

## Emotional Support Games

### 1. Starfish and Tornadoes

**The goal:** To help kids notice how much energy they're feeling inside. When they know they have too much energy, they can either use their own calming skills or ask for help from a trusted adult.

**How to play:** Make a picture of a thermometer. Draw a starfish at the bottom and a tornado at the top. Ask if your child feels calm and peaceful like a starfish or revved up like a tornado. When your child is feeling over-energized, brainstorm together about ways to feel more like a starfish. For example, bouncing a ball to help release some of that energy.

Try playing this game at different times of the day and help your child describe the energy levels. For example, if you play first thing in the morning, you can say, "You like to snuggle and watch cartoons." Or, "I bet you could run up and down the stairs five times before I finish making breakfast!"

**Keep in mind:** Self-awareness can help kids build a skill called self-regulation. Self-regulation is about managing your internal energy. It helps kids manage their emotions and their body movements during tough situations. It also helps them pay attention and learn.

### 2. Turtle Time

**The goal:** To help kids practice observing what's going on around them. Picking up on social cues helps kids get their needs met and understand the perspective of others.

**How to play:** When you and your child go for a walk, look around like a turtle in a slow, exaggerated fashion. Take turns sharing details about what you see. Help your child connect these observations with choosing how to behave.

**Keep in mind:** You don't have to pretend to be turtles. You could pull out your pretend binoculars or a special pair of glasses to help you see better. You could also play "I spy with my little eye." You and your child can take turns spotting social interactions and describing them until the other player finds what you're looking at.

### 3. “Who Am I Right Now?”

**The goal:** To build self-awareness and help identify your child’s strengths. These skills can also help with decision making and understanding the perspective of others.

**How to play:** Get some index cards. Use them to draw pictures of your child doing something positive, like being a good helper or being a good teacher. Brainstorm about other cards your child could make.

To help your child come up with ideas, comment whenever you notice your child’s positive behaviours: “You just offered to teach your sister a nursery rhyme. Let’s talk for a second about what kind of person you’re being right now.”

**Keep in mind:** Many families try to teach social-emotional skills by commenting on negative behaviour. But don’t forget to catch your child doing something good. Praising good behaviour often leads to more of it.

Also, you can buy these kinds of cards or find templates online. But kids might like making the cards themselves.

#### 4. Let's Make a Deal

**The goal:** To help kids learn to compromise. Practicing how to see things from another person's perspective can help your child consider other people's needs.

**How to play:** When you and your child can't agree, use the tune of "This Old Man" to sing these lines: "You want this. I want that. How can we *both* get what we want?" Then brainstorm solutions and choose the best idea for right now. For example, if your child is demanding to bake cookies at 8 a.m., the best solution might be to wait two hours so you can bake when the baby is napping.

**Keep in mind:** Your child may have trouble letting go of an idea. Together you can pick the best of the runner-up ideas and put them in a special container. The next time you have a conflict, read through all of these ideas to help find the best solution for right now.

#### 5. Taking Turns Taking Charge

**The goal:** To help develop self-awareness, make decisions, and see other people's perspective.

**How to play:** Start a tradition where one night a week you and your child (or the whole family) take turns planning a fun night. You could stick to a theme, like choosing which food to eat, movie to watch, or game to play. Or leave things wide open, and let the person in charge pick.

**Keep in mind:** It might help to make a chart with categories like "Waiting my turn" and "Staying calm when doing something I don't like." After the activity, get everyone to rate themselves. Then talk about what's been working well and what they want to improve on.