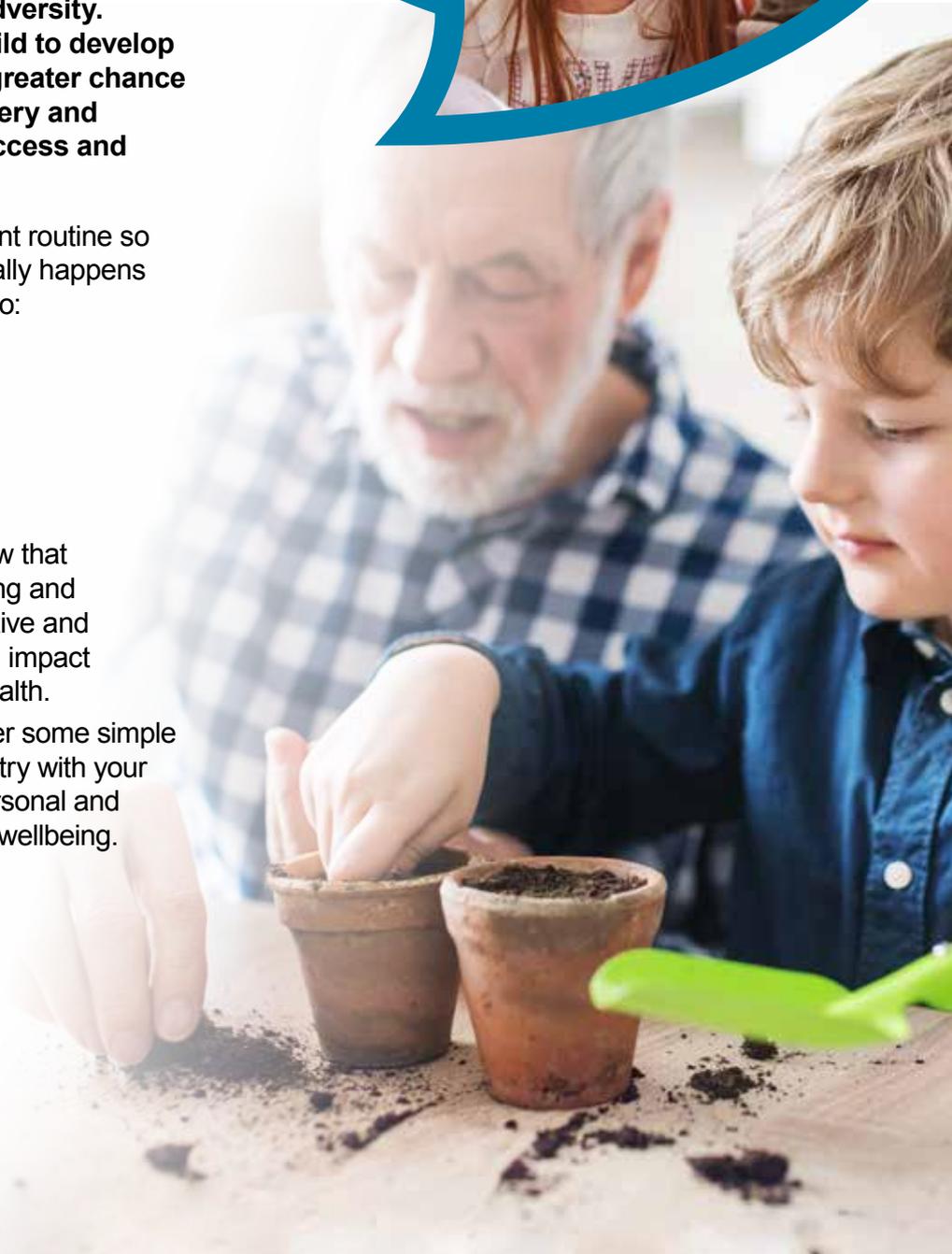
Children who develop good personal, social and emotional skills have been found to cope better with life's challenges. They become children who don't give up when the going gets tough and who bounce back in the face of adversity. Focusing on helping your child to develop these skills will give them a greater chance of enjoying their time in nursery and school and of developing success and happiness in the future.

Everyday try to have a consistent routine so that your child knows what usually happens when. In that routine plan time to:

- Do something active
- Spend time outdoors
- Do something creative
- Prepare a healthy meal
- Do something calming

There is lots of research to show that spending time outside, exercising and eating healthily plus doing creative and relaxing activities has a positive impact on our wellbeing and mental health.

In this pack we have put together some simple fun ideas which you may like to try with your child which will support their personal and social skills and their emotional wellbeing.



## Do something active

Everyday children under 5 should be physically active for at least 180 minutes, spread throughout the day. Exercise is proven to decrease worries and increase good sleep, focus and mood. It also helps children develop a positive view of themselves and increases their confidence and self-esteem.

### Activities:

- Sing and move to some action songs. 'If you're happy and you know it' is a great action song which also helps young children learn about feelings. Change the words to include other emotions, such as sad or excited. Let your child choose the actions to each of the different emotions.
- On the CBeebies website [bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/curations/get-active](http://bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/curations/get-active) look out for 'Get active with CBeebies' which has fun clips and songs that your child can move and dance along to. Dancing releases endorphins which lower stress and boost confidence and self-esteem.
- Wriggle Dance Theatre offer free bite-sized creative dance sessions for children aged 2-5 and their grown-ups. Have fun exploring clowning, balancing and being butterflies at [youtube.com/playlist?list=PLExi8pFA9jWkQoXJEOGv2bkFQGCpKxwA2](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLExi8pFA9jWkQoXJEOGv2bkFQGCpKxwA2)
- Cosmic Kids Yoga [cosmickids.com](http://cosmickids.com) is a brilliant way for little ones to be active whilst enjoying the benefits of yoga and mindfulness. Short video sessions are led by a trained yoga teacher who incorporates stories and rhymes in a way that is fun and easy to follow.
- Take scarves and streamers outside on a windy day. Encourage your child to move the scarves up/down/in big circles/to the side/snake-like on the floor/swirl above their head. Indoors play slow calm music for children to move to and swirl scarves about.
- Obstacle courses are great fun and are an easy play activity to organise. You can even do these indoors! Move the furniture so that your child must weave in and out, crawl under and over. Add throws which your child can crawl under and cushions that they can jump across. Join in yourself and teach your child to take turns in moving through the obstacle course. Why not also let your child have a turn in making up their own obstacle course?
- Treasure hunts are also fun games that can be easily organised, both indoors and outdoors. Whilst your child is active, treasure hunts also help them develop resilience by persevering and not giving up. Try cutting old birthday and Christmas cards in half and hide one half of each of the cards around the house. Give your child the other halves, one at a time, and encourage them to run around the house hunting for the matching card.
- Find ideas for family friendly indoor activities to get everyone moving at [nhs.uk/change4life](http://nhs.uk/change4life)



## Spend time outdoors

Spending time together outside in nature improves mood. There are lots of different things to notice – the temperature and light change from hour to hour, scents and sounds vary from one day to the next and as the seasons change there is a progression of flowers, insects and birds to spot. Being outside also gives children an opportunity for letting off steam and for rough and tumble play. This allows children to freely express a range of feelings, from joy and excitement to fear and frustration.

### Activities:

- Go for a walk. Even in winter, there are lots of fascinating things to spot and explore – twigs, leaves, birds, ice on puddles and so much more.
- Help your child develop empathy as they learn to care for wildlife by making bird feeders to hang in the garden or local park. Take a clean, empty yoghurt pot and make a hole in the bottom. Thread a length of string through and knot one end so that the string stays fastened through the pot. Melt lard in a large bowl and let your child mix in some bird seed. Pour this into the yoghurt pots, with the string held up in the middle of the seed mix. Put in the fridge until set and then take out and remove the pot and hang the feeder on a tree. Encourage your child to watch the birds coming to feed and talk about how he/she has helped them through the winter months
- Help your child make a simple pair of binoculars with two toilet roll tubes and some tape. Taking these on an outdoor walk will certainly add to your child's interest and enjoyment as they explore the natural world around them.
- Land art involves making art and sculptures using materials you find in nature, such as leaves, fir cones, twigs, pebbles, rocks, feathers, sand and shells. It is creative and fun and can be done by anyone. Gather natural materials and encourage your child to use them to create shapes, patterns and pictures outside.
- If possible, try to visit local playgrounds with your child on a regular basis. Risk taking is important in helping children to develop confidence and emotional resilience. Try to encourage your child to take risks when using the play equipment so that they challenge themselves, discover their own personal boundaries and limitations and learn to assess and manage risks.
- Help your child learn to ride a balance or pedal bike. At [readyssetride.co.uk](http://readyssetride.co.uk) from British Cycling and HSBC UK you will find free fun games to help children from 18 months to 8 years learn to ride a bike.



## Do something creative

**Creative activity gives children confidence, joy, and freedom – qualities that build healthy self-esteem. The process of making things is relaxing and the end-product may be beautiful, but it is the experience of messy hands and discovery that is important!**

### Activities:

- Provide plain paper and crayons and encourage your child to make scribbles, lines, circles and pictures of things that they are interested in. Children enjoy it if you draw alongside them! Drawing offers the opportunity to slow down and focus on one thing. Help your child make things for others, for example, making a card for somebody who has a birthday or is ill or a picture to send to grandparents. In this way you are helping your child make social connections with others.
- If your child has a favourite story they might like to create a picture linked to the story. An example is to make a patchwork picture, with collected junk, bright paper and glue after reading *Elmer* by David McKee or *Rainbow fish* by Marcus Pfister. Encourage your child to tear and/or cut the pieces with scissors.
- Encourage your child to create patterns and pictures with different sized and coloured buttons. If you don't have buttons, look for other bits and bobs around your house, such as string, wool, fabric pieces, cotton wool balls, different shaped pasta, etc. It is amazing how a child can turn a collection of odds and ends into a really creative picture. Your child might like to take a photo of their creation to share with family members!
- Cut out pictures of facial features, noses, eyes, mouths and hair from magazines and let your child glue them onto circles of paper to make funny faces. Talk to them about how the faces might be feeling.
- Print off photos of family members and friends who your child might be missing seeing at the moment. Stick them onto pieces of card, such as a cereal box. Cut around them and tape them on to a small container such as a yoghurt pot or small box, so that they stand up. Your child can then play with and talk about their 'family / friends'. They can even bring them out to share a meal or stand them next to their bed at night.
- Make a musical band. Help your child fill empty plastic bottles with small objects like pasta or pebbles. Screw the lids on tightly and decorate the bottles to make musical maracas. Turn old pots and pans into drums, with wooden spoons as drumsticks. Add elastic bands across empty tissue boxes. Underneath tape a long-handled spoon or long tube, decorate and you have a guitar. Playing musical instruments, singing along and dancing is great for children's wellbeing.
- Use natural objects such as pine cones and shells, or household items, such as lids and empty loo rolls to print onto paper with paint. Try different objects and colours on the same paper for varied effects. Try different sizes and colours of paper or cardboard - a great way to upcycle an old box.
- Build dens together – both inside and outside. Children love dens; making them, playing in them and even having a quiet time by themselves in them! Den making helps children's creative building skills but, if you build a den with your child, it also provides an opportunity for them to develop the social skills of listening to others' ideas, negotiating and taking turns.
- Make some calming lavender playdough using the recipe below. There is something very relaxing about playing with playdough - it's a great stress reliever! You will need:
 

• 1 cup of flour	• 1 cup of boiling water
• 1/2 cup of salt	• 1/2 teaspoon of lavender oil
• 2 tbs of cream of tartar	• 1 tbs of oil
• Food colouring (e.g. purple)	

Mix all the dry ingredients together in a large mixing bowl. Add the oil, food colouring and lavender oil into the boiling water - this is a job for adults. Make a well in the middle of the dry ingredients and pour in the water, mix well and then turn onto some baking paper to cool.

## Prepare a healthy meal

**Encourage your child to help you with preparing healthy meals and snacks. Yes, it might take a bit longer but involving children in cooking activities is great for their wellbeing, confidence and self-esteem. As children prepare food, they get to observe, touch, smell, taste and listen. They also learn about healthy eating and are much more likely to try new foods if they have been involved in preparing them.**

### Activities:

- Foodie Faces – try chopping up a variety of fruits together with your child and arranging them on a plate to make a funny face. Alternatively, try making a pizza face. Buy ready-made pizza bases and help your child make them into faces with sliced mushrooms and peppers, onion rings, pepperoni and grated cheese.
- Teach your child how to safely chop vegetables to make a healthy, warming soup. Simply add a variety of veg, some water and a stock cube. Cook until the vegetables are soft and then blend.
- Making bread is a great activity to involve young children in. If it is something you haven't tried before, start with a bread making packet mix where all you have to do is add water and you have a dough! Involve your child in mixing and kneading and let them explore making different shaped rolls with their dough.
- Painted toast is a fun and simple way to involve young children in food preparation. Put a few drops of food colouring into a small cup of milk. Let your child mix it up with a spoon and then use a pastry brush to paint it onto a piece of bread. Using a few different food colourings will allow your child to paint a rainbow or a picture on their bread. Toast as usual and then let your child butter their special painted toast!
- For more ideas about involving children in cooking and baking see [bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/guide-cookery-skills-age](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/guide-cookery-skills-age)



## Do something calming

**Calming activities help children to relax and to learn to manage their emotions. It is important that your child gradually learns to understand about their own and other people's feelings. It is really helpful if, as you do some of these calming activities, you introduce the language of emotions, talking to your child about how they, and also you, are feeling.**

### Activities:

- A mindfulness walk - go for a short daily walk. Stop for a minute occasionally and remain completely still and silent. Listen to the different sounds that you hear, notice what you can feel and what you see.
- Involving your child in daily tasks and chores which involve using their muscles to push and pull objects can help to calm them. Activities such as hoovering, mopping or brushing the floor, cleaning the windows, loading the washing machine, unloading the dishwasher, helping in the garden by pushing the wheelbarrow, carrying buckets and digging are all good for developing children's personal and social skills as well as their emotional wellbeing.
- Starfish meditation – show your child how to hold up one hand with their fingers spread wide like a starfish. With the other hand gently trace up and down their fingers as they breath in and out slowly. They should breath in as they trace up a finger and out again as they trace down. This is a technique to help focus on regular steady deep breathing which will support a child learn about self-calming techniques.
- Share a book. Children love to have their favourite stories repeated again and again and enjoy joining in with repeated phrases and rhymes in predictable traditional stories. Sharing stories sparks a love of words and develops children's sense of fun and creativity. Listening to stories provides comfort and relaxation. Some picture books are a great way of exploring emotions with your child. Others help children understand about difference, for example, Elmer the Elephant didn't like being the only elephant that wasn't grey, yet he had to become grey to find out that being grey wasn't much fun!
- Play the bubble balloon game where you blow up some balloons and pat them to keep them in the air, so they don't touch the floor. Pretend that the balloons are bubbles that might pop so tell your child that they can only tap them gently to keep them afloat.
- If the weather is suitable, go outside and do some cloud watching. Alternatively watch them out of the window. Ideally you need partial cloud and a good breeze. Get your child to lie down and look up at the clouds (taking care not to look directly at the sun). Encourage your child to talk about the shapes they can see and notice how the clouds move.
- Before bedtime ask your child to think of 3 things that made them happy today.
- Find 'calming sounds to relax' in the Radio section at [bbc.co.uk/cbeebies](http://bbc.co.uk/cbeebies)



## Links to other useful information to support children's wellbeing at home

[cumbria.gov.uk/.../homelearningandtimetogetherhomepage.asp](http://cumbria.gov.uk/.../homelearningandtimetogetherhomepage.asp)

[ncic.nhs.uk/services/childrens-therapy-toolkit](http://ncic.nhs.uk/services/childrens-therapy-toolkit)

[early-education.org.uk/children-artists](http://early-education.org.uk/children-artists)

[early-education.org.uk/helping-children-cope-change](http://early-education.org.uk/helping-children-cope-change)

[nhs.uk/change4life/activities](http://nhs.uk/change4life/activities)



## For parents:

Find tips and practical advice to help parents look after their children's and their own mental health while the family is staying at home at

[nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/childrens-mental-health/](http://nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/childrens-mental-health/)



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