

Glitter Bottle Activity

Watch the video on my activity webpage to help take you through the activity and steps:

Materials:

Clear 500ml water bottle 3/4s full of water (with the label removed)

Glitter in various colours

¼ teaspoon measure or a funnel

Activity:

Give your child the water bottle. Explain you are going to do an activity which requires their imagination – but the activity will help explain what happens in the brain when we feel big emotions (like fear, anger, excitement).

Explain – the water bottle is the brain.

Ask them to look through the bottle. What can they see? Can they see their hand that is holding the bottle? Can they see through the bottle? They will be able to because the water is clear.

Explain – we are going to think about feelings/emotions and how they change what is happening in the brain and body.

Provide glitter and a small spoon to put some glitter inside the bottle. Guide them in taking the cap off of the bottle. Ask them to think about some of their feelings and ask them to put a bit of different coloured glitter in the bottle for each feeling (they can choose the colour to go with the feeling). Include positive and negative feelings (happy, sad, excited, angry, anxious, worried, love, hope). Place the cap back on the bottle. Try using about 1 to 2 tsps of glitter in total.

It is useful when doing this to talk about the different feelings that might be coming up for them. Help them explore the link between different feelings and different situations (“I get anxious when I go to school and have no one to play with at lunchtime” or “I feel sad when I think about Grandma dying”).

Explore with them how the feelings show up in their bodies. What do they feel like? How do they make their body behave or act? (“When I get angry I shout and sometimes hit my sister” or “When I am sad I cry and have no energy and want to be on my own” or “When I am anxious I want to run away, my heart races and I feel sick.”)

Explain – when we are overwhelmed with big feelings it is like shaking up the bottle

Ask them to shake the bottle and see what happens as the glitter disperses in the water. If the glitter clumps together you can add a small squirt of washing-up liquid to help it flow more easily.

Ask them to look through the bottle. What can they see now? The water is all full of glitter and we can't see through it. Explain that when the brain is filled with feelings the emotional brain takes over

and the thinking brain turns off, which means that we can't see clearly or think straight. We might say or do things we later regret.

Think together of examples this may of happened for you and for them.

Explain – we need to settle the body and mind to help our emotions not be in control

Until we still the emotional brain our thinking brain can't work. We can't see clearly or communicate helpfully with words.

Ask them to shake the bottle and imagine that their mind is revved up with those feelings, anger, anxiety, excitement. Then tell them to hold the bottle completely still and watch what happens inside the bottle.

Explain that as they quiet and still in their mind, their busy or angry or worried thoughts calm and clear just like the glitter settles to the bottom of the bottle.

Now ask them to hold the bottle and jump up and down and twirl around and watch what happens in the bottle. Then encourage them to stop and stand completely still as they again watch what happens in the bottle.

Explain – there are some things we can do to help settle the body and mind

Explain as they calm their body, their mind quiets and thoughts settle just like the glitter in the bottle. They feel peaceful and clear. They can think more clearly as their feelings settle.

Things that can help settle the body and mind:

- Slowing down breathing, calms the bodies stress response, and helps the emotional brain settle down. In *Happy Families* you can find a section on breathing and breathing exercises you can do with your child – pages 170 to 172. Google finger breathing for younger children and box breathing for older children and teens.
- Reducing sensory information. Moving to another calmer area where there is less sensory information can help some children (a quieter, less busy environment) – this isn't always practical.
- Not shouting or getting visibly cross with your child. If your child's glitter bottle is shaken up it is likely to shake yours up to. Try to remain calm. Coming down to your child's level and using a soothing voice can help. Instead of saying "Calm down" name the emotion you see "I can see you are angry." Name it to tame it. This helps your child learn the words that go with emotions.
- Validate your child's experience "I understand why you are feeling so sad, it's hard when we lose something precious" or "I understand why you might be feeling angry, it feels so unfair when you want something and you can't have it" or "I understand you are feeling anxious about going to school, it's hard having a new teacher you are not sure about."
- Some older children/teens need space when their glitter bottle is shaken up. They may like to go to their room or be on their own for a few minutes to calm down. Lots of arguments happen when parents follow them and continue the discussion or argument. Remember the

thinking brain is turned off so your teen cannot properly hear you and your likely to be adding to the bottle being shaken up (especially if yours is too).

Explain – once the emotions have settled, then is the time to talk together about what has happened

Sit the bottles down on a surface. You will see the water becomes clear again. Explain that once our emotions are settled our thinking brain is back online and now is the time to talk and think together as we can listen and use logic to make sense of what has happened.

Encourage your child to come up with ideas as how to resolve the problem that led to the emotional outburst. Happy Families takes you through how to do this with younger children (pages 116 and 122) and teens (pages 193 and 299).

Think about what you can both do differently next time to help the glitter bottle settle back down, or not explode in the first place.

Encourage them to use their glitter bottle to help them calm anger or worry. Practicing breathing whilst they watch the glitter settle.

Explain – some things make our glitter bottles more sensitive to being shaken up.

Lack of sleep, being hungry, temperament, difficulties in communication, neurodiversity and trauma can all contribute to the glitter bottle being more sensitive to being shaken up. Think with your child what might be trigger situations for them. Consider how you can provide more support in these situations – or avoid them if appropriate. Work out with your child what makes their bottle more sensitive to being shaken up.