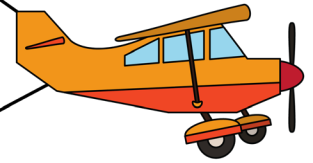


A white banner with a black outline, featuring the text "HAVEN Bridge" in blue. The banner is attached to the back of a small orange and red propeller airplane.

HAVEN Bridge

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

Being Together, Being Me



Routine-Based Activities

- While reading books or watching shows with your children, point out what the characters do when they are communicating, listening, and having fun together. Support your child in thinking about what their ways of communicating, listening, and having fun might look like in that situation.

Note: The majority of children's books and shows lack neurodivergent representation. Ensure that when you point out how characters are communicating, listening, and having fun, you reinforce that their way is one way, not the right way.

- Highlight examples of ways in which you communicate, listen, and have fun that are unique to you.



Validate your child's authentic ways of communicating, listening, and having fun.

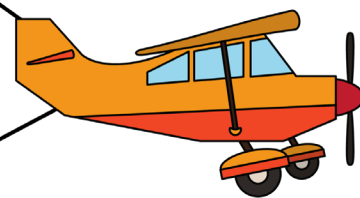
Focused Activities

- Being together, being me visual brainstorm:
 1. Gather a big piece of butcher paper and a writing utensil or markers.
 2. In the middle of the paper, draw a picture of or write the name of an environment that your child spends time in (e.g. home, school, park).
 3. Discuss the different parts of being together in this environment: What are the expectations that go along with being together in this place? Write these expectations on your paper.
 4. Brainstorm all of the different ways that you can do each of these parts of being together (e.g. "At home there is an expectation that the family will eat dinner together. We can eat dinner together while holding a fidget in one hand, rocking on the chair, getting up every few minutes and then sitting back down or wearing headphones.").
 5. Evaluate each of the expectations that you identified. Which ones need to be revised to better meet the needs of your child (e.g. Does the expectation of sitting together with others to eat dinner work for your child right now? Can they eat dinner in a separate space? Can you eat dinner in pairs? etc.)?
 6. Repeat the activity for a different environment.



Be creative; don't just think outside the box, rip it up! Challenge yourself to start with allowing your child to being their authentic self, then build in what that looks like while they are together with others.

What Do I Need?



Routine-Based Activities

- Model what it looks like when you meet your own needs (e.g. “I need energy to do this task, I’m going to get a snack.”).
- Model what it looks like when you advocate for your needs even when it means your child isn’t getting what they want (e.g. “I can’t play right now, I am exhausted after a long day at work. I need to lay down for 20 minutes so that I have the energy to get through the rest of my day.”).
- Validate when your child recognizes their needs (e.g. “I’m proud of you for taking care of your sensory needs and leaving that loud area when you needed to.”).
- Validate when your child advocates for their needs, even when it means that you aren’t getting what you want (e.g. “I’m glad that you told me that you need some time to play your video game by yourself right now, instead of telling me about your day. Just like I needed to rest after work, you need to rest in your own way after school.”).



Support your child in affirming that their needs are needs.

Focused Activities

- What needs when:
 1. Gather a blank piece of paper and a writing utensil or markers.
 2. Divide the paper into three sections.
 3. Remind your child of the three categories of needs: basic needs, sensory needs, and activity and interest needs.
 4. Choose a time of day or activity (e.g. coming home from school) and write it or draw a picture of it at the top of the paper.
 5. Work with your child to through what their needs might be at that time. Remind your child that their needs can and will change, but it’s helpful for you to know what some of their needs are likely to be so that you can help make sure their needs are met.
 6. Draw or write the identified needs in their appropriate category area.
 7. Refer back to this chart during the time of day or activity specified and use it to check in with your child and discuss if their needs are being met.

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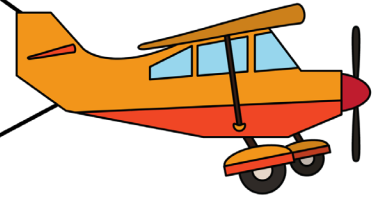
Focused Activities (continued)

- Met needs and unmet needs:
 1. Gather two pieces of blank paper and a writing utensil or markers.
 2. On each piece of paper:
 - Label or draw an image (e.g. a checkmark, star, etc.) on one side that represents when needs are met.
 - Label or draw an image (e.g. an X, ☹, etc.) on the other side for when needs go unmet.
 3. Keep one piece of paper for yourself and give the other to your child.
 4. Using colors, shapes, and/or imagery, under the label of when needs are met, draw and color what it feels like in your body when your needs are met. Have your child do the same on their paper.
 5. Each of you do the same on the other side of the paper for unmet needs.
 6. Share your picture with your child and ask if they'd like to share theirs with you.



Give your child opportunities to advocate for their needs. If others are invalidating their needs, speak up and advocate that your child's needs are needs.

How Do I Feel?



Routine-Based Activities

- Model for your child using different ways of understanding your own feelings. For example, you could share with them, “I feel stressed out,” and/or “I feel a tightness in my shoulders and chest,” and/or “I feel like a tangled ball of yarn,” etc.
- Always ask your child what they are feeling. If they don’t know, that’s okay, too. Support them in tuning into their body signals as a way to understand their feelings and what their feelings might be telling them.

Note: Don’t assume your child’s feelings based on your preconceived notions of tone of voice, facial expression, or body language. Many neurodivergent people express feelings in different ways.



Anytime you notice your child express shame around a feeling (e.g. “I shouldn’t be mad”), gently reframe that there are no should’s, supposed to’s, or have to’s with feelings. However they feel is valid and welcome.

Focused Activities

- Big feelings chart:
 1. Gather a piece of blank paper and a writing utensil.
 2. Discuss with your child different things that help them feel more comfortable during or after feeling big emotions.
 3. Draw or list the different things that they identify. Examples might include:
 - Running as fast as they can,
 - Hitting a pillow or throwing stuffed animals as hard as they can
 - Going to a recycling center and breaking glass bottles while they throw them in the bin
 - Tearing or crumpling recycling paper
 - Being alone in a cozy spot
 - Listening to their favorite music
 - Taking a bath
 4. Refer back to this list the next time your child is experiencing big emotions. And, update or remake this list as your child’s needs and comfort items or actions change.

Continued —————>

Focused Activities (continued)

- Tactile fun:

1. Gather a medium-sized bin and several different sensory items like slime, rice, water, sand, cream, etc.
2. Invite your child to explore the different items with you.

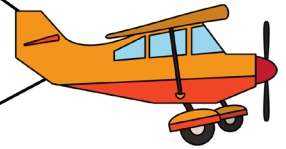
Note: If there are any items that your child doesn't want to explore, that's okay. Tactile sensitivity is a valid need.

3. Talk to your child about how the items feel. Support them in tuning into the tactile sensations.



Supporting your child in recognizing their feelings means expanding your language beyond emotion words to include other forms of understanding, including body signals, values, and “like” statements.

Building Bridges of Understanding



Routine-Based Activities

- When you are using a style of communication that could be inaccessible to your child, (e.g. using expressions or creative phrases such as “it’s raining cat’s and dogs!”), be sure to provide explanations for what you mean and try to draw the parallel between the expression and why it symbolizes what it does.
- Take interest in your child’s interests and support them in communicating in ways that feel authentic to them.
- When you notice different styles of communicating or thinking causing misunderstandings in your family, model for your child an approach of curiosity rather than one of blame or right or wrong (e.g. “Can you explain what you mean?” or “It’s helpful for me when you don’t use creative phrases. Can you say that in a different way so I can better understand?”).
- Work with your child to advocate for their way of communicating. For example, help them recognize if they are a direct communicator or tangential communicator. Teach them language that they can use to share that information with future communication partners. When others understand your child’s communication style, it can reduce misunderstandings.

Focused Activities

- Identifying my style of communication:
 1. Print the Storybook 4 poster.
 2. Have a conversation with your child about different styles of communication and support them in identifying which styles come most naturally them.
 3. Share your own authentic styles of communication with your child.
 4. Discuss the similarities and differences between your styles.
- Creative phrase breakdown:

Note: Use this activity if your child struggles with creative phrases or expressions.

 1. Gather a set of blank index cards and a writing utensil or markers.
 2. With your child, draw, write, or illustrate an image of a creative phrase on one side of the card (i.e. “It’s raining cats and dogs”).
 3. Flip the card over and write an explanation of what that phrase means on the other side. Use language, phrases, images, etc. that are helpful for your child to understand.
 4. Refer to the cards with your child when a creative phrase is used in a sentence.

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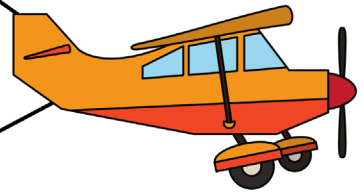
Focused Activities (continued)

- Becoming a bridge builder:
 1. Print the Coloring and Activity Book.
 2. Cut out the Insight Sprite characters from the last two pages of the booklet.
 3. Attach each Sprite to a popsicle stick or wooden dowel.
 4. With your child, act out different scenarios with the Sprites from Storybook 4.
Alternatively, assign a communication style to each Sprite and have your child act out what that could look like.
 5. Tell your child that they are the bridge builder and encourage them to help the two characters learn to understand one another.



Reinforce that it is not your child's job to change to meet other's expectations around being or acting a certain way, rather it is everyone's job to build bridges of understanding.

Celebrating Me



Routine-Based Activities

- Make it common practice in your house to comment on and appreciate the unique way that the different people in your house think and communicate. Build an understanding that diversity in ways of thinking and being gives your family strength.
- Talk with your child about their strengths and how they can use their strengths when they encounter problems or challenges.

Focused Activities

- Affirmations practice:
 1. With your child, watch and/or sing-along with the “I Am Me” song from Storybook 5.
 2. Print out the poster from Storybook 5 and practice repeating or pointing to the affirmations together while you listen.
 3. Hang the poster in a place where your child can see it and repeat the affirmations on their own. Consider placing it on a mirror so that they can see themselves while repeating the affirmations.
- I am me poster:
 1. Print or gather a photograph of your child and a photograph of you.
 2. Gather two pieces of blank paper, glue or tape, and a writing utensil or markers.
 3. Paste or tape the photographs in the middle of each piece of paper.
 4. Support your child in thinking of all the ways that they are proud of themselves and surround their photograph with words or visual representations of those things.
 5. Do the same with your piece of paper. Modeling pride in oneself is an important part of developing your child’s self-confidence. After all, they look up to you so show them that it’s good to be proud of who you are.
 6. Share your artwork with each other.



Your child may receive messages from others suggesting that they aren’t enough and that they need to change who they are to fit in. Empower your child to see all of the wonderful things that make up who they are!