

# YOUR EVERYDAY GESTURES CAN HELP A CHILD HEAL.

Research continues to show that witnessing or experiencing traumatic events in childhood can impact the physical development of a child's brain. You can help reverse the effects. In fact, as a caring adult, you could be the most important factor in helping children heal. Here's what you can do:



## CELEBRATE

Use "put-ups," not "put-downs."



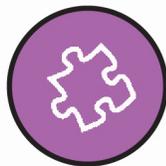
## COMFORT

Stay calm and patient.



## LISTEN

Show an interest in their passions.



## COLLABORATE

Ask for their opinions.



## INSPIRE

Expose them to new ideas.

Childhood trauma  
**Changing minds.**



[www.WashtenawSuccessBy6.org](http://www.WashtenawSuccessBy6.org)

Find more information and helpful tips at [ChangingMindsNOW.org](http://ChangingMindsNOW.org)

## CELEBRATE

- Create lots of opportunities for children to engage in open-ended free play. Follow their lead.
- Praise them for completing or sticking with difficult tasks, and for being helpful or kind to others.
- Provide opportunities to experiment with trial and error, so they can learn to solve problems.
- Offer support consistently and often, when appropriate.
- Talk to children and narrate what is happening in the world around them.
- Encourage them to explore cultural traditions and identify sources of cultural pride.
- Support them when they're frustrated with a task and offer the least amount of help needed for them to accomplish it.
- Encourage exploration. Teach them how to evaluate outcomes to foster a sense of control and self-efficacy.

## COMFORT

- Practice relaxation techniques when children are not under stress—like counting to ten, deep breathing, meditation, or positive self-talk. Repetition will make them more likely to utilize these techniques when they're upset.
- Help a child empathize by labeling others' emotions. This can also help them understand appropriate behavior.
- Help children feel like they can trust you by only making promises you can keep.
- Offer them safe ways to express feelings, such as drawing, pretend play, or telling stories.
- Teach children positive self-talk to help them deal with everyday frustrations.
- Recognize that when children are disruptive, they are generally feeling out of control and may not have the ability to express themselves in other ways. Use a calm approach to help children regain a sense of safety and control.

## LISTEN

- Encourage children to express their feelings, particularly when they show nonverbal signs of negative emotion: a slumped posture, tiredness, or certain facial expressions. Young children often express themselves through play or art, and these activities can offer insight into what they are feeling.
- Be open to their ideas and opinions.
- Be patient. Processing experiences and emotions can take time and they may need to talk about topics multiple times.
- Make sure you're understanding them correctly by reflecting back to them what you're hearing.
- If a child wants to talk about a difficult topic, supportive listening helps them express their thoughts and make sense of their experience. If a child wants to share his or her story, allow them to share without interruptions or judgement.

## COLLABORATE

- Help children learn conflict resolution skills and nonviolent ways of playing.
- Work together to establish the rules and expectations for different situations, and set reasonable consequences when things are going well.
- Help children recognize when they're getting frustrated and might need to take a break.
- Through gentle guidance and asking open-ended questions, support children in resolving their own conflicts. Some children may need you to model the exact words to use, particularly in new situations.
- Provide choices whenever possible and when children are stuck.
- Encourage children to think about challenges they might face in carrying out their plans, and help them consider how they could prevent or solve them.
- Acknowledge children's problem-solving attempts, whether or not the attempts are successful.
- Create opportunities for children to work together with their peers on tasks, and help them to see others' perspectives on possible action steps and solutions.

## INSPIRE

- Encourage children to try to master tasks they're struggling with. Break down difficult tasks into smaller, manageable steps to help them feel safe enough to take risks.
- Focus on positive mindsets. Help children develop strategies to bring them closer to their goals.
- Engage children in short- and long-term goal setting—help establish realistic, achievable goals. Anticipate success.
- Nurture curiosity and creativity by exposing kids to a wide range of artistic and athletic activities.
- Read to and with children to help expand their sense of the world.
- Engage them in conversations about adults they look up to and why, i.e. celebrities, famous athletes, etc.
- Support and encourage dressing up and pretend play.
- Provide children with toys and activities that both challenge them and allow them to succeed. Use the challenges to show children that it's okay to experiment, to take risks, and to fail.