

THE INVISIBLE SUITCASE

An emotional toolkit for life

McMonagle, A. 2022

As a child goes through life, they carry an invisible suitcase. You will never be able to see it, but it's there. It will accompany the child through adolescence and into adulthood.

The contents of this suitcase are commodities of the child's experiences, relationships and interactions accumulated over the years. Some are **constructive**, some are **undesirable**, and others are **damaging**.

The invisible suitcase acts as an emotional toolkit for life, like an ever-present inner voice, full of messages, learned behaviours and image of self. Some of the messages accumulated have the potential to **propel the child forward** in every aspect of well-being and development. Some will **limit the child** and separate them from their true potential. Some will function as unwelcome triggers and **emotional barriers well into adulthood**.



Storing Positive Messaging

Children come to early childhood settings with vastly different life experiences. Some come from homes where parents and family members provide a secure loving environment, rich in love, emotional security and interaction. On the other hand, some children come from an environment where domestic violence, drug or alcohol dependency, neglect or adverse parenting is part of everyday life.

It is absolutely vital, that all children accumulate a bank of positive messaging to store in their invisible suitcase, to build the strong mental toolkit needed to navigate life. This is one of the most important and privileged positions held by the early childhood educator.

For children with supportive life experiences, the continued nurturing of stable relationships outside the home, will reinforce the positive messaging contained in their suitcase. For children coming from adverse environments, meaningful interactions from a key person in the early childhood setting will dilute negative experiences and store alternative messaging in the invisible suitcase. This will go a long way in supporting **healthy emotional well-being**.

Educators have the power to balance the invisible suitcase



One of the most privileged positions of the early childhood educator is to work to ensure that each child's suitcase is filled with positive messages and meaningful interactions.

Educators who balance

For educators, there is **no more important role** than to add balance to a suitcase that starts its earliest life out of balance.

Educators achieve this by building secure relationships and practicing affirming interactions. They pay attention to and tune-in to the child, see and hear their voice and respond to their needs. Simple interactions like a genuine smile, good eye contact, a hug or stopping to hear what the child has to say will add positive messaging to the child's suitcase. These affirming interactions are at **the core of quality early education and care.**

It is worth remembering that tone of voice, facial expression, levels of attentiveness and body posture communicate subliminal messages – either positive or negative, to the child.

Genuine, secure relationships and positive interactions demonstrate to the child that their voice and opinion is valued and important. Regardless of the child's home environment, this type of experience will build a bank of positive inner messaging that will be drawn on throughout the child's life.

For educators, there is no more important role than to add balance to a suitcase that starts its earliest life out of balance.

THE INVISIBLE SUITCASE ...

'Every child carries an **invisible** suitcase filled with experiences and messages - some **positive**, some **negative**. You cannot see the suitcase, but it is there. The contents will act as an **emotional toolkit** for each child's life. Some content will propel the child forward, some will limit and separate them from their true potential.

The most important role of an early childhood educator is to be aware of the **contents of each child's suitcase**. **Tune-in** to children, **listen** to what they have to say, give them **time** and **respond** to their needs.

Fill the invisible suitcase with **positive messaging**, your **attention** and **meaningful experiences**. Work to balance the suitcase, particularly when it is out of balance.



MOSAIC

'It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken adults'

www.mosaicearlyed.com