



The
**Mulberry
Bush**

Transforming troubled lives together



Supporting Children's Wellbeing: Practical Approaches

Understanding Children's Wellbeing in Everyday Practice

This guide helps you **notice, understand** and **respond** to children's wellbeing in simple, everyday ways that feel natural and connected.

In an emergency or if you have serious concerns, **please call 999 for immediate support** or refer to the NHS Mental health support for children and young people.



How to Respond to What a Child Is Communicating

Regulate before you respond

1

If a child is dysregulated, reasoning won't land. Focus first on helping them feel safe. Lower your voice, slow your pace, reduce demands and offer calm, consistent presence.

Name the feeling, not the behaviour

2

Show them you see what's underneath.

Instead of "stop that", try "it looks like something feels really hard right now".

Give safe, manageable choices

3

Support a sense of control without pressure.

"Would you like to do this together or have a short break first?"

Adjust the environment, not just the child

4

Ask what might be overwhelming.

Can you reduce noise, simplify the task, offer more structure or create a calmer space.



Building a Child's Sense of Safety

Be a consistent, predictable adult

1

Safety grows through repetition.

Greet them the same way, follow through on what you say, and keep boundaries calm and steady.

Respond to closeness and distance with understanding

2

Whether they cling or push away, both can signal need.

Stay emotionally available without taking rejection personally or overwhelming them with attention.

3

Use transitions as moments of support

Transitions can feel like loss of control.

Prepare them in advance, use simple countdowns, and stay alongside them through the change.

4

Name and make emotions feel safe

Children feel safer when their inner world is understood, not corrected. Notice and gently name what you see: "That felt tricky," or "I can see that was frustrating." Over time, this helps children recognise, regulate and trust their feelings without fear.



Responding in Ways That Deepen Trust and Connection

Prioritise connection over compliance

- 1** Focus on the relationship first.
A child is more likely to accept boundaries when they feel understood and safe with you.

Be reliably available, even when they pull away

- 2** Some children test connection by rejecting it. Stay calm, consistent and emotionally available without chasing or withdrawing.

Support re-engagement in small steps

- 3** Coming back can feel vulnerable. Offer low-pressure ways to reconnect, sitting nearby, sharing an activity, or a simple check-in.

Offer choice to build safety

- 4** Small choices can reduce anxiety and increase a sense of control. Keep options simple and manageable.
“Would you like to start here or there?”



Supporting Children's Wellbeing with Engagement and Learning

Start with connection, not the task

Engagement follows relationship.

1

A quick check-in, shared moment or calm presence can make it easier for a child to begin.

Break tasks into manageable steps

Large tasks can feel overwhelming.

2

Offer clear, simple starting points and build gradually. Small successes help children stay engaged and build confidence over time.

Make success feel safe

3

Some children find success uncomfortable or unfamiliar. Acknowledge effort rather than outcome: "You stuck with that even when it was hard."

Respond to disengagement with curiosity

4

Avoid seeing it as defiance.

Gently explore what might be getting in the way and adjust your support accordingly.



Creating Supportive Environments for Children and Young People

Create predictable, safe spaces

1

Children need to know where they can settle. Offer a consistent place they can return to when things feel too much. A calmer environment helps children feel more regulated and able to engage.

2

Use structure to provide containment

Clear routines can support emotional safety. Make expectations visible and predictable, especially during transitions.

3

Balance structure with choice

Too much freedom can feel unsafe, too much control can feel restrictive. Offer guided choices within a clear framework.

4

Notice patterns across the day

Children often respond differently depending on time, energy and context. Pay attention to when things feel easier or harder. This helps you adjust the environment to better support them.





Where To Go Next:

If you are worried about yours or a child's safety or mental health, it's important to seek help straight away.

In an Emergency

Call NHS 999

For Urgent Mental Health Support

Call NHS 111 for urgent advice

Contact your local NHS Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CYPMHS).

Deepen your understanding

Explore 99 Questions to Understand a Child's Wellbeing to help you gently uncover what may sit beneath behaviour at mulberrybush.org.uk.



The Mulberry Bush brings over 75 years of experience supporting children and young people affected by adversity.

Visit mulberrybush.org.uk to explore how we can support you at home or in your setting.