



Helping Your Child Identify and Express Emotions



Young children deal with many of the same emotions adults do. Children get angry, sad, frustrated, nervous, happy, or embarrassed, but they often do not have the words to talk about how they are feeling. Instead, they sometimes act out these emotions in very physical and verbal ways.

As a parent, you may sometimes feel overwhelmed by these expressions of emotions. The good news is that there are some simple and effective methods you can use to help your child communicate peacefully.

The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning suggests 4 main steps to helping your child express his or her emotions:

1 Explain the feeling by using words your child can easily understand. Try to use pictures, books, or videos to help get your point across. Example: *"Look at Little Red Riding Hood's face; she is so scared when she sees the wolf in her Grandma's bed!"*

2 Teach your child the different ways we can deal with feelings. Let your child come up with ways he or she can deal with their feelings. Talk about positive and not so positive ways to express feelings. There are many strategies you can use to teach new ways to appropriately express feelings:

Use real-life examples or teach in the moment:

For example, *"You are having a difficult time putting your bike in the carport. You look frustrated. What can you do? I think you could ask for help or take a deep breath and try again. What do you want to do?"*

Teach your child new ways to respond to feelings by discussing common situations that your child might remember or that happen frequently. For example:

"Yesterday, you were angry because Joey would not let you play with his truck. You were so mad that you hit him. When you feel angry that Joey won't let you have a turn, what should you do?"

Use children's books to talk about feelings. For example, ask your child when reading a book, *"What is (character in book) feeling right now? How do you know? Have you ever felt that way? What do you do when you feel that way?"*

Keep it simple, use visuals or pictures to help get your point across, and always try to relate your lesson back to something that happens in your child's life.



Teach your child new strategies to use when feeling emotions that may be expressed inappropriately (e.g., anger, frustration, sadness). Strategies to share with your child might include taking a deep breath when frustrated or angry, getting an adult to help resolve a conflict, asking for a turn when others won't share, asking for a hug when sad, and finding a quiet space to calm down when distressed.

3 Praise your child the first time he tries to talk about his feelings instead of just reacting. It is **REALLY** important to let your child know exactly what she did right and how proud you are of her for talking about feelings. It should always be OK to say what we are feeling. It's how we choose to show our feelings and respond to them that requires special effort.

4 Support your child to talk about feelings and practice her new strategies for expressing emotions appropriately every chance you get. For example, you can talk about feelings when you are playing a game, when you are riding in the car, or when you are eating dinner. There will be all kinds of things that happen every day that will be great opportunities for you to talk about feelings. The more often your child practices, the faster your child will learn.

Teaching Activities

The following are some activities you can do with your child to help him or her better understand how to express feelings:

Play "Make a Face" with your child.




Start the game by saying, "I'm going to make a face, guess what I am feeling by looking at my face". Then, make a face that is happy, sad, excited, scared, silly, etc.


When your child guesses the right feeling word, respond by saying, "That's right! Do you know what makes me feel that way?" Follow by describing something simple that makes you have that feeling, for example: "Going to the park makes me happy", or "I feel sad when it is raining and we can't go to the park". (Please note: this is **not** the time to discuss adult circumstances that are linked to your emotions, like "When Daddy doesn't call me, I feel sad").

After you have explained the emotion connected to the face, ask your child to take a turn. Don't be surprised if they choose the same emotion you just displayed; it will take some time before your child can be creative with this game. Once you guess the emotion, have your child to name what makes them have that emotion. Repeat this process until your child shows that they are no longer interested in continuing the game.

Make an "Emotion Book" with your child.

An easy project to do with your child is to create a homemade book. All you need is paper, crayons or markers, and a stapler.

 You can make a book about one emotion and have your child fill the pages with things that make her feel that way. For example, a "Happy Book" may have pictures that you and your child draw of things that make her happy, pictures cut out of magazines that are glued on the pages, or photographs of friends and family members.

 Another approach is to have the book be about a variety of feeling words and do a page on each of several emotions (happy, mad, surprised, scared, angry, etc.). For children who have a lot to say about their feelings, you may want to have them tell you a sentence about what makes them feel an emotion so you can write the sentence on the page. Then, your child can cut out a picture to glue in the book or draw a picture to go with the emotion.

Expressing Feelings

Sometimes children express their emotions in ways that are problematic. Your child might cry when frustrated or throw toys when angry. Here are some different ways you can teach your child to act on feelings:

- * Ask for help
- * Solve problems with words
- * Say it, don't do it (*say "I am mad" instead of throwing toys*)
- * Tell a grown-up
- * Take a deep breath
- * Describe what you are feeling
- * Think of a different way to do it
- * Relax and try again
- * Walk away
- * Ask for a hug
- * Do a physical activity

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- **Ready to Learn-Music is a Must: September 21st at Noon.** Everyone likes hearing a great story. This workshop provides an introduction to the various skills needed to engage others in a story. Educational children's programming, books, and activities are used to show how easy telling a story can be.
- **Free parenting workshops!** 12 workshops present key steps in your child's development, demonstrate how to combine media with reading, and hands-on activities to enhance your child's learning. For more information visit:
<http://www.kbyutv.org/kidsandfamily/readytolearn/>
- **Free Car Seat Safety Inspection** held at the Utah County Health and Justice Building in room 2601. Visit http://www.utahcountyonline.org/Dept2/Health/Health_Promotion/Injury/CarSeatClass.html for a current schedule.
- **Pregnancy Tests**-are free at the Health Department clinic. Walk in any time Monday-Friday from 8:00-4:30, room 1709. 151 S. University Avenue, Provo, Utah 84601.