EARLY YEARS Cocoon

Parenting booklet

A collaborative booklet full of resources & guidance · 2024

I am delighted to be able to present to you our 5th issue, as we come to celebrate 6 years of existence as an organisation. It has been a great adventure over the years and especially recently with our focus on building collaborations and partnerships to help tackle the complex issues in our borough.

We continue to support and empower families with young children, providing services that we believe contribute to navigating parenting in a much better way. Building the village is at the heart of what we do, bringing the community closer together via our sessions and projects.

This edition is particularly special because we decided to ask our local families for the topics they wanted to get support with. Interestingly, when we compiled those topics, we found that many of them were repeated over and over again. Once we had completed the consultation, we got in touch with local partners to invite them to join our endeavour. I would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who have written articles because we know how much work this entails.

Parenting can be a challenging journey, especially if you don't have enough resources and support. We hope you find this booklet useful and relevant. We also hope you will share ideas with other families and keep seeking answers to your questions while opening up to others, so that we can all address these topics with greater honesty and less shame.

We would like to take this opportunity to share the values we stand for:

- Diversity and Inclusion
- Child-led learning
- Creativity
- Family engagement
- Building community and strengthening the 'village'

If you are a family/parent/carer with young children, and you are searching for a place to connect with others, enrich your children's learning, develop skills, engage in activities and build a supportive village, this is what we are offering. We like sharing resources, learning together and growing stronger. And because we believe this is essential, we are making our best efforts to develop our capacity and strengthen sustainability.

Natalia Lema

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Barking & Dagenham

Illustrations & layout: © Calu Design

Special Time

- Spend 5 minutes each day playing with your child.
- The child chooses the toy/activity (not computer or books).
- Use a separate room/corner of a room away from the rest of the family.
- Keep the room as quiet as possible.
- Adult to give the child their full attention.
- The play is the important thing, not the talking. Try not to ask questions.
- Get down to your child's level and make sure you are face to face.

Why should I use Special Time?

- The quality of the time spent together is more important than the quantity, so stick to 5 minutes of Special Time.
- Special Time develops the parent/child relationship.
- Special Time gives attention to the child which is not dependent on any difficulties they may have with talking.
- Special Times provide the parent with a Special Time that is not dependent on any language difficulties your child may have.

Try to:

- ALLOW your child to lead you. Before you speak use the OWL approach:
  Observe – what your child is doing.
  Wait – to see what they say to you.
  Listen – to what your child says.
- ADAPT to share the moment. Join in with your child's activity. Comment on what your child is doing but don't disrupt the flow of the play.
- ADD language and experience. If your child says “car”, expand the label, e.g. “yes, red car” or if they say "doggy", you can say “it's a big doggy”. Extend your child's understanding of the world through play.

Speech therapy with Ema | speechtherapywithema@gmail.com | Instagram: @speechtherapywithema

Healthy eating on a budget

Look at supermarket brands
Premium food brands are generally marketed to make you believe they are superior in taste and quality. However, that isn't always the case! Often the non-branded versions are less than half the price and can be more nutritious.

Buy fresh fruit/vegetables from the local market rather than supermarkets
These tend to be relatively cheaper. If you do buy your fruit/veg from the supermarket, consider buying 'wonky' and/or loose fruit/veg.

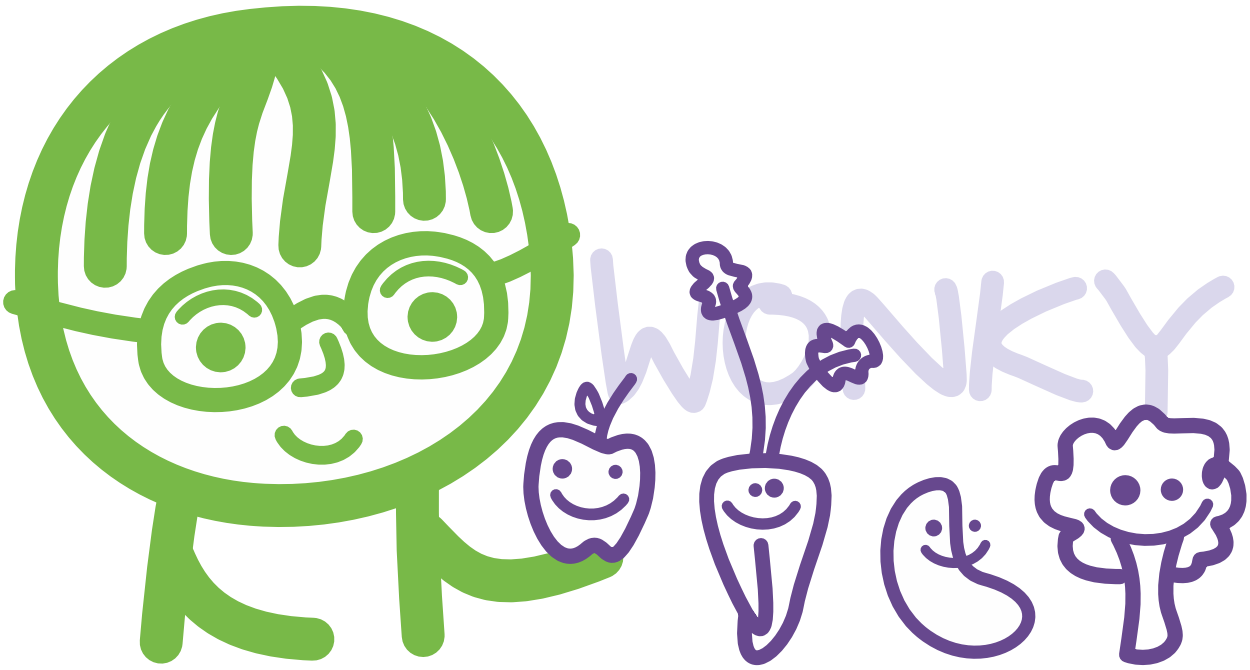
Use frozen or tinned fruits and vegetables
Frozen and tinned fruits and vegetables are just as nutritious, if not more so, than the fresh varieties and are less than half the price!

Consider including vegetarian meals in the week
Vegetarian meals can be significantly cheaper than when using meat or fish products. Using dried or tinned beans and lentils or eggs as protein alternatives can be delicious and just as nutritious.

Buy cheaper cuts of meat
Cheaper cuts of meat include mincemeat, chicken thighs, wings or drumsticks, rather than chicken breast or diced beef. A whole chicken can also be good value, especially if you use it for more than one meal.

Find out food reduction times at your local supermarket and try to shop then
Often supermarkets will cut the prices of products towards the end of the day if they may be expiring on that day. Ask a member of staff at your supermarket for food reduction times and try to shop then.

Healthy eating | ramatujalloh@hotmail.co.uk | Instagram: @rambos_nutrition



Reduce, reuse and recycle

We all need to do our bit to create a cleaner, greener borough for our children and future generations. The best way to do this is by cutting down on the waste we produce. This helps the environment, and it can save you money too.

So, what small steps can you take as a parent to make a big difference? We've listed top tips below.

Food waste
Cooking for children isn't easy at the best of times! Visit www.eatlikealondoner.com for help to reduce food waste.

Library of Things
Visit the Library of Things in Barking Learning Centre to borrow useful household items for cleaning, DIY and entertainment at affordable prices.
www.libraryofthings.co.uk/barking

Reusable nappies and period products
Reusable nappies are kinder to babies' skin and can save you up to £500 per child! Not to mention cutting your household waste by nearly half. Email wasteminimisation@lbbd.gov.uk for a free trial pack.

Reusable period products also cut waste. Visit www.wen.org.uk for more information.

Don't just bin it!
Before you throw something in the bin, could it be used by someone else? Or if it's broken, could you fix it? Visit www.lbbd.gov.uk/stop-waste to find out how to donate pre-loved items and get help to repair things.

Recycle
The best way to cut waste is to not produce it in the first place, but it's important to recycle what we can. Visit www.lbbd.gov.uk/recycling to find out how.

Working together
Find out about the council's Cleaner, Greener campaign at www.lbbd.gov.uk/cleaner-greener-bd.

London Borough of Barking & Dagenham | sushant.bali@lbbd.gov.uk

Join the Arktivists

A Family Guide to Saving the Planet with Noah
Are you ready to embark on a journey to save our planet alongside Noah, the eco-friendly superhero? As arktivists, families have the power to make a real difference in the fight against climate change. Here are some tips and advice for families with children eager to become environmental warriors:

Embrace Eco-Friendly Habits: Encourage your family to adopt eco-friendly habits such as recycling, reducing waste, and conserving energy. Small changes can make a big impact!

Get Creative: Channel your inner artist and brainstorm fun eco-friendly projects that the whole family can enjoy. From upcycling old materials to creating DIY compost bins, the possibilities are endless.

Learn and Educate: Take the time to educate yourselves about environmental issues and the importance of conservation. Share what you learn with friends, family, and your community to spread awareness.

Take Action: Get involved in local environmental initiatives and volunteer opportunities. Whether it's participating in beach clean-ups or planting trees, every action counts towards a healthier planet.

Document Your Journey: Capture your family's arktivist journey through photos and videos. Document your eco-friendly projects, from garden makeovers to homemade solar ovens.

Gala Awards: Showcase your best projects and enter them into our gala awards. The best project will be awarded with prizes and certificates at our annual ceremony, celebrating your dedication to saving the planet.

Join the arktivists today and be part of the solution to protect our environment for future generations!

Healthy habits

Lead by Example: Children often mimic the behaviours of adults around them. For children to develop healthy habits, make sure you're modelling those behaviours yourself.

Start Early: The earlier you introduce healthy habits, the more likely they are to stick. Encourage healthy eating, physical activity, and good hygiene from a young age.

Make it Fun: Find creative ways to make healthy habits enjoyable. Incorporate games, challenges, or rewards to make activities like exercise or trying new foods exciting.

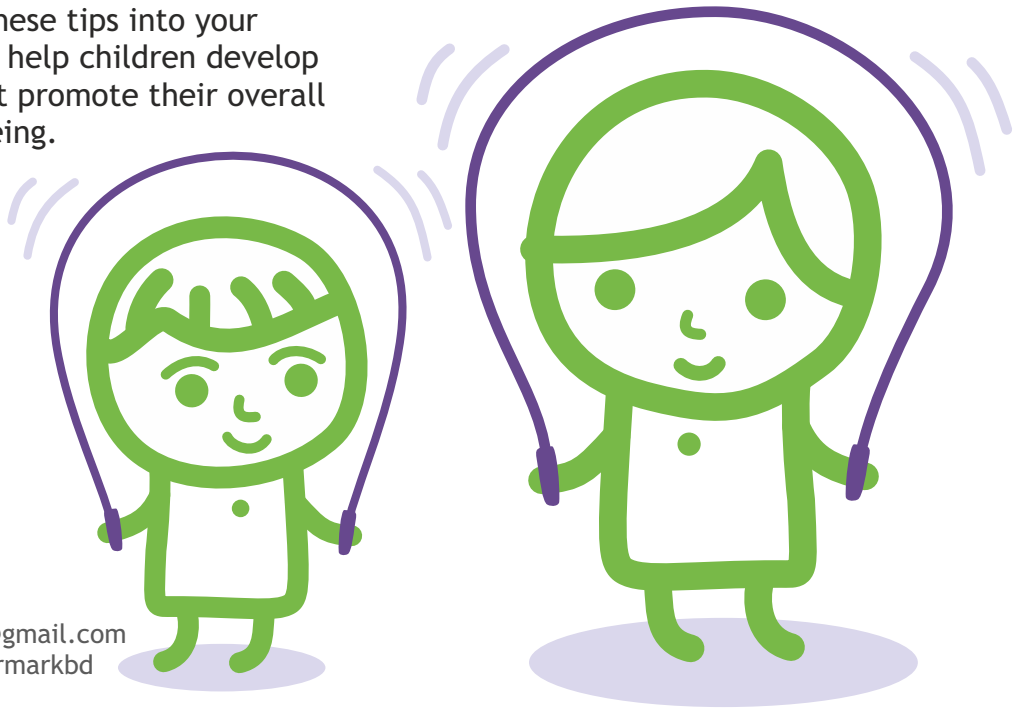
Involve them in Decision-Making: Let children have a say in the healthy habits they adopt. Whether it's choosing vegetables at the supermarket or picking out activities to stay active, involving them increases their sense of ownership and commitment.

Set Realistic Goals: Help children set achievable goals. Whether it's drinking more water, trying fruits and vegetables each day, or getting a certain amount of exercise, make sure the goals are realistic and age-appropriate.

Limit Screen Time: Encourage less time in front of screens and more time being active. Set limits on screen time and provide alternative activities like playing outside, reading, or doing crafts.

Celebrate Progress: Acknowledge and celebrate your child's efforts. Whether it's trying a new food, reaching a fitness milestone, or making a healthy choice, praise their efforts and reinforce their positive behaviour.

By incorporating these tips into your approach, you can help children develop lifelong habits that promote their overall health and well-being.



Make Your Mark B&D
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Being creative

Bee-in Creative inspires creativity, using art to express ourselves, letting our curiosity lead the way. We use our curiosity by exploring and experimenting with various art materials. We love our environment and sustainability is important to us, so we find ways to reuse resources we already have at home.

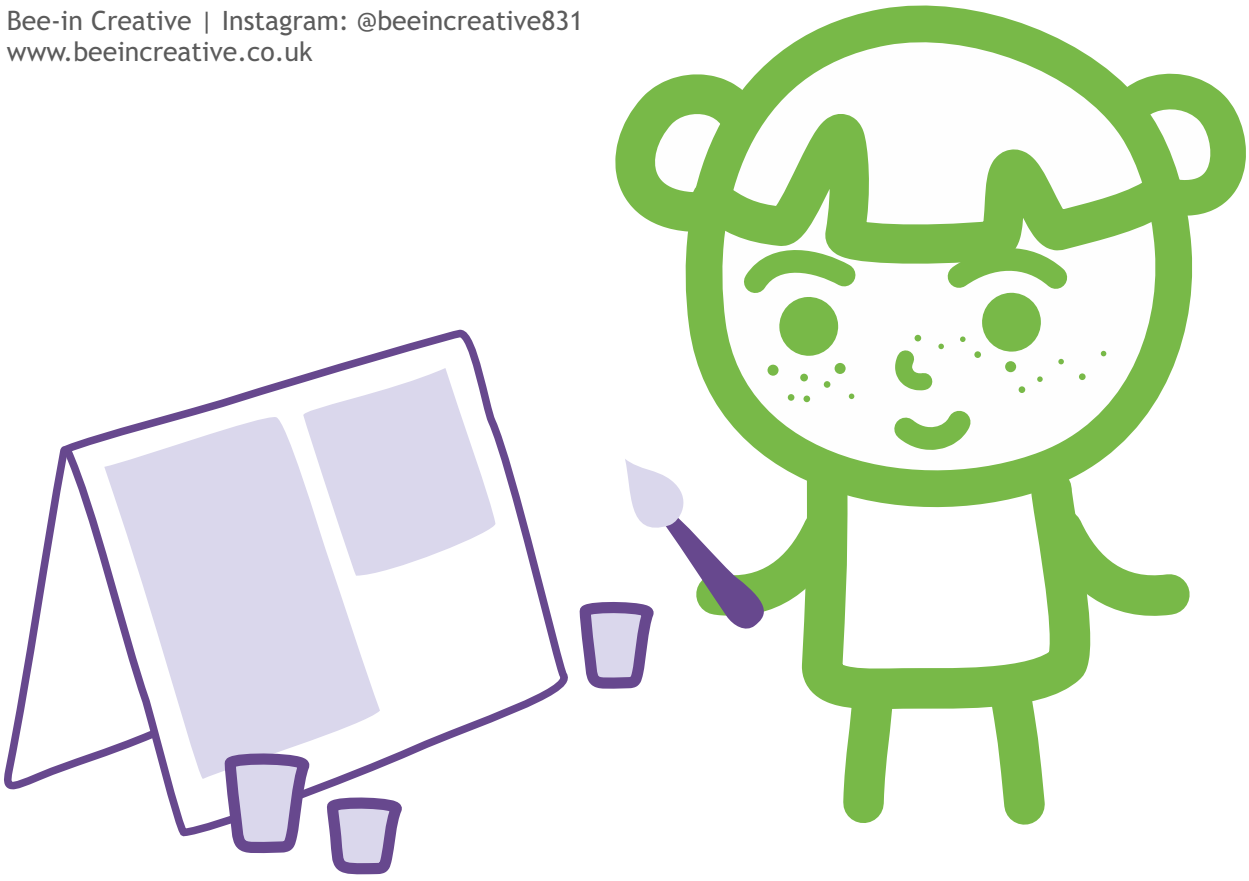
Why not try out one of our favourite activities at home.

What you'll need:
- Cardboard (e.g. boxes from deliveries / recycled boxes)
- Masking tape
- White paper
- Scissors
- Paint, palette & paint brush

1. Get your box and scissors. Cut down one side of the box to open it, leaving you with two good sides to use. Cut the edges off.
2. Fold the cardboard in half to create your canvas board structure.
3. Ensure the printed side of the box is on the inside, leaving the outside plain.
4. Use masking tape to attach your choice of card or paper to the board.
5. Add paint to your palette, place a mat on the floor, and let your little one explore their imagination and curiosity.

You can create various sizes of DIY easels.

Bee-in Creative | Instagram: @beeincreative831
www.beeincreative.co.uk



It's ok to not be ok!

Good mental wellbeing doesn't mean that you're always happy, that you're unaffected by your experiences. Having poor mental wellbeing can make it harder, though, to cope with daily life.

As a parent we can feel like we need to be on top of it all, have everything under control and, if it's not, we often feel a failure. STOP thinking like this!

Real life is messy, and if you throw young children into the mix, it’s chaotic. So, what can we do to help stop feeling like a failure or being anxious?

There are lots of things we can do to try to take care of our wellbeing.
- Find time to rest, meditate and reduce stress
- Find ways to learn or be creative
- Spend time in nature
- Connect with others
- Do something physical/exercise

Where do I start? It can be helpful to:
- Only try what feels comfortable
- Give yourself time to figure out what works for you. Different things work for different people
- Go at your own pace
- Take it step by step. First step too hard? Try to break that up into smaller steps
- Celebrate your successes, big and small

Remember that good days for your wellbeing won't always look the same. We don't always have the same levels of energy or motivation. Be kind to yourself and do what feels right for you.

Mums Matter is a support service empowering mums to take control of their health and wellbeing.

Mums Matter | mumsmatter@haveringmind.org.uk
www.haveringmind.org.uk/services/mums-matter/

Children's behaviour

Behaviour, often seen as problematic, is the window to unmet needs, offering a glimpse into one's emotional landscape. While it may seem at odds with conventional wisdom, even adults struggle to fully control their behaviour, yet we hold high expectations for our children, still in the process of growth and development.

Supporting children's behaviour, rather than imposing control, is the essence of aware, positive, or progressive parenting. When a child experiences dysregulation – such as tantrums or meltdowns – it's crucial for adults to convey confidence and calm, as this helps instill a sense of control. Paradoxically, our attempts to control behaviour often exacerbate it, whereas promoting calmness can de-escalate situations.

Here are 3 things you can do to increase your children's level of control and support the emotional regulation and behaviour:

1. Take some deep breaths to calm yourself before responding, you need to bring yourself to calm before you can share it.
2. Acknowledge and empathise with your child, we have all felt big feelings and not behaved in ways we usually would.
3. Increase their ability to choose – Micro choices are really powerful and can sound something like this: 'Do you want to put this shoe on first or this shoe?'

The true behavioural challenge lies in refraining from controlling children's behaviour, recognising that the only behaviour we can truly control is our own.

For support with emotional regulation, behaviour and parenting approaches please get in touch or check out The Behaviour Bank.

SPD Tuition and Coaching Ltd, The Behaviour Bank | spdtuitionandcoaching@gmail.com
Instagram: @spdtuitionandcoachingltd | https://spdtuitionandcoaching.co.uk

Recycling and reusing

Rethink! Reduce! Reuse! Recycle! Upcycle!

The future of our world is in our hands. Our actions, the values we cherish and instil in ourselves create the ripple effect in those around us. Choosing to waste less can be challenging as we need to think more carefully what we buy and bring into our homes. But taking the time to choose can enhance how we live now and in the future. Allowing ourselves to see the items we no longer need as “resource” rather than waste can certainly help our journey to a world where nothing goes to waste!

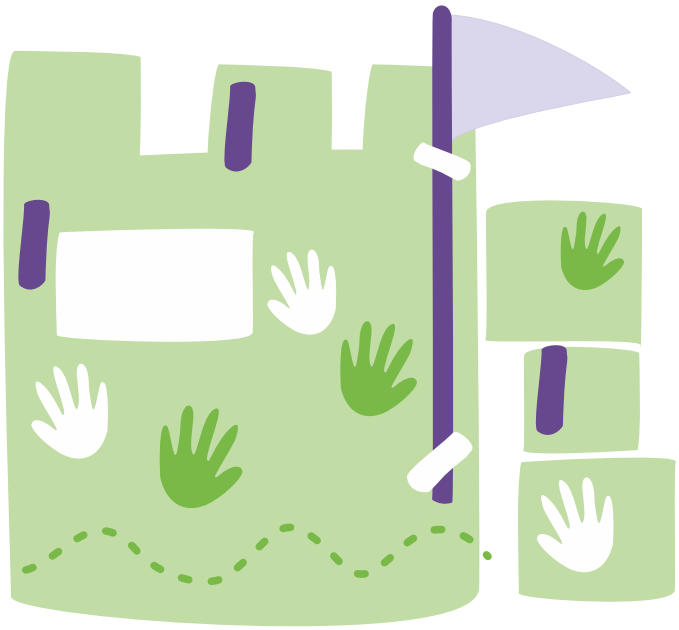
What else can you do?

Be Curious
- Check your local council's website. What waste and recycling services do they provide? What goes in each container? Check their advice on recycling electronics (WEEE), batteries, composting and textiles in your area.
- Get to know your local charity shops and find out what items they accept.
- Search for local artists or groups who use unwanted household items to create art installations or run art activities.

Think and Question
Can you or someone else reuse or repurpose the items you no longer need?

Storage
Labelling and containing will make it easier for you and your family to know where reuse and recycling items go.

Giving away and gratitude
The items you no longer need have served a purpose for you and now it is time to give them away with gratitude. After all, they are a resource.



Liliana Hristova AssocMCIWM
Director at Loop BooksByMILE
www.looprecycle.co.uk
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Febrile convulsions

Did you know that 1 in 20 children experience febrile convulsions?

What are they?
The majority of parents have never heard of them unless they have witnessed their child have one or know someone that has. Most common in babies and children under the age of 5 years old, if a baby or a child gets too hot – generally anything over 38 degrees – they can experience a seizure because their body is not able to cool them down sufficiently and their brain experiences an electrical disturbance as a result of the high temperature.

Signs of febrile convulsions
If your child is unwell and has a temperature over 38 degrees, a febrile seizure can follow 3 stages:
1. Stiffness in the limbs, arching back, whole body turning rigid
2. Physical convulsions – ranging from twitching limbs to uncontrolled body movements, eyes rolled back, foaming at the mouth, locked jaw
3. Exhaustion – whole body stops moving and child becomes excessively sleepy

What should I do?
Firstly, it is worth remembering that these convulsions on their own cause no lasting effect or damage for your child.

- Call 999 if first fit, lasts longer than 5 minutes, injury has occurred or for reassurance
- While the convulsions take place, keep the child still and safe from hurting themselves, don't restrain them in any way.

- Monitor breathing and take advice from emergency operator
- Time the seizure – it should not last longer than 5 minutes
- After the seizure, strip them off and get them cooled down with lots of natural airflow.

Daisy First Aid | Jen.moss@daisyfirstaid.com
07969637601 | Instagram: Daisyfirstaid_hornchurch

Business spark

Here are 8 ways to develop your business spark for stay-at-home parents:

Self-Assessment: Take time to reflect on your skills, passions, and experiences. Identify what you excel at and what you enjoy doing the most.

Market Research: Explore different business ideas and industries. Research market trends, consumer needs, and competition to find opportunities that align with your interests and skills.

Networking: Connect with other entrepreneurs, mentors, and professionals in your desired field. Attend networking events, join online communities, and seek advice from experienced individuals.

Online Courses and Workshops: Enrol in online courses or workshops related to entrepreneurship, business development, and skills enhancement.

Side Projects: Start small by launching a side project or hobby-based business. Experiment with different ideas, products, or services on a smaller scale to test the market and refine your offerings.

Mentorship: Seek guidance and mentorship from experienced entrepreneurs or business professionals. Learn from their successes and failures, and gain valuable insights into starting and growing a business.

Action Planning: Create a detailed action plan outlining your business goals, objectives, and steps to achieve them. Break down larger tasks into smaller, manageable action items, and set deadlines to keep yourself accountable.

By implementing these strategies, stay-at-home mums or dads can cultivate their business spark and embark on a rewarding entrepreneurial journey.

Hannah Kupoluyi | Founder / CEO All Women Network | Business Coach
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Risk-taking

How to help children develop confidence and responsibility? Risk-taking!

Exposing children to appropriate levels of risk is very important for their long-term physical and emotional development.

Healthy doses of adrenaline stimulate a child's self-awareness. By recognising the benefits of risk-taking during outdoor activities, we can encourage independence, creativity and friendship. According to the world-famous educator Tim Gill in his book 'Nothing Ventured…', children need to experience risk to become healthy adults.

Activities like learning to light a fire, carving wood with a pen knife, or canoeing have a certain level of risk attached to them. For example, lighting a fire could lead to getting a burn. However, if the skill is taught carefully, and the risk is managed (by having a tank of water ready to put the fire out, getting a first aid kit, using the correct technique which minimises the chances of touching anything hot etc.) then lighting a fire can be a continuous source of fun, achievement and self-confidence. Also, handling fire offers great learning opportunities: being responsible about the environment, being aware of others and working as a team.

Childhood experiences stay with us for the rest of our lives, so if children are taught to be responsible for their actions when taking measured risks, they will have the opportunity to develop self-confidence, problem solving skills and a general positive attitude towards life and its challenges.

rangers@lbbd.gov.uk | Twitter: @BDRangers | www.barkinganddagenhamcountryparks.com

Choosing the best book

10 Principles of a Good Children's Book

There are SO many children's books available!

I know you want to enrich your child's life with books. But sometimes you feel confused and overwhelmed with so many books that look good. This article will show you 10 principles to make it easy to choose a high-quality children's book.

1. If the illustrations captivate your attention – they will also captivate your child.

2. A good book does not promote a brand, a TV series, toys, or any consumer product.

3. Find books that deal with experiences, challenges, and circumstances that your child is in.

4. A book with embedded values that doesn't try to preach values.

5. Read your children books you loved when you were a child.

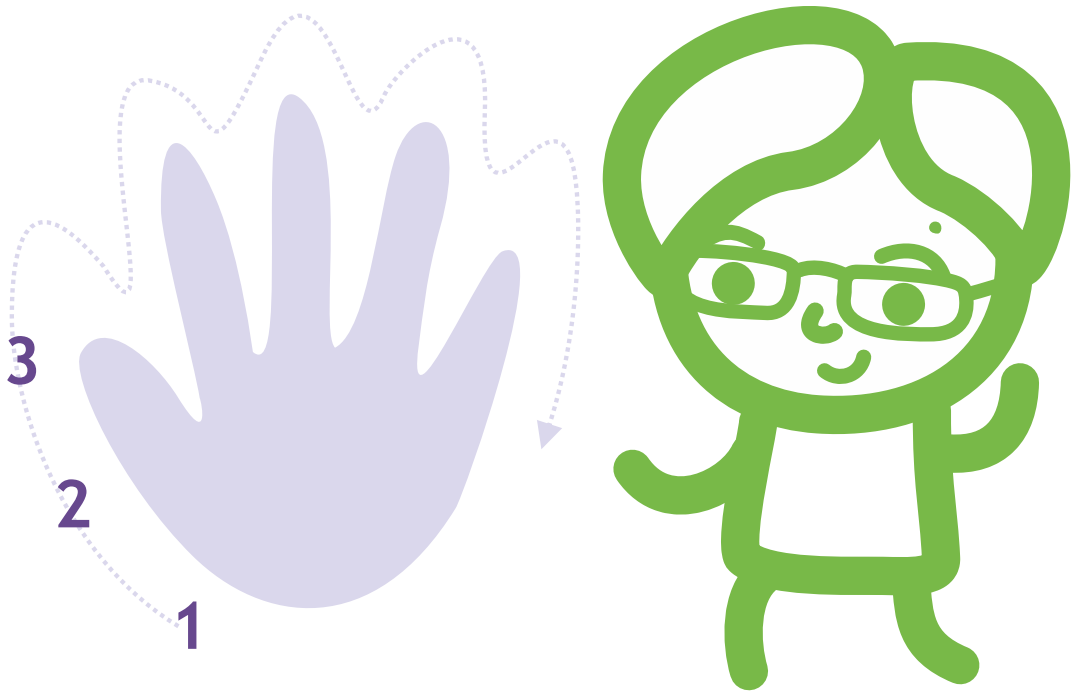
6. Select books from a variety of genres: picture books, knowledge books, play books, folk tales, mythology, poetry.

7. Choose a book that suits your child's intellect and age.

8. If the language and the rhyming captivate you – it will captivate your child. Children hear not just the words but also the sounds, tempo, and speed. It's not chance that we remember nursery rhymes such as Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall or Mary had a little lamb.

9. If the author is well-known. So if you see an author's name that you recognize, there is a good chance that the book is good.

10. Classic children's books!



Mindfulness & Breathing

As parents there are times when we may feel overwhelmed, stressed or anxious. How we deal with these feelings makes all the difference.

A good tool to go to, which can help calm and regulate the body is your breath. A quick and easy mindful breathing exercise that you can do to help you focus is the 5 finger breath, this breathing technique can help your body relax and be in a calmer state. This exercise can be done by yourself or with your child and can be a fun and helpful tool for children to process big emotions. The good thing is you can use it anytime and anywhere to connect to the present moment.

To do the 5 finger breath you:

1. Lift one of your hands up then spread your fingers wide like a star.
2. With the index finger on your other hand trace the outside of your hand starting with the outside of your thumb.
3. Inhale through your nose for three seconds as you trace up each finger and exhale through your mouth for three seconds as you trace down each finger.
4. Repeat the steps on the other hand.
5. Remember to keep it slow and steady.

Taking a few moments to focus on your breath at different times of the day can help with managing big feelings and this particular technique also uses others senses like touch, sight and sound to help bring your attention to the present moment and gives you time to centre yourself and calm your mind down.

Give it a try with your little ones as many times as you like until you feel more relaxed.

Lauren Davis | lauren@leiyoga.com | Instagram: @leiyoga_ | www.leiyoga.com

Tips for navigating your parenting journey

(from parents and carers)

"Every child is different, so learn to be patient with their differences and work around them. If things get too stressful, take a deep breath and remember you're creating your children's memories. How do you want them to remember you? How do you want to remember your time with them?"
Millie

"Join local playgroups and be brave about striking up conversations with other parents. There is so much kindness, understanding, knowledge and support within the Dagenham community. Do not accept that loneliness is part of parenting".
Helen

"Remember to be a loving parent for yourself first, self-love will fill your cup and only from a full cup can you give it to someone else, without feeling drained. Prioritising yourself isn't selfish, it's a key ingredient to feeling happy and sharing this feeling with your family. When you have a quiet moment, ask yourself 'what do I really want to do now, what would bring me the most happiness?"
Beata

"Don't take everyone's advice to heart! Everyone is an expert in their own child/ren only. Some of it might apply to your little dumpling and some might not and you'll learn what works over time. Be kind to yourself."
Alicia

"When times are hard and you think you are failing as a parent, think that you are doing your best and say to yourself 'it's just a phase and it will get better'. Focus on all the times where your kid smiles and is happy, your kid loves you and that's what matters".
Caterina

"Always remember to prioritize self-care and take time for yourself. It's important to recharge so you can be the best parent you can be. And don't forget to trust your instincts too!"
Iqra

"The advice that I would like to give to parents/carers is to join a parent group and create your own "village", a safe network that fits with your needs and understands your new concerns. Share your journey with other parents, it is harder doing it alone!"
Ilaria

About us

Early Years Cocoon CIC (EYC) is a Community Interest Company (CIC) deeply committed to serving families with young children in Barking and Dagenham. Established in late 2018 and officially becoming a CIC in June 2020, we have rapidly grown to support over 700 local families in one of London's most deprived boroughs.

We are passionate about what we do and dedicated to having a positive impact on society. Our mission is to provide holistic support and educational activities that foster the growth and development of families within our community, leading to building a ‘village’ together.

Our main service is running five weekly "stay and play" group sessions held at various local venues. These sessions, catering to hundreds of families, offer a range of engaging activities including free play, crafts, singing, physical movement and interactive storytelling. We continually enhance these sessions by inviting external specialists and artists to contribute, ensuring a diverse and enriching experience for all participants. We also promote family engagement by involving parents and carers in the delivery of activities, especially sharing their skills, talents and celebrations.

Complementing our primary services are various secondary support initiatives. We organise special events focused on celebrating diversity and raising awareness on crucial issues such as Women Empowerment, Mental Health, LGBTQ+, Earth Day, Recycling and more. Thanks to securing some additional funding, we currently have weekly Yoga for Adults and Children, Forest School sessions in collaboration with park rangers at Eastbrookend Country Park, online parenting workshops, and park events held during spring/summer.

Our projects are continually inspired by the needs and insights of our community. Through conversations, surveys and other means of gathering feedback, we tailor our services to address the evolving needs of families in Barking and Dagenham. A community-led approach lies at the heart of what we do, empowering families to take an active role in shaping the support they receive.

Our objectives are:

- To **develop supportive services** for families with young children
- To **promote positive parenting** by focusing on the learning and development of children
- To **strengthen social, communication and artistic skills** in young children and their parents
- To **share creative and educational practice** to ensure the well-being of children within supportive families
- To **create multidisciplinary stimuli** for children by collaborating with other local community organisations and individuals

EARLY YEARS Cocoon

Funders, partners and families – Thank you for your ongoing support!

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www.earlyyearscocoon.co.uk

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