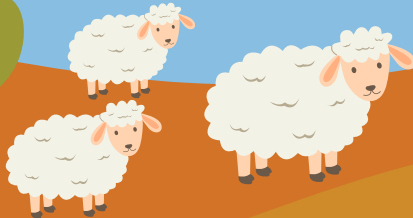
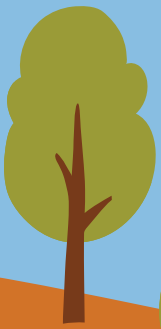


# PLAY & GROW

Fun everyday activities to help our littlest bush kids grow and learn.

For parents, carers and playgroup leaders.



outback  
futures

# PLAY IS FUN *and important for learning*

The ages of 0-5 are an amazing stage of rapid brain and skill development for our children.

Offering a range of different play activities and experiences helps children, parents and carers learn together about the world, develop skills, interact with one another, and share new ideas.

This guide is organised around different learning themes based on our day-to-day lives, and can be used by parents, carers, early childhood educators and playgroup facilitators.

Our speech pathologists, occupational therapists, counsellors and psychologists have contributed to this resource. You'll find songs, books, activities and do-at-home ideas for each theme. For the safety of children, we recommend an adult supervises all activities.

Together we're helping give our bush kids a head start in life.

**The Outback Futures Team**

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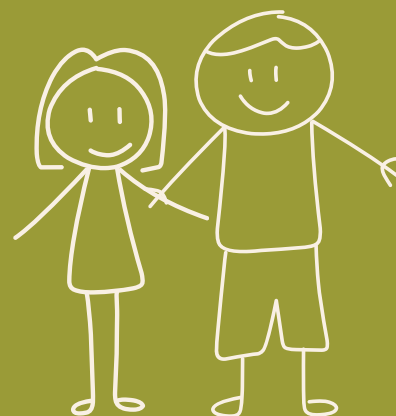
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## Body parts

Learning about body parts helps children understand their bodies, talk about their needs, and learn to take care of themselves.



These are some key concepts to explore:

- Using basic concepts that help children understand directions, ask questions, and express ideas. For example, 'on', 'in', 'up', 'down'.
- Developing social language skills such as turn taking, eye contact, asking questions, etc.
- Using gestures such as pointing, clapping, waving, head nodding and other non-verbal communication cues.



### SONGS

Here are some song suggestions that explore body parts:

- "Heads and shoulders, knees and toes"
- "Open, shut them"
- "Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear"
- "Hokey Pokey"



### BOOKS

Here are some book suggestions that explore body parts:

- The Foot Book (Dr. Seuss)
- Piranhas Don't Eat Bananas (Aaron Blabey)
- Or any body parts board book



### ACTIVITIES

Here are some suggested activities to help children learn more about their body:

1

#### Doll/action figure bath routine

- Show how to "brush" the doll's teeth, saying, "Let's brush their teeth! Look at their mouth! Can you say 'mouth'?"
- Use the brush or comb and say, "Let's brush the doll's hair. Look, their hair is messy!"
- Talk about body parts as you dress the doll: "Their pants go on their legs. Now they're ready!"
- Name body parts while washing: "Let's wash their arms! Now their legs!"

2

#### Exploring body parts with Mr. Potato Head

- Hold up Mr. Potato Head's body and one part (e.g., an arm). Ask, "What is this? Where does it go?"
- Point to each part on Mr. Potato Head and say, "This is his eye. Can you show me your eyes?"
- Use accessories (e.g., hat, shoes) and narrate: "Let's put the hat on his head. Where is his head?"



### EXTRA IDEAS

- Make handprint or footprint art with paint.
- In everyday moments, encourage the imitation of different body movements, like shaking fingers, clapping hands or touching toes. You might use these movements to get the attention of your child i.e. "3, 2, 1 hands on head."

# Emotions

Learning about emotions helps young children understand their feelings, share them with others, and build healthy relationships.

These are some key concepts to explore:

- Naming basic emotions such as happy, sad, angry, scared, etc
- Expressing anger in appropriate ways (rather than hitting/biting)



## SONGS

Here are some song suggestions that explore emotions:

- "If You're Happy and You Know It"
- "You are my Sunshine"



## BOOKS

Here are some book suggestions that explore emotions:

- Pig The Pug (Aaron Blabey)
- The Very Cranky Bear (Nick Bland)
- Elephant and Piggie series (Mo Willems)



## ACTIVITIES

Here are some suggested activities that help children learn more about emotions:

### 1 Guess the Feeling

Have someone act out an emotion and encourage the kids to guess. After they guess correctly, briefly explain the feeling.

- Example for sad: Frown, pretend to cry, and look down. "This is my sad face. I feel sad when I lose my toy."
- Example for mad: Cross arms, furrow brows, and stomp feet. "This is my mad face. I feel mad when it's not my turn to play."

### 2 Mr Potato Head

- Use his eyes, mouth and accessories to create different faces of different feelings. For example, happy, sad, scared, angry.



## EXTRA IDEAS

- Hang a poster of basic feelings in your children's bedroom. Feelings may include happy, sad, angry, scared, tired, sick, excited, bored.
- Create your own feelings chart using movie, television or book characters your child may be familiar with. For example, *Inside Out* have feelings cards and charts freely available online.

## Daily routines

Learning about daily routines (toileting, bedtime, transitions from one activity to another etc.) can help children feel safe, do things on their own and be prepared for what to do each day.



These are some of the key concepts to explore:

- Using strategies to help with transitions (stopping one activity and starting another) e.g. 5 minute warning
- Using words to describe the transitions i.e. “bath time / big bath / splashing in the bath / time for a bath”



### SONGS

Here are some song suggestions that explore daily routines:

- “This is the Way we Clean our Teeth/Wash our Hands” etc
- “Brush your teeth”
- “Wake up!”



### BOOKS

Here are some book suggestions that explore daily routines:

- The Bedtime Book (Todd Parr)
- Bluey: Road Trip
- One Day, So Many Ways (Laura Hall)
- Elephant and Piggie series (Mo Willems)



### ACTIVITIES

Here are some suggested activities that help children learn more about their daily routines:

#### 1 Feltboard stories

Use felt, paper or card characters to create a story about doing things during the day like playing, bathtime, going from inside to outside, quiet time. Practice transition strategies during storytelling.

#### 2 Household items

Use household items like brushes, bath towels, toothbrushes, clothes, pillowcases, bowls, pillows, and cups in play. As you move through different activities with the item, use words to get the group ready for the next activity. i.e. Now we've had a drink, it's time for a nap.



### EXTRA IDEAS

- Develop a daily routines chart. Some useful and free picture cards can be found on the Do2learn website:
- Develop your own family story about routines.



# Managing feelings

Supporting children to understand their feelings can help them develop positive ways to express and manage their emotions. As adults, acknowledging and showing an understanding of our children's feelings can help them see their feelings are being recognised.

These are some of the key concepts to explore:

- Getting close to offer comfort to your child.
- Bringing words to feelings. For example, "I know you want cake, you're angry because today is not cake day."
- Being firm when you need to be and helping your child organise their feelings, "I know this is hard for you, but I will help you." Once calm, talk to your child about the behaviour – Keep it Short and Simple (KISS).



## SONGS

Here are some song suggestions that explore feelings and emotions:

- "It's ok to cry" The Wiggles



## BOOKS

Here are some book suggestions that explore feelings and emotions:

- Little Lion is so Cranky (Jedda Robaard)
- No more Tantrums: Handling Temper Tantrums (Campbell Books)
- Hands Are Not For Hitting (Martine Agassi)
- No, David! (David Shannon)



## ACTIVITIES

Here are some suggested activities that help children learn more about managing and expressing how they feel:

### 1 Simon Says

Play Simon Says as a learning moment about following rules and talking through feelings and actions when you get 'out'.

### 2 Musical statues

Play musical statues. Integrate deep breaths into moments when the music stops.



## EXTRA IDEAS

- Create a safe place at home where your child can sit quietly with their big feelings - this may be with you or on their own if they prefer. This could be in the lounge room, bedroom or anywhere your child feels safe and secure.

# Farm animals

Playing and learning about about animals helps children understand their world and how to care for other living beings. It also helps them feel less scared and grow emotionally as they learn about animals they might encounter in both day-to-day life, or less often at places like the zoo.

**These are some key concepts to explore:**

- Adding one word / association to the animal i.e. “lion roar” “pig oink”
- Talking about exposure to more/different animals, for example animals at the zoo
- Developing vocabulary – explore relevant animals in their lives, for example farm animals, or pets



## SONGS

Here are some song suggestions that explore animals:

- “Old Macdonald had a farm”
- “5 Little Monkeys jumping on the bed”
- “Incey Wincey Spider”
- “Gallumph”
- “Soft Kitty”
- “Ba Ba Black Sheep”
- “Barramundi, barramundi”



## BOOKS

Here are some book suggestions that explore animals:

- George the Farmer Beef Bonanza (Simone Kain)
- Old Macdonald had a Farm (various authors)
- We’re Going on a Bear Hunt (Michael Rosen And Helen Oxenbury)
- Spot Goes to the Farm (Eric Hill)



## ACTIVITIES

Here are some suggested activities that help children learn more about animals:

1

**Duck, duck, goose**

2

**Red rover**

Play a varied version of Red Rover by replacing the running with animal movements like “jump like a kangaroo.”


3

**Animal craft**

Prepare some craft ideas for making different animals out of recycled household items such as cardboard rolls, egg cartons, milk bottle tops and boxes.



## EXTRA IDEAS

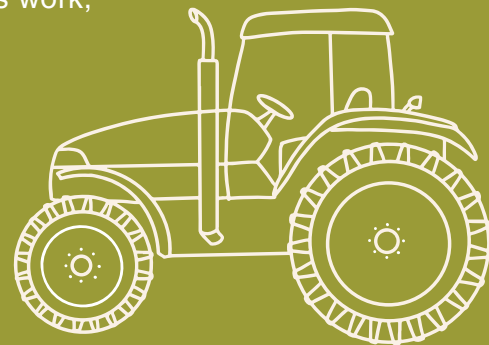
- Go for a walk and play ‘spot the animal’ - see how many you can find!
- Play charades using animal movements and sounds. Have your child guess the animal.
- Paper plate frog activity: 

# Farm equipment

Machines and equipment are a big part of life in the outback. Learning about transport and farm equipment helps children understand how things work, and be aware of safety around machinery.

These are some key concepts to explore:

- Making noises and use words to match the movement of the equipment i.e. “Go Bruuum”.
- Talking about different equipment, how they work and being safe around them. Use play tools to pretend to fix them.



## SONGS

Here are some song suggestions that explore transport/farm equipment:

- “Old McDonald” (vehicle noises e.g., horn on the truck, motor on the bike)
- “The Wheels on the Bus/Truck”
- “Down at the Station”



## BOOKS

Here are some book suggestions that explore transport/farm equipment:

- Spot Goes to the Farm (Eric Hill)
- George the Farmer Plants a Wheat Crop (Simone Kain)
- George the Farmer Machinery on the Farm (Simone Kain)



## ACTIVITIES

Here are some suggested activities that help children learn more about farm equipment:

### 1 Driving the trucks

All players have their own truck or tractor, moving around the floor. Move the truck back and forth, going fast and slow.

- Make noises and use words to match the truck movements as the truck moves. For example, “bruum”, “eek” (going around a corner), “stop” or “go.” Invite the children to follow along or take the lead.

### 2 Fixing the truck

All players have their own truck or tractor.

- The truck crashes or bumps into something. Say “oh no”.
- Use pretend or plastic tools like a hammer or screwdriver. Make the noises of the tools as you use them, “bang” “tap tap”. When finished, say, “All fixed, we can drive now”. Continue to drive and fix the truck.



## EXTRA IDEAS

- Play ‘what’s that sound?’ and guess noises around the farm
- Notice and name farm equipment you see out and about

# Grocery shopping

Learning about shopping for food makes this regular experience engaging for the whole family. Grocery shopping can also be an overwhelming experience for some children, so play experiences can make it more enjoyable.



## These are some key concepts to explore:

- Encouraging kids to use their hands to touch and feel the food textures
- Adding one word to describe the food, for example “green apple / crunchy apple”
- Helping kids to make choices between two or more items



## SONGS

Here are some song suggestions that explore shopping for food:

- “Grocery Shopping” (The Kiboomers)
- “Where We Go Shopping” (Munch & Move)



## BOOKS

Here are some book suggestions that explore shopping for food:

- Grug Goes Shopping (Ted Prior)
- Stanley’s Store (William Bee)



## ACTIVITIES

Here are some suggested activities that help children learn more about shopping for food:

### 1 Pretend play

Set up a pretend ‘shop’ where children are provided with bags / baskets / buckets and use coins / leaves (whatever you have available) to purchase pretend or real food.

### 2 Colouring in

Grocery store colouring in sheets.



## EXTRA IDEAS

- Choice-making at the grocery store
- I-spy in the grocery store
- Helping to locate items at the grocery store

# Getting dressed

Learning about clothes and getting dressed helps kids do things on their own and feel confident. It also helps them pick the right clothes for the weather or activity.

These are some key concepts to explore:

- Describing different clothing items (i.e. t-shirt, shorts, socks)
- Categorisation of clothing items (i.e. school uniform, pyjamas, swimmers)
- Sequencing of dressing (i.e. undies first, jacket on last)
- Choice-making and learning what to wear for different weather/occasions
- Pulling up / doing up clothing (i.e. zipping, tying, buttoning)



## SONGS

Here are some song suggestions that explore clothing:

- "Put on your hat song" Playschool



11 Songs About Clothes and Shoes



## BOOKS

Here are some book suggestions that explore clothing:

- Hippo Has a Hat (Julia Donaldson)
- We Wear Pants (Katie Abey)



## ACTIVITIES

Here are some suggested activities that help children learn more about getting dressed:

### 1 Character dress up puzzles

The Melissa & Doug - Wooden Bear Family Dress Up is one of many puzzles that teach kids about getting dressed.

### 2 Dressing dolls/figurines

Use dolls or figurines and change their clothes as a learning moment around getting dressed and different types of clothing.



## EXTRA IDEAS

- Practice doing up buttons and zips on a 'busy book' or board to practice fine motor skills.
- Let your child choose parts of their outfit or give them a choice of two of the same items.

# Mealtimes

Learning about mealtimes helps children develop healthy habits, routines, and social skills.

These are some key concepts to explore:

- Encouraging kids to use their hands to touch and feel food textures
- Adding one word to describe the food, for example “green apple / crunchy apple”
- Practicing transitions to and from mealtimes, for example stopping play and washing hands before dinner, and taking plate to sink after dinner



## SONGS

Here are some song suggestions that explore mealtimes:

- “Apples and Bananas”
- “I’m a little teapot”
- “Jelly on a plate”
- “Popcorn Kernel”



## BOOKS

Here are some book suggestions that explore mealtimes:

- The very hungry caterpillar (Eric Carle)



## ACTIVITIES

Here are some suggested activities that help children learn more about mealtimes:

### 1 Pretend play

Organise a pretend tea party or picnic with plastic foods.

Optional – each child can bring a teddy or doll to the picnic if they would like.

### 2 Describing food

During morning tea, encourage parents and children to enjoy it together. As they are eating, encourage parents to describe their food.



## EXTRA IDEAS

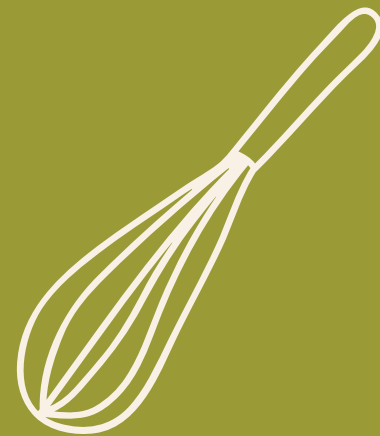
- Encouraging children to try feeding themselves whether it be with their hands or appropriate cutlery.
- Prepare food with different textures and colours. Encourage children to use their hands to touch and feel food textures.

# Cooking

Making and playing with food is fun for young children. It helps them be creative and try new tastes and textures.

These are some key concepts to explore:

- Prepositions of place when it comes to our food - for example 'on', 'in'
- Action verbs – mix/stir, pour, give, cut
- Talk about what things look like before and after they are mixed together



## SONGS

Here are some song suggestions that explore cooking:

- "Fruit salad"
- "Pat a Cake"
- "I'm toast in the toaster"



## BOOKS

Here are some book suggestions that explore cooking:

- Possum Magic (Mem Fox)
- Bluey: BBQ



## ACTIVITIES

Here are some suggested activities that help children learn more about cooking:

### 1 Playdough

Make playdough together and let the children explore the dough with their senses. When you talk through what you are doing you are sharing words that go with these early science concepts.

### 2 This goes with that!

Have a mix of plastic cutlery and crockery (cups, plates, bowls, spoons, forks) available.

- With the spoon and cup, tap the spoon and cup and then stir. Describe the movement as you go, "stir stir". Build on this by moving the cup to your face and pretend to drink.
- Extend this with other items that go together: cup/plate, spoon/bowl, spoon/fork/plate



## EXTRA IDEAS

- Cooking together at home. Involve your children to do small tasks like stirring batter, tearing lettuce, washing fruit, adding ingredients, and helping "read" a cookbook by turning the pages.

# Jobs around the house

Children can learn and participate in household chores and small tasks from a young age. Including children in household tasks can build independence and self-confidence.

## These are some key concepts to explore:

- Naming items around the house
- Building transitions between activities at home e.g. “once we hang out the washing it’s time to read a book”
- Describing items around the house, for example what they look like, what they feel like, where they belong



## SONGS

Here are some song suggestions that explore things around the house:

- “My mummy takes good care of me” (tune of “This is the way we brush our teeth”)
- “Where You Are” (Moana)
- “Who’s in the Wiggle House?”



## BOOKS

Here are some book suggestions that explore things around the house:

- Aunt Amelia’s House (Rebecca Cobb)
- I’m Actually Really Grown-up Now (Maisie Shearring)



## ACTIVITIES

Here are some suggested activities that help children learn more about household items:

### 1 Household items

Use the household items like brushes, bath towels, toothbrushes, clothes, pillowcases, bowls, pillows, and cups in play. As you move through different activities with the item, talk through what they are used for.

### 2 Obstacle course

Use the household items in an obstacle course. This is a fun way to learn about how they are used around the house.



## EXTRA IDEAS

- Develop a daily routines chart.
- Develop your own family story about tasks around the house.
- Get your child involved in household tasks. These may include helping to tidy up toys after playtime, put laundry in the washing machine, or fill a pet’s water bowl.

# EXTRA RESOURCES

for little kids to play and grow



## IDEAS ON HOW TO ACCESS RESOURCES

- Borrow books from your local library
- If you don't have a library nearby, search on YouTube for people reading books
- Search online for free printable downloads
- Search online for kids audio books - there are lots of great free options too



## SOME OF OUR FAVOURITE RESOURCES

### ● Book Share Time

Book Share Time is a great website developed by a Speech Pathologist that suggests some of the best children's books to support speech and language development.



Visit their website



### ● George the Farmer

George the Farmer books and resources inspire kids to learn about agriculture and where their food and fibre comes from creatively. They do this through fun storybooks, musical paddock-to-plate videos, virtual reality, performance and free curriculum-aligned educator's resources.



Visit the website



### ● Birdie's Tree

Birdie's Tree is a set of storybooks, videos and resources created by the Queensland Centre for Perinatal and Infant Mental Health (QCPIMH) to help children and families going through natural disasters and disruptive events.



Visit the website



### ● Sally and Possum

Filled with fun new adventures, follow Sally and Possum as they explore, discover, and learn about the world around them using Australian Sign Language (Auslan) in short videos.



Visit the website



### ● Parent TV

ParentTV offers hundreds of on-demand videos to support the parenting and care of children from birth to teens.



Visit the website





# Parent Peers

## SUPPORTING PARENTS AND SOON-TO-BE PARENTS

Outback Futures' Parent Peers are local parents who walk alongside you to share the journey of parenting in social and informal ways.

**We understand the joys and challenges of pregnancy and the early years of parenting in the bush.**

We also know it's important to have people around you who provide support, encouragement and connection.

We're here to listen, share the everyday reality of parenting, celebrate the good stuff, and walk together through the tough stuff. Here's some of the ways we support parents:

- **Catch up for a coffee** at home or out and about
- **Have a chat** when you need a listening ear
- **Be a familiar face at parent groups** including playgroup and other gatherings
- **Go with you to appointments** for company and support
- **Help you connect** with Outback Futures and other services
- **Share helpful resources** and links to trusted materials about parenting and wellbeing
- **Keep you in the loop about services** including who's in town and what's available
- **Join in community events** and be a friendly face for you and your family

**Have something else in mind? Just let us know!**

Find your local  
Parent Peer



# EXTRA SUPPORT TO HELP KIDS *grow in confidence and capacity*

Outback Futures provides **allied and mental health services** for babies, kids, teens and adults.

- Regular, confidential support
- Telehealth appointments plus periodic face-to-face appointments available in some West Queensland regions
- Referrals not required
- Range of fees including some free options

## SPEECH PATHOLOGY

### Helping your child find their voice

If your child is having difficulty expressing themselves, understanding others, or using language clearly, speech pathology can help.

Getting support early can make a big difference, and help your child build strong foundations for learning, communication, and social connections. Our **Speech Pathology** team can support you and your child with practical strategies and playful, engaging activities.

#### Developmental delays including late talking

Some children take longer to start talking or may be slower to develop communication skills. If your child isn't meeting milestones as expected, we can support early language development and work with you to build communication step by step, in ways that suit your child's needs.

#### Speech clarity, sounds & lisps

If your child is hard to understand or struggles with certain sounds (like 's' or 'r'), it can affect their confidence and communication. We can help your child learn how to move their tongue, lips, and jaw to make sounds clearly and confidently, so they can be understood by others.

#### Expressive language and communication difficulties

Every child has something to say. If your child struggles to find the right words, form sentences, or express their thoughts, we can help. Whether it's through speech, signs, pictures, or technology, we support kids to communicate clearly and confidently in ways that work for them.

#### Understanding language

If your child finds it hard to follow instructions, answer questions, or understand stories, they may need support with receptive language. We can help your child build their understanding of words, sentences, and meaning, so they can better learn, play, and connect with others.

#### Stuttering

Some kids go through a 'bumpy' speech phase where they repeat words, get stuck, or pause a lot when talking. You might also notice blinking, tension, or changes in breathing. If this lasts more than a few weeks, extra support can help. Our speech pathologists encourage smoother, more confident speech and reduce the stress that can come with stuttering, for both kids and parents.

#### Reading and spelling

Reading and writing are complex skills that build on strong speech and language foundations. If your child is finding it hard to sound out words, spell, or understand what they read, we can help develop early literacy skills to help them become a confident reader and writer.

#### Social and conversational skills

Communication is more than just words. If your child finds it hard to make friends, take turns, or understand social cues, we can assist. We'll help your child build skills to connect with others, like using eye contact, reading body language, and understanding emotions, so they can build friendships and feel more confident in social situations.

#### Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Children with ASD may communicate in different ways. We help kids build skills for understanding language, expressing themselves, and connecting with others. Using a range of tools including speech, visuals, and technology, we tailor support to your child's strengths and challenges.



## OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

### Helping your child develop skills for life

**You want your child to feel confident, capable, and connected at home, at school, and in everyday life.**

Occupational Therapy can support your child's development in areas like coordination, emotional regulation, and feeling comfortable in different environments. With practical strategies and playful, hands-on activities, we'll support you and your child to build skills to grow and thrive.



#### Developmental delays

If you are concerned your child is developing a little differently or more slowly than others, you're not alone and we're here to support. We can help you understand what's happening and guide your child's growth, one step at a time.



#### Friendship and play

Struggling to make friends or join in play can be tough for kids and parents. We help children build confidence and social skills so they can connect with others and enjoy being part of the group.



#### Sensory processing

Sometimes children experience sensory information differently, and things like loud sounds, bright lights, or certain textures can feel overwhelming. We help kids understand and manage their sensory needs so they feel more comfortable and in control.



#### Self-regulation

Big emotions can be hard to handle. If your child struggles with meltdowns, shutdowns, or emotional outbursts, we help them (and you) build tools to navigate those moments with more calm and confidence.



#### Self-Care (Toileting, Dressing, Feeding, Sleep)

Daily routines like toileting, mealtimes, and sleep can be challenging. We work with you to make these moments smoother, less stressful, and more manageable for your child, and for you.



#### Motor skills

From running and jumping to using their hands for everyday tasks, motor skills are a key that builds independence. We help kids strengthen these skills so they can move through the world with confidence.



#### Attention skills

If your child finds it hard to sit still, focus, or follow instructions, it can impact learning and relationships. We support kids in building attention skills in ways that suit their unique needs.



#### Growth mindset and learning confidence

When kids start to believe they're 'just not good at learning,' it can hold them back. We help shift that mindset and build confidence so they feel more capable and willing to try.



#### School readiness

Starting school is a big step. If you're unsure whether your child is ready socially, emotionally, or physically, we're here to help them (and you) feel more confident and prepared.



#### Handwriting

If handwriting is a struggle, we can help. We support children in developing the fine motor and planning skills they need to write with more ease and less frustration.



#### Autism, ADHD & other neurodevelopmental conditions

Whether your child has a diagnosis or you're exploring the possibility, we're here to support you. We focus on your child's strengths while helping you with the challenges.



## MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

### Supporting your child's emotional wellbeing

**Growing up comes with ups and downs, and kids sometimes need extra support to thrive.**

Our team of psychologists and counsellors can help kids with things like managing emotions, recovering from disasters, navigating family changes, and building confidence for learning.

And because parenting can be challenging as well, we're here for you with resources, mentoring, and wellbeing support for the whole family.

- developing confidence and a mindset for learning
- managing anxiety and stress (eg learning worries, social anxiety)
- peer relationship issues, behaviour challenges and social difficulties
- managing emotions
- coping with grief and loss
- coping with family, home and school changes
- building a sense of emotional wellbeing and resilience
- parenting support and resources including mentoring
- wellbeing support for parents, including family and workplace stress, couples counselling
- ...and more

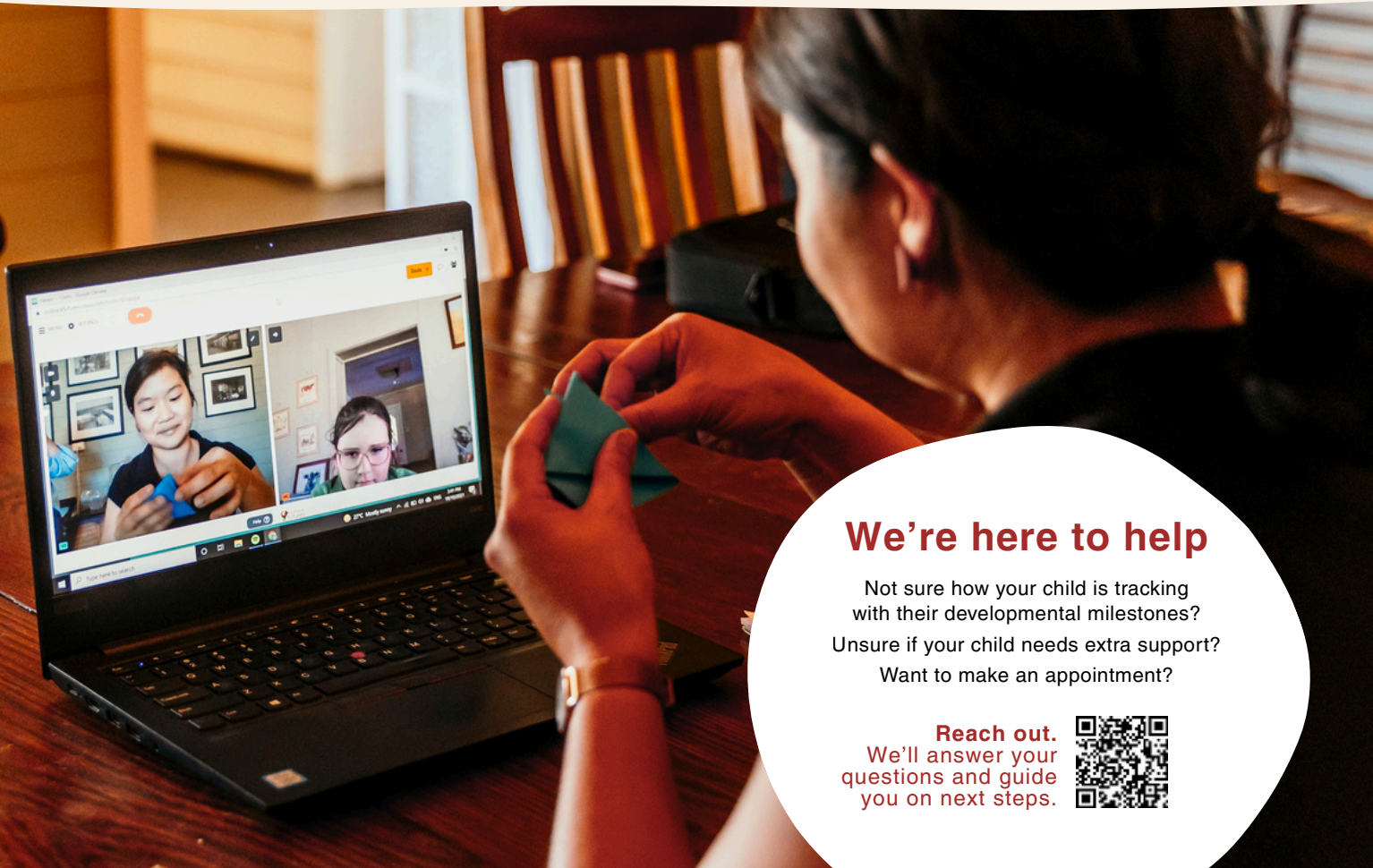


### Do kids engage with telehealth sessions?

Our experienced clinicians know how to keep kids engaged over telehealth. We work together with parents, and use a range of interactive tools and playful strategies to make online sessions fun, focused, and effective.

“

*The Outback Futures therapist is friendly and always there for support. Also, she keeps my child engaged on their telehealth lessons.*



### We're here to help

Not sure how your child is tracking with their developmental milestones?  
 Unsure if your child needs extra support?  
 Want to make an appointment?

**Reach out.**  
 We'll answer your questions and guide you on next steps.





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