



STARCATCHERS

**WEE
PEOPLE,
BIG
FEELINGS
HELENSBURGH**



**THE ARMED FORCES
COVENANT FUND TRUST**
Funded by HM Government

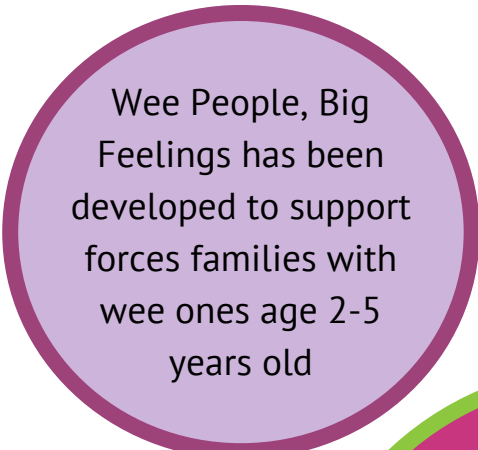
ABOUT STARCATCHERS

Starcatchers is Scotland's Arts and Early Years organisation. We believe that our youngest children, those aged birth-to-five, should be able to fulfil their right to access arts and creative experiences that give inspiration, joy and wonder to early childhood in Scotland.


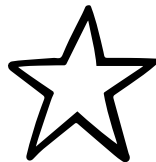
A bit about the Wee People Big Feelings Approach

"Every forces family is different, and every deployment is different: sometimes we cope well with the transitions, and sometimes it can bring a lot of challenges. There's no one size fits all approach, its important we develop a repertoire of techniques to support wee ones and their families."

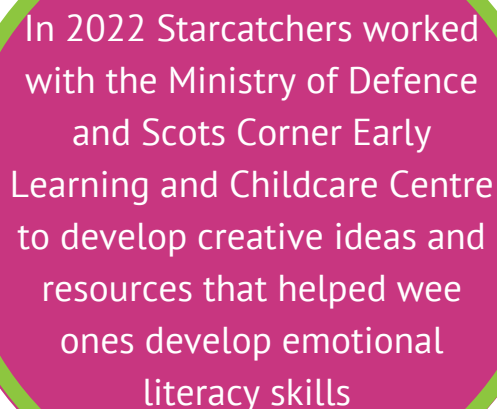
Early Years Practitioner and Forces Family member



Wee People, Big Feelings has been developed to support forces families with wee ones age 2-5 years old



The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust has now funded Argyll and Bute Council and Starcatchers to bring Wee People, Big Feelings to nurseries in Helensburgh and the surrounding areas 2024-26



In 2022 Starcatchers worked with the Ministry of Defence and Scots Corner Early Learning and Childcare Centre to develop creative ideas and resources that helped wee ones develop emotional literacy skills



WHAT IS EMOTIONAL LITERACY?

Emotional literacy is the ability to recognise, understand, handle and express emotions (Sharp 2001)

For adults, mindfulness based approaches like **RAIN** can be used to deal with difficult emotions like fear, anxiety, anger and sadness.

▶ **Recognise the difficult emotion** – name it, and think about where you feel it in your body

▶ **Accept the emotion** – try not to judge the way you feel or push it away – just let it be

▶ **Investigate the emotion** – what are your emotions trying to tell you? What “need” is behind it?

▶ **Nurture Yourself** – Offer yourself kindness and support – how would you treat a friend in the same situation?

Techniques like **RAIN** can be really useful for adults, but wee ones need a different approach.

Wee People Big Feelings gives wee ones the opportunity to develop emotional literacy skills every day – through tuning into their bodies, and learning to recognise different emotions by “practising” them through imaginative play and self expression.



WHAT'S HAPPENING IN HELENSBURGH?

Starcatchers recognises that Naval families experience deployment differently, so we're developing Wee People, Big Feelings for the wee ones in Helensburgh.

Over the next two years we'll be offering training opportunities to every nursery in the area, and we'll be running sessions in four local nurseries working directly with the staff and wee ones.

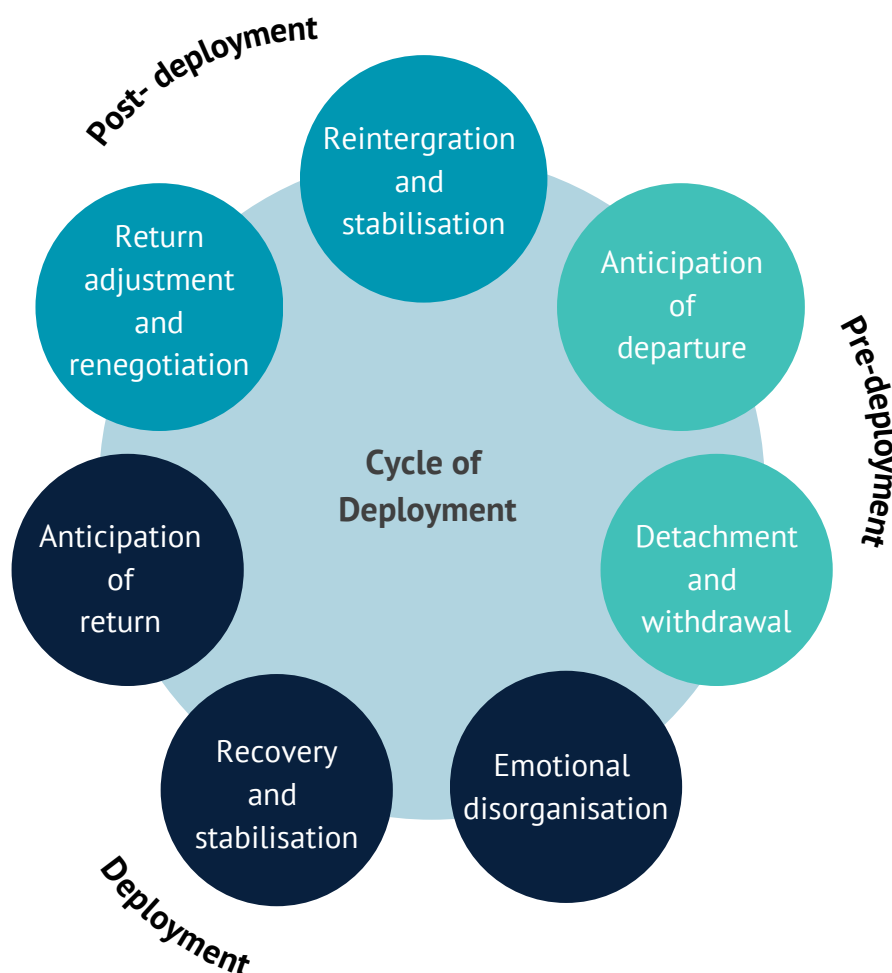
By the end of the two years, we want the community to be full of early years staff who understand the challenges of deployment and know how to support families with wee ones, and we want to make sure Naval families have lots of fun, creative ways to play together that help with emotional literacy.

We also want to make sure we're talking to families as we develop resources, to make sure what we create is accessible and helpful.

Important things to remember:

- ▶ **Every family and every deployment is different** – the emotional cycle of deployment can be a useful starting point, but there is no one way to feel
- ▶ While this project focused on forces families and the emotional cycle of deployment, remember that **ALL children go through transitions**
- ▶ **Emotional literacy isn't built in times of crisis, it's a skill we build over time**, often through play and creative experiences where we can express ourselves in the moment AND “practice” lots of different feelings
- ▶ **Emotional literacy doesn't have to be words!** There are lots of non-verbal ways we express ourselves and understand each other
- ▶ **None of this is a magic wand or a quick fix** - the part of our brain that regulates our thoughts, actions and emotions doesn't fully mature until we're 25!

The Emotional Cycle of Deployment

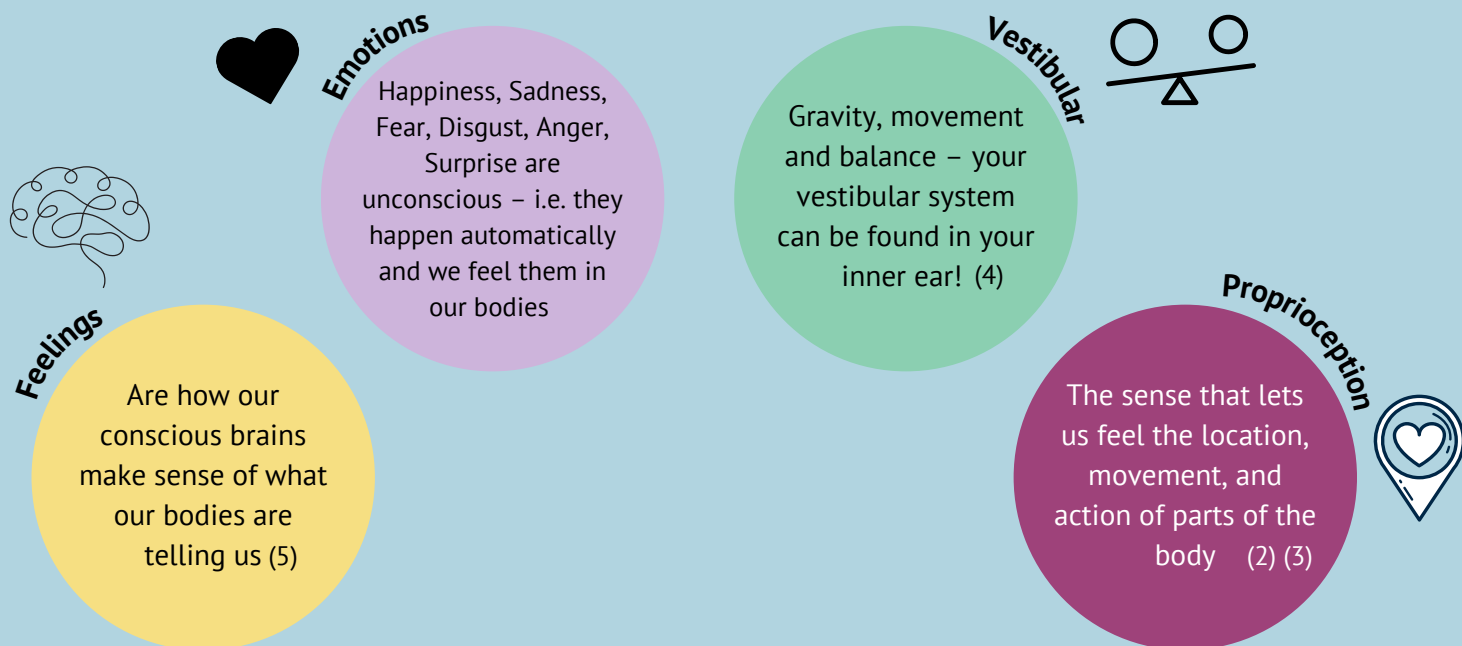


A BIT ABOUT BRAINS, BODIES AND EMOTIONS

Did you know...

...90% of the connections in our brains are developed **in the first three years.** (1)

We now believe we have at least **seven** senses: As well as sight, touch, taste, hearing and smell, there is **vestibular** and **proprioception**.



Behind every behaviour is an emotion

As we get better at helping children identify how they feel, we can give them chances to express their emotions appropriately (e.g. without hurting themselves or others) (6)

Children don't always have the words to tell us how they feel

Movement, music, art and drama/pretend play all give them opportunities to express themselves without needing words

We need to express our emotions, or our brains can often go into a fight-or-flight state:

increasing heart rate, slows digestive function and makes us feel anxious or depressed

References

(1) Pre-Birth to Three, LTS, pg 16

(2) https://cchp.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/Proprioception_HK_V1b.pdf

(3) https://cchp.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/The%20Vestibular%20System_handout_V1.pdf

(4) Realising the Ambition pg 24

(5) <https://www.mind.org.uk/for-young-people/introduction-to-mental-health/understanding-my-feelings/#:-:text=They%20mean%20slightly%20different%20things,and%20give%20meaning%20to%20them>

(6) <https://www.children1st.org.uk/help-for-families/parentline-scotland/guidance-advice/behaviour-and-feelings/>

CREATIVE IDEAS FOR BUILDING EMOTIONAL LITERACY

The ideas in this section were developed by Starcatchers artist-in-residence Skye Reynolds, the wee ones and the staff team at Scots Corner. We recognised that moving and imagining together helped wee ones develop emotional literacy skills, like tuning into their own bodies and safely expressing strong or overwhelming feelings.

For parents who deploy, try using these play ideas before you go, and again when you come back – play can be a great way to reconnect.

If parents/carers are feeling stressed or isolated, your playfulness can be the first thing to suffer. Try using some of these ideas to entertain your wee ones and to connect with them – making the decision to immerse yourself in play can also let you step back from the stresses of everyday life. Early Years Practitioners can also use these ideas throughout the day in nursery.

Welcome to Wee Inspirations

Here's how to use our **Wee Inspirations idea cards**, and a summary of what each of our headings mean.

THE BASIC IDEA

Embrace silliness. Embrace imperfection. These are fun, creative ideas to engage your wee ones without a lot of kit, stress or the need to 'achieve' anything. For our Wee People, Big Feelings project, we're focusing on ideas that can help build emotional literacy and wellbeing together.

OVER TO YOU, WEE ONE

This is where the children take over. Giving them the chance to shape how ideas develop and grow helps them feel safe and valued, and gives them a voice and helps them realise their rights.

CHEEKY BONUSES

Here we list some of the emotional and social benefits of the idea, whether it's self-expression, bonding, concepts like consent and boundaries, or even just having a chat about how you feel!

VARIATIONS

Lots of our ideas can be adapted for children of different ages and abilities, and to whatever space you have.

AND REMEMBER...

It's okay if things don't go to plan. If you and your wee ones aren't having fun, ditch it, have a cuddle and try something else another day.

TUMMY TUMBLES

You will need: A clear space, pillows/blankets

THE BASIC IDEA

Rough and tumble is full of rich learning opportunities, and creating a specific space for it can help create boundaries and let wee ones clearly show when they want to be involved.

OVER TO YOU, WEE ONE

Clear a space of any furniture or breakables(!) and use pillows or a blanket to create a soft floor. Introduce words like “I need space” so you can both tell each other when to stop or back off. You can start with rolling, tickling, or balancing their weight on yours.

CHEEKY BONUSES

- Social skills – consent, boundaries
- Exploring their position in physical space
- Learning about their bodies – their own strength, and how they can express themselves safely
- Builds trust and bonding

VARIATIONS

- If space is tight, or you have lots of breakables, create a clearly defined “safe” space outside instead
- Think about how you wind down, slow down movements and ease into something more gentle and calm.

AND REMEMBER...

Physical play isn't just for Dads! The trust and communication you can build when exploring big, physical movements together is amazing, and often develops afterwards into gentler play.



BIG DRAWING, BIG CHATS

You will need: A roll of paper, pens, pencils or crayons

THE BASIC IDEA

Big paper is great for wee ones – they can still engage with mark-making while using their whole bodies! Old wallpaper or parcel paper works well, on the floor or stuck to the wall.

OVER TO YOU, WEE ONE

After a walk, or having gone on an imaginary journey together, unroll the paper, lie on your tummy and draw as you chat. Where did you go? What did you see? How did it make you feel? Don't put any pressure on your wee one to draw – they'll join in when they're ready.

CHEEKY BONUSES

- Mark-making builds the foundation of literacy and writing skills
- Great way to reflect on memories together and learn what your wee one especially enjoyed about a trip/walk/game

VARIATIONS

- Draw a map of the places you've been together – maybe you can follow that map and go back there again
- Make deliberate mistakes while you're drawing and let your wee one “correct” you – it can be great motivation for getting them more involved

AND REMEMBER...

Sometimes this is about the drawing, sometimes it's about the chats. When you're creating something together, wee ones may open up and share new thoughts and ideas – it's less pressure than a face to face “what did you do today” chat.



HAPPY STANDS

You will need: A clear space, a wall or some furniture

THE BASIC IDEA

You might think you can't do a handstand – but we're here to help! Try putting your hands on the floor and "walking" your feet up the wall or furniture. Or play wheelbarrows, where you hold your wee ones legs and they walk on their hands.

OVER TO YOU, WEE ONE

If you sense your wee one is frustrated, find something else for them to push off – the floor, the wall or the sofa. Start with small pushes and build up until you're upside down.

CHEEKY BONUSES

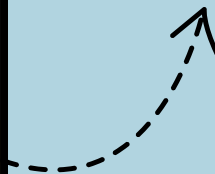
- Helps wee ones direct the same impulse that makes them want to push things or other people
- Good for processing stress and frustration
- Playing with being upside down is good for developing balance and perspective

VARIATIONS

- Work together to try and build different shapes with your body: try letters for older children, or circles/squares/triangles for younger children
- A handstand can also be a tunnel! Prop your legs on a wall, your hands on the floor and see if your wee one can get through the gap!

AND REMEMBER...

It's not about having the perfect handstand. Even if your balance isn't the best, playing together can help start a conversation about feelings that make them want to push. Helping wee ones redirect those feelings means they aren't denied them, can process them and self-regulate.



ON THEIR LEVEL

You will need: A clear space, no shoes!

THE BASIC IDEA

Get down on their level! Clear a space and get down on the floor: crawl, travel and move across the floor. Top tip: taking your shoes off together helps their mobility and gets you ready to play!

OVER TO YOU, WEE ONE

Try mirroring what your wee one does – it lets them be in the lead, and is a great way to get in sync with them without having to jump straight into conversation or suggesting ideas.

CHEEKY BONUSES

- A great way to connect and have fun together
- Developing listening skills
- Building understanding of what our bodies can and can't do – great for talking about boundaries

VARIATIONS

- Use your imagination! Maybe you're creeping through a forest or swimming through the sea.
- Take turns to suggest what creatures you find – can you show your best impression of a fish? Or a tiger?

AND REMEMBER...

Follow their energy – if they're high energy, you can use faster movements, crawl around or use some rough and tumble. If you feel they need to wind down, use soft music and slower movements. A great way to wrap up play is to suggest you go to "sleep" and pretend together. When your ready to "wake up", you're ready for something new!





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