

The Power of Fostering Hope in Children

I thought about what I wanted to write about for the December newsletter and the word “hope” came to me. What is hope? It’s a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen. I wondered about children and the word hope and then discovered it was an important topic. Hope in a world where there are so many obstacles. Hope when there is environmental, social, and political anxiety. How do we foster and sustain hope in the children with whom we work?



Hope plays a pivotal role in the emotional and psychological development of children, shaping their ability to navigate challenges and pursue their goals. According to Fraser et al. (2022), hope is not merely a fleeting emotion but a vital cognitive resource that fosters resilience in young people. Children who cultivate a sense of hope are more likely to engage positively with their environment, set achievable goals, and maintain motivation in the face of adversity. This foundational element of hope empowers them to envision a better future, enhancing their overall well-being and life satisfaction.



Research indicates that hope is linked to positive outcomes in children including academic success, social competence and positive mental health (Fraser et al., 2022). Hopeful children are better equipped to handle stress and uncertainty. There are three central characteristics through which hope is experienced: 1) ability to set a goal 2) ability to make a plan (pathways thinking) and 3) a belief that they can make choices and develop abilities necessary to follow a plan (agency thinking).

Tips for Encouraging Hopefulness in Children

Discuss the Future

Regularly and intentionally discuss the future with children and assist them to set goals that are realistic and attainable. This could include academics, hobbies or personal development. Break larger goals into smaller manageable steps and don't forget to celebrate each achievement along the way. Remember to think about tiny goals – we forget that each step taken is a step that leads somewhere.



Work with Obstacles

Address challenges that arise and work with children to overcome obstacles. In play therapy, this could include games, mazes, construction activities, role play and so much more.

Model Positive Thinking

Share your experiences of overcoming challenges and the strategies that you used to remain optimistic. Children learn by observing adults, so showcasing resilience and a positive mindset can inspire them to adopt similar attitudes when faced with difficulties.



Create a Supportive Environment

Encourage open communication about their worries and aspirations, and validate their feelings. A supportive atmosphere empowers children to articulate their hopes and dreams, reinforcing their sense of agency and optimism.

Encourage Reflection and Gratitude

Incorporate practices that encourage children to reflect on their experiences and express gratitude. Activities like keeping a gratitude journal or discussing daily positive moments can shift their focus from challenges to the good aspects of their lives. This practice enhances their overall outlook and reinforces the understanding that hope can coexist with difficulties.



Summary

Instilling hope in children can create a ripple effect within families and communities. When children express hope and optimism, they inspire those around them to adopt similar attitudes, contributing to a supportive environment conducive to learning and personal growth. As Fraser et al. (2022) emphasize, promoting hope in children is not just about helping them to dream; it is about equipping them with the tools they need to turn those dreams into reality, ultimately leading to a brighter future.

Fraser, A. M., Alexander, B. L., Abry, T., Sechler, C. M., & Fabes, R. A. (2022). *Youth hope and educational contexts*. Routledge.

Fraser, A.M., Alexander, B. L., & Fabes, R. A., (2021). Hope levels across adolescent and the transition to high school: Associations with school stress and achievement. *Journal of Adolescence*, 91, p. 41-58.