



AROMATHERAPY WITH CHILDREN GUIDELINES

Use of Essentials Oils on Children

The little noses of children are generally more sensitive to aromas (than adults) and more receptive to the therapeutic use of essential oils. In addition, young children's immune systems have not fully developed, making them less able to deal with adverse effects when concentrated substances, such as essential oils, are used in the air around them (via diffusion). In particular, Peppermint, Eucalyptus, and certain chemotypes of Rosemary contain high amounts of menthol or 1,8-cineole which are mucous membrane irritants and can cause slowed respiration in some children. Because of this, Tisserand recommends that these oils are not diffused in close proximity to infants or children, or applied to, or near, their faces.

The skin of infants and children is much more delicate than adult skin. So, essential oils, which are highly concentrated, **should not be used on the skin of children under the age of two years.** Newborns in particular are less able to deal with any adverse effects due to the over-use of improperly diluted essential oils. There needs to be caution when using essential oils around young children, So for kids under age of six years, inhalation is usually going to be the best way to use essential oils, via room diffusers or vapourisers.

Dilution and Dosage

Essential oils are far more concentrated than herbal extracts and tinctures so should always be diluted before applying to the skin. Because a child's skin is more permeable than an adults, a dilution of 0.5-1% is recommended for infants between the ages of 2-5 years and; 0.5-2% dilution on children between the ages of 6-12 years. A 0.5-1% dilution is a total of 1-2 drops of essential oil in 10mls of a carrier (eg, lotion or vegetable oil); and 0.5-2% dilution is 1-4 drops of essential oil in 10mls of carrier. Coconut, jojoba, and almond oils are popular choices of vegetable oil carriers.

Room diffusion or vapourisation is ideal for respiratory congestion. Adding a drop or two of Pine, Cypress, Spruce, or Fir into a commercially available diffuser or vapouriser can help clear nasal congestion.

To help prevent restlessness, diffuse just one or two drops of Lavender in your child's bedroom 15 minutes before they go to sleep.

Sweet Orange or Mandarin can be added to an aromatherapy inhaler or diffused into the air when your child needs to find some calm. Other calming essential oils are Bergamot, Neroli, and Geranium.

Diluting essential oils before applying to the skin is very important and has many benefits. It provides a good medium for the essential oils to be absorbed; spreads the essential oil over a larger surface of the skin; and provides a measure of safety against irritation, phototoxicity, and sensitization.

Good reasons to use essential oils topically:

- itching, including from bug bites
- rashes
- minor cuts and scrapes
- bruises
- and other skin-related issues

Safe use of Essential Oils You Can Use on Children

Here are some examples of essential oils that are safe to use topically as well as diffused around, or otherwise inhaled, by children two years or older:

- Cedarwood
- Cypress
- German Chamomile
- Geranium
- Helichrysum
- Lavender
- Mandarin
- Neroli
- Sandalwood
- Tea Tree

Essential Oils to Avoid around children

Here are some of the essential oils that are NOT SAFE to use around children:

- Eucalyptus camaldulensis, Eucalyptus globulus, Eucalyptus maidenii, Eucalyptus plenissima, Eucalyptus kochii, Eucalyptus polybractea, Eucalyptus radiata, Eucalyptus Australiana, Eucalyptus phellandra, Eucalyptus smithii
- Fennel (bitter), Fennel (sweet) *Foeniculum vulgare*
- Lemongrass *Cymbopogon flexuosus*, *Andropogon flexuosus*, *Cymbopogon citratus*, *Andropogon citratus*
- Niaouli (cineole chemotype) *Melaleuca quinquinervia*
- Peppermint *Mentha x Piperita*
- Rosemary (1,8-cineole chemotype) *Rosmarinus officinalis*
- Verbena (Lemon) *Aloysia triphylla*, *Aloysia citriodora*, *Lippa citriodora*, *Lippa triphylla*
- Ylang-Ylang *Cananga odorata*

Essential Oils that can cause an adverse affect when exposed to the sun

When applied to the skin and exposed to the sun certain essential oils can cause a phototoxic reaction. Reactions can be severe, and sometimes irreversible. Some signs are severe sunburn, blistering, edema (swelling), or changes in skin colour. These reactions can occur up to 48 hours after sun exposure.

Phototoxic oils include: bergamot; lime; bitter orange; lemon; grapefruit.

Sweet Orange, Tangerine, and Mandarin are not phototoxic. Neither are steam-distilled Lemon or Lime, or furanocoumarin-free (FCF) Bergamot.

NOTE: essential oils applied to areas not exposed to the sun should not present a risk. That said, some summer clothing is very thin and might cause a reaction under intense sunlight.

Additional Resources:

Essential Oil Safety, by Robert Tisserand and Rodney Young (2nd edition).