

WEE PEOPLE, BIG FEELINGS MORAY



FESTIVE GLIMMERS

Creative play ideas that support emotional literacy in early years



Ministry
of Defence




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.


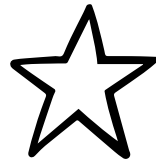
A bit about the Wee People Big Feelings Approach

“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 has now funded Moray Council and Starcatchers to bring Wee People, Big Feelings to develop Creative Play Kits with nurseries in 2025-26.



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



The festive period can be a magical time – and it can also be stressful for adults AND wee ones! Routines are out of whack, meals and bedtimes may look very different, and all the excitement can also be over-stimulating to the point where tears are shed. The festive season is often seen as a family time, but there are lots of reasons families can't always be together (geography, family dynamics, illness, work, bereavement) which can bring up a lot of big feelings.



HOW OUR BRAIN AFFECTS OUR BODIES

This is a resource for all families who may be dealing with some BIG FEELINGS over the festive period. Human brains have a negativity bias – we're hard wired to focus more on the negative. Unfortunately, this same trait that used to keep us safe from sabre tooth tigers and woolly mammoths reacts the same way to the stresses of modern life.



TRIGGERS: WHEN WE ARE STRESSED OR UPSET... BRAIN: DANGER

- Activates the Fight or Flight response
- Increases Heart Rate
- Dilates airways allowing more oxygen to enter the bloodstream
- Redirects blood flow away from non-essential functions (like digestion) and towards the muscles, brain, and other areas needed for quick action.
- Increases blood sugar providing extra energy for muscles and the brain.
- Sweating: Helping to cool the body down during intense physical exertion



GLIMMERS: WHEN WE RELAX... BRAIN: AAAH, IT'S SAFE AGAIN

- Activates the rest and digest response
- Slows Heart Rate
- Promotes digestion
- Reduces blood pressure
- Conserves energy: directs energy towards functions that are not urgent, such as growth and tissue repair
- Stimulates Relaxation: triggers a state of calmness, helping the body recover from stress, promoting restful sleep, and improving overall well-being.

GLIMMERS TELL OUR BRAINS AND OUR BODIES THAT EVERYTHING IS SAFE

What are glimmers?

Glimmers are micro moments of joy that help us feel calm or peaceful – they are the opposite of triggers that stress us out. Glimmers tell our brains and our bodies that everything is safe.

SCAN ME



Find out more about Glimmers by scanning here

FESTIVE IDEAS FOR BUILDING EMOTIONAL LITERACY

Use these ideas to find glimmers for both of you during the festive season. The ideas in this section were developed by the Starcatchers team delivering Wee People, Big Feelings with little ones and their practitioners in Helensburgh and Moray. You can think of these creative play ideas as early intervention – each one can help us tune into our senses, be in the moment, and give us a wee break from the stresses of everyday life.

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 – so remember to choose an idea that YOU will enjoy too!

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.

MUSICAL CHATS

THE BASIC IDEA

When we learn to speak, we're learning a lot of musical skills – and vice versa! When we engage in a musical call and response or conversation – even if it's nonsense – we're teaching babies how language and speech works.



**NO RESOURCES NEEDED,
BUT MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS
WOULD BE HANDY**

OVER TO YOU, WEE ONE



For wee ones who are babbling, respond with your own sounds, then pause, and wait for them to babble again. It doesn't have to be perfect, it doesn't even have to be words: it's all about the to and fro. You can use bells instead: respond to their shakes, copying them with your voice or tapping similar rhythms.

CHEEKY BONUSES

- Tuning into each other supports bonding and co-regulation
- Give wee ones, especially pre or non-verbal children, a sense of agency
- Rhythm builds foundational skills in literacy (syllables), and numeracy (patterns)



VARIATIONS



- If your wee one enjoys getting a few notes from a musical instrument, try playing those same notes back, then waiting for another response
- Singing words, humming tunes, making noises are all valid ways to engage in a musical chat

AND REMEMBER...

No one is expecting you to be Beyoncé! Your singing voice or rhythm doesn't have to be perfect, it's about opening up communication. Often the reason we feel self-conscious about our musical skills is because of adults from when we were wee. So model confidence and fake it until you make it!

EYE BOMBING

THE BASIC IDEA

We're making faces around the room! Use eye stickers, googly eyes, or even draw pairs of eyes on paper or card, cut them out and use sticky tack to stick them on objects, light switches, wherever you can make a "face".



RESOURCES:

- **STICKERS OR PAPER EYES**
- **BLUETACK OR CELLOTAPE**

OVER TO YOU, WEE ONE



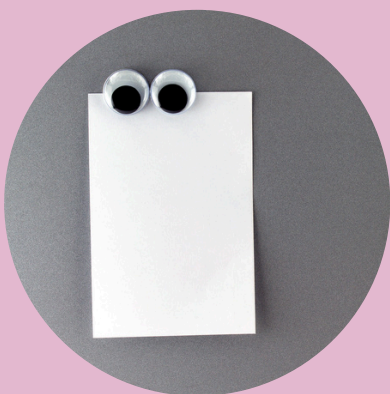
Have some sets of eyes already cut out with sticky tack on them so little hands can grab them and start making faces straight away. Objects with eyes can be used as puppets, and eyes can be hidden all over the house for others to find... Or even take it outside!

CHEEKY BONUSES

- Fine motor development
- Imaginative play, exploring emotions
- Brings new fun to familiar spaces



VARIATIONS



- Children might want to draw and cut out their own eyes
- Do the faces look sad, happy, surprised? Take the chance to talk about different feelings
- Use any other craft bits you have for hair etc. For example, paper hats from crackers.

AND REMEMBER...

- Sometimes children engage best when it's something they 'discover' themselves. If you secretly stick eyes around the home when they're in bed, the next day will feel magical as they slowly discover the faces themselves.

PAPER BAG PUPPETS

THE BASIC IDEA

Decorate a paper bag any way you like – let your wee one go wild, and put the eyes on last to make it a character. Use voices, sound effects and movement to bring them to life.



RESOURCES:

- A PAPER BAG
- ITEMS TO DECORATE YOUR BAG



OVER TO YOU, WEE ONE

Let your wee one play with the shapes and build the face – you can talk about the different expressions that appear (angry eyebrows, sad eyes) or mirror them with your own face and wonder aloud how the puppet is feeling.

CHEEKY BONUSES

- Observing and naming emotions that your puppet shows, explores the language in a safe way
- Decision making
- Physical and visual representations of characters make stories more relevant and engaging



VARIATIONS

- Take some time looking at each other's faces and describing what you see: "I can see hair... and two eyes... and glasses" – to get ideas for features
- Your puppet pals are also great for some festive storytelling; have a chat with them – maybe they're an elf on an adventure or a penguin looking for their reindeer friend!

AND REMEMBER...

The winter months are full of joy but they can also be a little tricky for us all; taking the time to chat with your wee one using your paper bag puppets can be a great way to check in with their feelings. Creativity is about the process rather than the product. Chatting about faces and exploring how to build one is more important than a perfect puppet at the end of it.

CHARACTER RACES

THE BASIC IDEA

The best way to understand a character is to walk – or run – a mile in their shoes! Use your bodies to explore how the different characters from the story might move, sneak and run!



NO RESOURCES NEEDED



OVER TO YOU, WEE ONE

Wonder aloud how the different characters move – expect lots of flat out running at first! Use your own body to show examples and ask “Is this how the fox would move?” and let the wee ones be the experts – they may show you their own version or have fun giving you advice.

CHEEKY BONUSES

- Fun, physical way to explore stories
- Moving our bodies give us new ways to communicate and tune into each other
- Thinking about characters and moving like them is a great way to start building empathy



VARIATIONS

- Use a “Funny Face Remote” to make characters go faster, slower, and explore different feelings
- Turn the races into a game of Grandmother’s Footsteps and see who has the best character poses when they stop!

AND REMEMBER...

Often, wee ones need to work their way through lots of high energy moves before they feel able to slow down a little and think about more subtle movements – there’s no wrong way to move, it’s all exploration.

5 WAYS WITH...HATS

1



Hat Stack

How many hats can you balance on someone's head? Take turns stacking hat after hat and see how long they stay up! Run out of hats? Send the hat-wearer on a wobbly walk around the room. It's a fun way to work together, build trust, and practise coordination.

2



Love You / Hat You

Gather a few hats and give each one an emotion. When someone puts on the "angry" hat, they act angry; the "scared" hat means acting scared, and so on. Try matching faces or sounds to each feeling. Older children might enjoy talking about why a hat feels that way – maybe certain colours match certain emotions – or you can turn it into a fun guessing game!

3



Hat and Seek aka Hide the Hat

One person closes their eyes while the others hide a hat in funny places – on a teddy, on a lampshade, even tucked into a photo frame! Don't worry if your wee one peeks or hides it somewhere obvious; just play along and pretend to search around. It's all about having fun together, not winning a competition!

4



Steal the Hat

Lie down and pretend to fall asleep, then challenge your wee one to try and steal your hat without waking you. They'll have a brilliant time sneaking around to pinch it! Afterwards, switch roles and see if you can nab the hat from them. It's a fun little game – and a perfect way to earn yourself a wee five-minute rest!

5



Funny Faces

Pull hat over your face, and take it off again to reveal a new facial expression. Each time you take the hat down explore a different emotion - see how many emotions they can identify. Then encourage your wee one to try it too! A lovely way to explore big emotions in a fun and silly way.

AND REMEMBER...

You can use these ideas with the paper hats you find in crackers, or whatever hats you have in your house. If (and when!) the paper hats get ripped don't worry – we have more creative ideas for them on pages 6 and 7.

5 WAYS WITH...TIME WITH YOU

1



Our Festive Story

“Once upon a time there was a little girl called...” Tell your child about themselves, focussing on their successes: how they tried and tried until they learned to roll over; how they used to pull themselves up on the side of their cot to build their muscles. Bring some festive cheer into it – “Last Christmas, you unwrapped your first present.”

2



Silent Night

While chatting with your baby, press your nose and pretend you’ve been “muted” – your mouth moves, but no sound comes out! Press again to “unmute” and make noise. For tiny babies, gently guide their hand to your nose to mute you, acting surprised each time. Older babies may be able to reach for your nose – or even your ear – on their own, joining in the fun.

3



Festive Shivers

Trace festive words like “Rudolph” on babies’ tummies as you chat. For little ones who can sit or stand, trace simple shapes, letters, or numbers on their back. Invite them to try: “Want to draw on my back and I’ll guess?” As they draw, copy their marks on paper – slow, fast, swirly, dots. Swap over if they’re up for it.

4



Jingle Bells Jingle Poo

Change the words of favourite Christmas songs (like Jingle Bells) to try make each other laugh. Babies and young children react to funny faces and voices as much as the lyrics. Pause halfway through a line and see if your child makes their own suggestion – even the baby shouting “GAAAAH!” can be funny! They’ll soon get the idea.

5



Sneaking Santa

Turn on some music and tiptoe around like Santa on Christmas Eve. Try different shapes and movements as you go. Ask, “Which body part should we lead with next?” and let your wee one choose by pointing, gesturing, or telling you. Give plenty of feedback – “Your head? Okay, let’s lead with our heads!” – naming body parts and showing you’re following their lead.

AND REMEMBER...

Wee ones are the gift that keeps on giving and so are you. Spending some quality time together is a truly beautiful way to spend the holiday season.

TIME TO WEAR YOUR SLEEP MASK



5 PRESENTS FOR YOU

1



What's on my bottom?

Lie face down and close your eyes. Let your child place various household objects (festive or not) on your bottom for you to guess what they are. Silly guesses make it all the more fun!

2



Cover the sound

Give yourself a lie down and let your wee one play at waking you up. A few snores here and there adds to the dramatic tension. Bring some character into it – perhaps you're Santa and someone has eaten all your mince pies; or maybe you're a very grumpy polar bear...

3



Decorating you

Your wee one might love decorating the tree – but now it's time to decorate you! Close your eyes and have them hang decorations and any scarves, ribbons, or other loose items over you. Amid this busy season, this is a relaxing way to encourage multi-sensory play while giving you a bit of shut eye. If you want to go that bit further, washable felt pens are great for drawing on your bare arms, legs, and face.

4



Shadow Show

Let yourself be entertained! Set a lamp behind a bed sheet hanging up and encourage your wee one to make a shadow show. Children often love watching themselves back so if you have access to a phone camera, offer to film it – this is a great way for them to think a little more about how their bodies interact with light. Sit back and enjoy their art, made especially for you!

5



Lazy Tunnels

Make tunnels with your arms and legs and let your wee one crawl through/under. What shapes can you make? And what ways can they tunnel through? Change position every now and then, allowing you to get a little break while they explore their body in a new and exciting way.

AND REMEMBER...

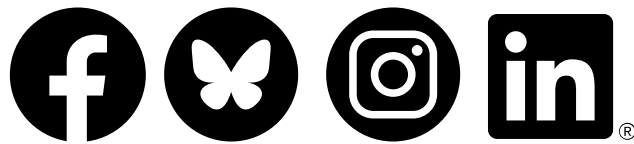
YOU are your children's role model when it comes to resilience. If they see you try different ideas, and be accepting that mistakes are something to learn from, their growth mindset will develop.



STARCATCHERS

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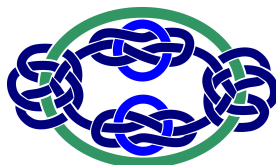
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