

An 'A to Z'

of a nurturing home



A is for Attunement

Attunement is about being in sync with your child. Watch closely, listen, then respond with positive words and body language. This will strengthen your bond, but will also demonstrate the important rules of two way interaction. Turn taking games will also teach your child how to successfully play and work with others.



B is for Belonging

Encourage your child to tell you their stories, chat about their interests, and show you their skills. Providing opportunities for them to share their views or contribute to decisions will help make them feel they are truly valued and belong.



C is for Co-Regulation

Young children need help to manage and regulate their emotions. By staying calm, helping them figure out how they feel, and showing them how to relax, you will be teaching them how to sooth and control themselves in the future.



D is for Developmental

Some children are more able to handle their emotions than others, regardless of what we would expect for their age. Really thinking about how well your child is able to control their impulses and relate to others will help you deal with them in a nurturing manner.



E is for Empathy

Take time to connect with your child's feelings. Saying things like 'I know this is really hard for you' lets them know you understand. Commenting during happy times - 'When I see that big smile on your face I can tell you're proud of yourself and it makes me so happy' will add positivity to their day and build on their understanding of emotions.



F is for Flow

When children are completely absorbed in an activity their brains are in 'flow' - the perfect state for learning. If the activity is enjoyable but a little challenging (like building models, completing jigsaws, doing sports) then they will also feel a great sense of achievement.



G is for Guide

Many children find it difficult to get started on tasks, especially if they are feeling stressed. Setting clear goals, helping them get organized or even using written prompts and pictures will help your child feel ready for homework or daily chores.



H is for Humour

Laughing, telling jokes and generally being silly together will reassure your child that you actually like them! This is important for all children, regardless of age, and will cement your bonds.



I is for Integrated

It's important that all family members deal with situations in the same way. Likewise, school and home should be sharing information so that all efforts and decisions are supported and integrated.



J is for Joy

Play leads to pleasure and joy for all children! Playtimes will develop creativity, language and self-expression, but can also be used as teaching opportunities. Help your child practice social skills and think about more sensitive subjects through the safety of play. Playtime must be scheduled throughout the day, especially when arriving home from school, to allow children to unwind and change gear.



K is for Keep in Mind

Reassure your child that you will still be thinking about them when you're apart by saying things like 'I'll be back to check on you in two minutes' or 'when I saw that on TV it reminded me of you'. Anxious children can often be reassured by having special objects to keep, or by thinking about an invisible and unbreakable piece of string tying you both together.



L is for Language

Keep talking to your child! Describing what you're both doing will build their vocabulary, using very direct instructions will develop their understanding, and wondering aloud about how they might be feeling will boost their understanding of emotions. The use of reassuring messages for example 'you're getting better at this' is really important.



M is for Modify

Breaking tasks into smaller steps and offering support may be all your child needs to experience more success more often. Doing this may make homework and daily chores run more smoothly for everyone.



N is for Nearby

Co-regulating, guiding and letting them know you are keeping them in mind are all ways in which you can teach your child to become confident and independent enough to cope when they're on their own.



O is for Optimism

Try to recognize your child's strengths as much as possible. Focusing on effort rather than the end result, for example saying 'You're taking your time and looking really carefully at your drawing' will keep things positive. It may be a good idea to collect samples of photos, stickers and certificates to show your child if they're feeling low, reminding them of how well they coped with difficult things in the past.



P is for Predictable

Setting up daily routines and keeping some parts of the day predictable will make your child feel in control, relaxed and safe.



Q is for Question

Asking 'what happened to you? Instead of what's wrong with you' may lead to more open and honest answers. It should also change your mindset from 'they're just attention seeking' to 'they want to connect with me', helping you think about what it is they actually need.



R is for Repair

Every relationship has ups and downs, and learning that things can be fixed is an important lesson for children. Once things have settled, try apologizing for your part in the upset, acknowledge your child's feelings and calmly discuss how things could be handled differently in the future. All of these actions will help repair your relationship and will demonstrate how to deal with fall outs with other family members and friends.



S is for Safety

All children can feel overwhelmed at times and offering them an escape to a quiet place will give them the time needed to gather themselves. For example, allowing a few minutes in a quiet place of the house may be the solution if a family gathering becomes too much, though this must be suggested in a positive way without judgement.



T is for Transition

Some children may need extra preparations and explanations when there are going to be changes to routine. Using calendars can help anxious children count down how many days until a return to school, and coming up with a plan for holiday events are useful ideas.



U is for Understand

Whilst inappropriate behaviour should not be tolerated, showing your child you understand the feelings that caused their actions can help reduce feelings of unacceptance and shame.



V is for Voice

Rather than making assumptions, encourage your child to tell you (perhaps through talking or drawing) about the things that help when they are sad or stressed. Use this valuable information to work out the best ways to support your child.



W is for Wiggle

Physical exercise can help keep us emotionally well balanced and release stress. Walking up and down the stairs, dancing in the living room or lifting boxes in the kitchen are all ways of building in fitness activities for your child, even on rainy days.



X is for FleXible

(A bit of a cheat for "X"!) Everyone has good and bad days, including children. Sometimes your child may need you to readjust your expectations and plans, and simply help them control their feelings on difficult days.



Y is for You

Your relationship with your child is more important than any support programme or therapy session. How you look at your child, listen to, speak with and support them will create the vital opportunities they need for development and growth.



Z is for Zen

This final letter is all about relaxation. It's important that you look after yourself and stay relaxed. Then you'll be able to support your child when they are upset, and have the energy to follow all these 'A to Z' pointers to have a nurturing home.



This guide is based upon "An A to Z Guide of a Nurturing Environment" by Dr Chris Moore, Educational Psychologist (EA Psychology Service). Dr Moore's work was originally inspired by the brilliant "Resilience Alphabet" (developed by Martha Simpson and Philip Wong) which is being circulated by Education Scotland.