

Emotions



What are Emotions?

Emotions are mental reactions (such as anger or fear) marked by strong feelings and usually causing physical effects.¹

Why are Emotions Important?

- Feelings and emotions:
 - Drive behavior, especially in young children.
 - Can be confusing.
 - Are stored in the body; when they are blocked rather than expressed, they can damage health.
 - Can signal danger, and are meant to be protective. However, children who have experienced traumatic things may perceive danger in situations where none exists, leading them to respond inappropriately.
 - Can trigger survival behaviors (fight, flight, freeze) more frequently in children who have experience with trauma, due to their tendency to be on the lookout for danger.
- When safety, stability, and nurturance are lacking, children often begin to misunderstand the emotions of others. Emotional cues signaled by others are frequently misinterpreted, leading children to respond in ways that are viewed as inappropriate by those around them. (For example, a teacher may be slightly irritated with something completely unrelated to a child, but that child interprets the teacher's cues as anger towards him/herself.)
- Sharing feelings is sometimes viewed as unsafe or unacceptable, especially for children who have experienced trauma.
- Social and emotional competence is the single most important predictor of how children will adjust to life as adults.



¹ Merriam-Webster. "Dictionary Definition of Emotion." Accessed Sept. 9, 2015. <http://www.wordcentral.com/cgi-bin/student?book=Student&va=emotion>

What Can Be Done?

- Help children identify and name what they are feeling.
 - Practice makes perfect—give children lots of opportunities to identify feelings in themselves and others.
- Encourage children to talk about their feelings.
- Be a role model. Talk to someone you trust about your own feelings.
- Accept children’s feelings, whatever they are.
- Teach children that emotions are not good or bad, they just are. Help them learn that it’s ok to feel whatever they feel.
- Help children think about how to respond to feelings, conflicts, and problems in healthy and respectful ways. One way to do this is by asking them:
 - What can you do?
 - Who can you talk to?
 - How do you calm yourself down when you feel upset?



MORE INFORMATION



Teaching Your Child About Feelings from Birth to Age 2

From the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning.



Feelings Chart with Instructions

From the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning.

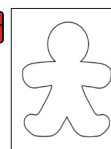


Teaching Your Child To Identify and Express Emotions



Emotions Vocabulary Chart

From the FASD London Region Assessment Clinic.



Gingerbread Cut-Outs with Instructions



Teaching Your Child About Feelings

from Birth to Age 2

Does This
Sound Familiar?

Damon (6 months) and his sister Karena (20 months) have arrived at their grandmother's house for the day. Even though this has been the morning routine for a few months now, Damon cries and cries when his mother leaves. He is almost inconsolable, and it takes a great amount of time and comforting for him to calm down. Meanwhile, Karena is pulling on her Granny's arm. She wants to play with her doll stroller but it is in the closet and she can't turn the knob. She is not happy about waiting for her grandmother's attention. Karena swats her little brother, stamps her feet, and pulls on the doorknob with all her might.

What would you do if this happened in your home? Would you be feeling a little frustrated with one or maybe even *both* children? Or would you be able to hang on to that little piece of calm inside yourself and find the strength to soothe both your little ones?

The Focus

Young children experience many of the same emotions adults do. Children can feel angry, jealous, excited, sad, silly, frustrated, happy, and worried. The difference is that very young children—ages birth to 3—often lack the self-control and language skills to express their strong feelings in ways that adults find acceptable. Instead, babies and toddlers communicate strong emotions through their sounds and actions. For example, Damon cried to show how difficult it was saying good-bye to his mother. Big sister Karena used her body—swatting, stamping, and yanking—to show her frustration with waiting and her desire for the doll stroller.



What to Expect: Social and Emotional Skills



Sometimes it is hard to imagine that very young babies are actively learning all the time, especially when they seem to spend most of their time sleeping, spitting up, or dropping strained carrots off the side of the high chair. However, these early years are a critical time of learning for babies and toddlers. They are developing a foundation of social-emotional skills that they will build on for the rest of their lives. Here is a table that highlights the social-emotional skills your child is learning and practicing at different ages. You can use this information to track how your child is growing and changing from birth to age 3.

GREENSPAN'S ESSENTIAL DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

Developmental Goal	Age Range	What's Happening?
<p>1</p> <p><i>Stage One:</i> Being Calm and Interested in All the Sensations of the World</p>	Approximately birth to 3 months	<p>Your baby is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learning how to be calm, how to accept soothing and comfort from a loved caregiver. • learning to feel secure and interested in the world around him. • trying to organize the information he is receiving from his senses.
<p>2</p> <p><i>Stage Two:</i> Falling in Love</p>	Approximately 2 to 10 months	<p>Your baby is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • becoming more focused on parents and other persons and things outside herself. • expressing emotional reactions of her own (e.g., smiles and frowns). • expressing pleasure in others' company.
<p>3</p> <p><i>Stage Three:</i> Becoming a Two-Way Communicator</p>	Approximately 3 to 10 months	<p>Your baby is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • purposefully using gestures (facial expressions, actions, and sounds) to communicate. • responding to others' gestures with gestures of his own. • realizing that he can use sounds and gestures to get his needs met by loved caregivers.
<p>4</p> <p><i>Stage Four:</i> Learning to Solve Problems and Discovering a Sense of Self</p>	Approximately 9 to 18 months	<p>Your baby is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learning to solve problems, like how to stack blocks in a tower. • communicating in increasingly complex ways, using language, expressions, and gestures. • learning what to expect from others, based on interactions and experiences with parents and caregivers. • developing a sense of self.
<p>5</p> <p><i>Stage Five:</i> Creating Ideas</p>	Approximately 16 to 36 months	<p>Your toddler is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • becoming skilled in symbolic thought (e.g., labeling images with words: "Cookie!"). • using verbal means to communicate needs and desires. • engaging in pretend play. • learning to recognize and communicate her feelings. • learning to understand others' feelings.

(Greenspan 1999)

Good Habits to Get Into

From birth to age 2, parents and caregivers have a big part to play in helping children learn about feelings. The most important thing they can do is meet their babies' needs, love and nurture them, and comfort them when they are upset. This type of responsive care helps very young children build a strong, loving relationship with the adults who care for them. Feeling safe and secure, loved and nurtured, is the biggest and most important ingredient for a child's healthy social-emotional development.

There are other things that you can do to help your baby or young toddler begin to learn about feelings and how to express them. These are all good habits to develop while your child is young so that they become part of your everyday interactions and routines.

- **Think about your child's temperament**, or the way in which she approaches and reacts to the world. Temperament influences how intensely your child experiences feelings (like frustration or anger) and how easily she can calm down. A child who has strong feelings and reactions might have a harder time learning to control her emotions. Strong feelings probably feel even bigger and more overwhelming to her. On the other hand, a child who is easy going and allows changes or disruptions to "roll off her back" will probably have an easier time. Think about your own temperament. There is no "right" or "wrong" way to be. *But paying attention to your own and your child's temperament gives you important information about each of your preferences.* You can learn how to adjust or match your caregiving to meet your child's needs and help her grow and learn.
- **Talk about feelings.** At first, babies and young toddlers will probably not understand when you say, "I can see you are angry because Jessie knocked your blocks over" or "You are so sad that your balloon flew away." It might even feel a little silly to talk to a tiny baby about his feelings. But this is an important part of helping your child learn to identify and describe his emotions. When you use feeling words over and over as your child grows, he will eventually come to understand what you mean. As your child's language skills develop, he will start to use these words on his own.
- **Be a role model for expressing strong feelings in healthy ways:** "I just spilled your cup of juice all over the floor! I am feeling really frustrated. I think I am just going to close my eyes and count to five before I clean up." Through your words and actions, you can show your child how to manage strong feelings and recover. And when you are having a hard time, it's okay to make sure your children are in a safe place and give yourself a couple of minutes to calm down. You are modeling self-control and showing that sometimes you need a break, too.

Practice Makes Perfect

Children from birth to age 2 are learning a lot about relationships, feelings, soothing, and self-control. Here are some activities and strategies you can use with your child to help him or her begin to understand these big ideas:

From Birth to 18 Months

- **Keep your baby close.** Put on some of your favorite music, pick up your baby, and gently sway to the beat. Gaze into your baby's eyes, smile at her, and hold her next to your body. Leave the infant carrier in the car sometimes and hold your baby instead as you walk through the mall or visit a friend. Cuddle and nuzzle your baby during some one-on-one time before bed. Shared moments like these help build a strong bond between the two of you.
- **Read or tell stories about feelings.** Choose books with brightly colored illustrations or pictures and not too much text. Stories help your baby begin to understand emotions like frustration, anger, pride, and joy. As you read, point to the faces in the book and say, "She looks excited. He looks surprised." As your child grows, you can ask: "Who is sad on this page?" When he is able to talk, you can ask, "How is that baby feeling?"
- **Make baby-safe puppets.** Cut some pictures of babies and adults from magazines or catalogs. Choose pictures that show a range of emotions. You can also use family photos. Glue these to sturdy cardboard. If you'd like, you can cover them in clear contact paper so your baby can drool on them! Let your baby choose a face to look at. Let her look at the picture for as long as she'd like. Talk about the picture as your baby gazes at it: "That baby is crying. He is sad." Or, "That baby is laughing. He is happy to play with his puppy."
- **Play peek-a-boo.** Beginning at about 6 to 9 months, babies really enjoy peek-a-boo. Label your baby's feelings as you play: "Uh oh, where's Mommy? Here I am—Peek-a-boo! Are you surprised? Are you happy to find Mommy?" Games like peek-a-boo are also ways you can practice separations, reassuring your child that "I might go away, but I come back."



- **Look in the mirror.** Babies don't really know it's them in the mirror until they are about 2 years old. But you can help them become familiar with their own faces by making baby-safe mirrors part of your play. As the two of you look at your reflections, point to your smile and say, "I am so happy. I am happy because I love being here with you!"
- **Watch to see how your child responds to sounds and textures.** Use different sounds (rattles, toy pianos, shakers) and textures (towel, blanket, a square of lace, a piece of sandpaper, etc.) during playtime with your baby. Watch how your child responds. What does he like? Dislike? How much stimulation is too much for him? How do you know when your baby has had enough playtime (does he cry, look away, fall asleep, etc.)? Information like this helps you understand his needs and make him feel safe and comfortable.
- **Help your child recover when feelings get overwhelming.** How does your child like to be soothed? You can try swaddling, or snugly wrapping your baby in a blanket. Giving your baby a pacifier to suck, rocking, and singing can also help soothe little ones. For children over age 1, a cuddly stuffed animal or special blanket can comfort and calm them. Does your toddler need time alone to calm down? A firm hug or cuddle time, a change of scenery, a chance to jump up and down, or some physical play can also help toddlers recover. When you help soothe your young child, you are not "spoiling." Instead, you are teaching your child that she can depend on you. Children are also learning what to do to make themselves feel better when they get overwhelmed—a lifelong skill.
- **Know that your baby senses how you are feeling.** Research has shown that babies watch their loved ones very closely and respond to the feelings of the people around them. They know when you are upset, angry, stressed, or worried, even when you are trying very hard to hide it. They can feel your arms holding them differently when you are stressed and they are able to recognize that although you are smiling, your eyes are sad. So it's very important to take care of yourself so that you can take good care of your baby and help him feel safe, secure, and loved.



From 18 Months to 2 Years

- **Use pretend play as a chance to talk about feelings.** Your young toddler is just beginning to play pretend. You can help her develop this important skill by using a doll or stuffed animal in your play. Ask your child, "Doggie is sad because he fell down and got a bump. What can we do to make Doggie feel better?" This helps your child think about others' feelings, a quality called "empathy."
- **Make a homemade book about feelings.** Toddlers love looking at photos of you, themselves, and their friends. Snap some photos of your child when he is happy, silly, tired, excited, etc. Glue each photo to a piece of sturdy paper or cardboard. Write a feeling word under the photo, punch holes in the pages, and tie together with yarn. Let your child "read" the book to you and tell you how he is feeling in each photo.
- **Use songs to practice feeling words.** Your child's language is just beginning to take off, so give her a fun way to practice by changing the words to songs like "When You're Happy and You Know It." Try adding new verses like, "When you're angry and you know it, stomp your feet," "When you're sad and you know it, get a hug," "When you're cranky and you know it, find your Teddy," etc.
- **Make a cozy place in your home.** Just like adults, children sometimes need time alone to calm down. Give your child a space to do this by piling up some soft cushions and blankets, and adding a few stuffed animals and favorite stories. You can even get a large moving box, cut a door, and create a toddler-size "cozy room." Encourage your child to use this place when he is feeling overwhelmed or just wants some quiet time.
- **Suggest ways to manage strong emotions.** We often tell toddlers what not to do (e.g., "No screaming" or "Stop hitting"). Telling toddlers what they can do to express big feelings is even more important. When your child is really angry, suggest that she jump up and down, hit the sofa cushions, rip paper, cuddle up in a cozy area for alone time, paint an angry picture, or some other strategy that you feel is appropriate. The goal is to teach your child that any emotion is okay to feel and that she can learn to express feelings in healthy, non-hurtful ways.
- **Empathize with your child's feelings.** Sometimes the choices your child is being offered are not the ones he wants. Because your reaction gives him a cue of how to respond, it's best to stay matter-of-fact when you explain: "I know that

Taking Care of Yourself

We all feel stressed and overwhelmed at times. Thinking about what makes you feel calmer and more relaxed gives you an idea of what you can do when the going gets rough. You might try asking a trusted adult to watch your child for a little while so you have some time to yourself; exercising; writing in a journal; talking to a friend, counselor, or home visitor; or connecting with other parents. When you are a parent, it can be easy to forget that you need to be nurtured, too. But you do! Parenting can be hard work at times and all parents need and deserve support.

Pow! Bam! Take That! And That!

As you watch your child playact a battle between two action figures, your impulse might be to stop this aggressive play. But this is very typical for the toddler years.

Play is the perfect time for children to work out strong feelings, even difficult ones like anger, frustration, or fear. Watching children as they play, and playing with them, helps you understand what they are thinking about or struggling with. You can also get insight into where they need a little support and how you can help them make sense of the world around them. If an upsetting play theme continues for a while or you are worried about your child's play, talk with your child's health care provider, teacher or caregiver, or a child development specialist.

• Plan for tantrums.

Tantrums are very common in the toddler years because children are still learning—and sometimes really struggling—with managing and expressing their feelings.

Tantrums are their way of saying, "I am out of control and need your help to calm down."

Rather than getting angry, too (which is easy to do, but can be scary for your child), help

your child recover. Here's what you can try:

1. Put into words how you think your child is feeling: "You are really mad. You are so frustrated!"
 2. Give him a way to show his strong feelings: "Do you want to throw some pillows?"
 3. Give him the support he needs (hugs, time alone, his teddy, etc.) to recover.
 4. Suggest another activity to shift his energy to something positive: "Let's play with blocks."
 5. And, as hard as it is sometimes, try to stay calm during your child's tantrums. You teach your child self-control by staying calm when he has "lost it." This helps him feel safe and lets him know that you'll always be there to support him—even during the tough times.
- **Offer choices.** Choices give toddlers a sense of control and can help them cope with disappointment. You might say, "It is bedtime. But you can choose whether you put pajamas on first or whether you brush teeth first." Choices can also help children deal with angry feelings and move on. For example, during a tantrum, you might say, "I can see you need to cry right now. Would you like me to hold you or do you want to be alone?"

Putting It All Together

Understanding feelings is an important part of a child's social-emotional development. Babies and toddlers experience feelings just like you do, and know when you are feeling happy or down as well. When you use words to describe emotions, share in their good feelings, and comfort them when they feel sad or overwhelmed, young children are learning important social-emotional skills. This learning takes a lot of practice on their part, and a lot of patience on yours. But the time and effort are worth it. The social-emotional skills children develop in the first two years are ones they will use and build on for the rest of their lives.

Reference: Greenspan, S. (with Breslau Lewis, N.). (1999). *Building healthy minds: The six experiences that create intelligence and emotional growth in babies and young children.* Cambridge: Perseus Books.

you do not want the doctor to give you a shot. You are feeling really worried. But the shot keeps you healthy. It will hurt a little, but not too much. And it will be over with very quickly."

This helps your child cope and, hopefully, move on.

- **Help your child understand her feelings and behavior.** When you can make connections between your child's temperament and her feelings, it helps her learn about herself. For example, you might say to a child who has a hard time moving between activities, "It's hard for you to get ready for nap right after we finish lunch. Your body needs time to relax after playing and eating. I will help you settle down and start to feel sleepy. Let's choose a story and get cozy." Over time this helps your child learn to manage situations that are challenging for her.

Teaching Feeling Words



We often think only of teaching words for common emotions like happy, sad, mad, etc. But there are many, many other feeling words that we can use to describe the range of complex emotions each of us (and our children) experience every day. Children benefit when they develop a "feelings vocabulary" that they can use to communicate what they are feeling and experiencing. While babies and

toddlers won't understand these words right away, over time and with practice they will grasp their meaning and begin to use these words themselves. Here are some ideas:

Brave	Frustrated	Embarrassed	Safe
Cheerful	Curious	Jealous	Relieved
Worried	Friendly	Angry	Peaceful
Joyful	Shy	Bored	Overwhelmed
Frightened	Ignored	Surprised	Loving
Calm	Lonely	Silly	Cranky
Excited	Interested	Uncomfortable	
Confused	Proud	Stubborn	



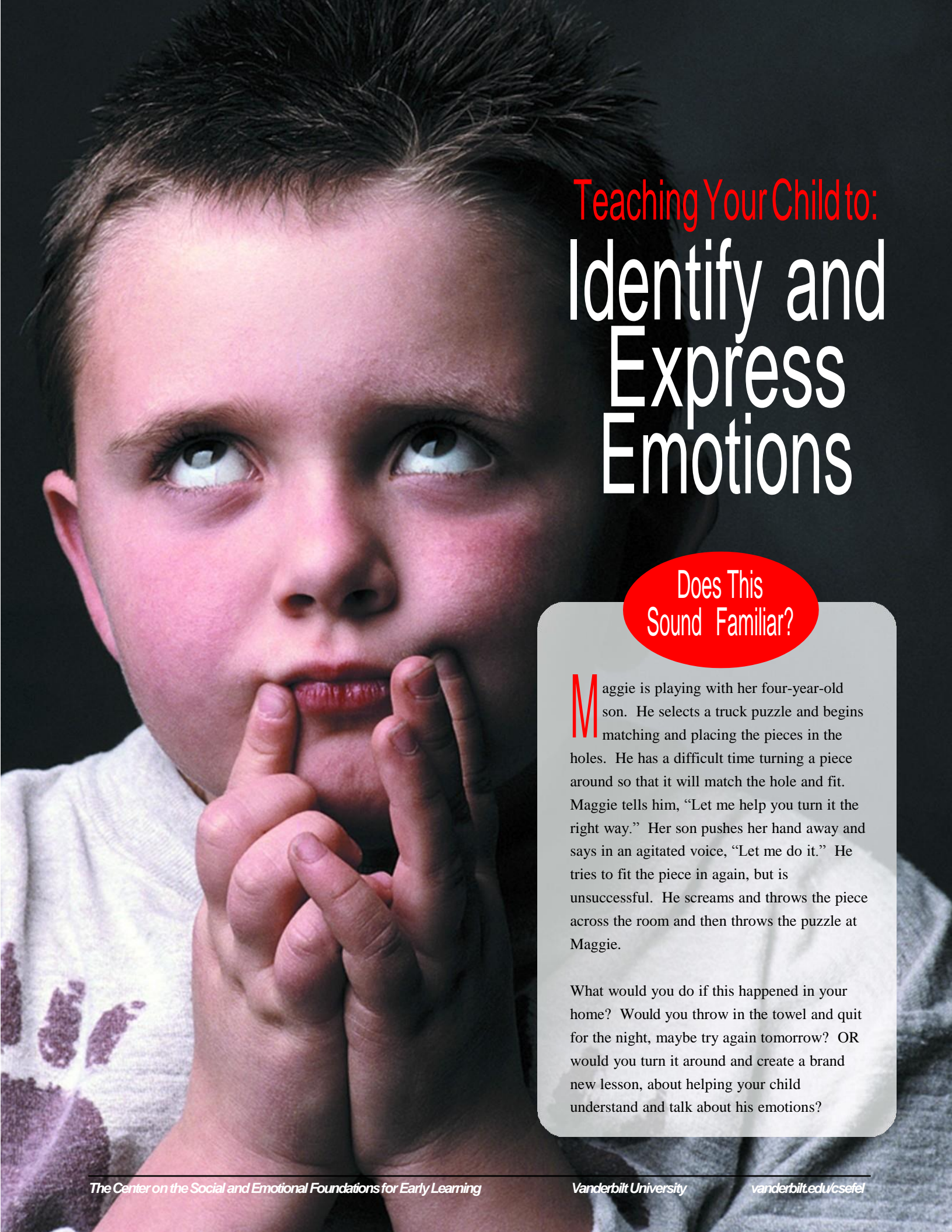
The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning



Child Care Bureau



Office of Head Start



Teaching Your Child to: Identify and Express Emotions

Does This Sound Familiar?

Maggie is playing with her four-year-old son. He selects a truck puzzle and begins matching and placing the pieces in the holes. He has a difficult time turning a piece around so that it will match the hole and fit. Maggie tells him, "Let me help you turn it the right way." Her son pushes her hand away and says in an agitated voice, "Let me do it." He tries to fit the piece in again, but is unsuccessful. He screams and throws the piece across the room and then throws the puzzle at Maggie.

What would you do if this happened in your home? Would you throw in the towel and quit for the night, maybe try again tomorrow? OR would you turn it around and create a brand new lesson, about helping your child understand and talk about his emotions?

The Focus

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 inappropriate ways. For example, when Maggie's son was frustrated, he threw the puzzle piece and the puzzle.

The Solution

Parents can help their children understand and express their emotions. The following strategies are some of the ways you can help your child express his feelings:

- Help your children understand their emotions by first giving the feelings names and then encouraging them to talk about how they are feeling. For example, you might say to your child, "Daddy left on a trip, you are sad. You said you want your Daddy." By giving your child a label for her emotions, you enable your child to develop a vocabulary for talking about feelings.
- Give children lots of opportunities to identify feelings in themselves and others. For example, you might say to your child, "Riding your bike is so much fun. I see you smiling. Are you happy?" Or you might point out a situation and ask your child to reflect on what someone else may be feeling: "Joey bumped his head on the slide. How do you think Joey feels?"
- Teach your children the different ways they can respond to specific feelings, conflicts, or problems. Talk about your own feelings with your children. "Remember yesterday when the water in the bathtub would not go down the drain? Mommy got so mad and do

you remember what my face looked like when I got mad? Can you make a mad face like Mommy's?" Talk with your children about different ways you deal with specific feelings. "When I get mad I take a deep breath, count to three, and then try to think of the best way to deal with my problem."

- Teach your child to identify and express their emotions in ways that your family and friends find acceptable. For example, you might tell your child "Sometimes Grandfather is angry when things don't go well at work. What does he do? He sits on the porch until he figures out what he wants to say about it. You should sit and think when you get angry."

The Steps

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. "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 she can deal with her 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 trike 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?"

- You can 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 express 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.

WARNING – Do not try and practice when your child is in the middle of a “meltdown.” Use quiet, calm times to teach and practice the new strategies. For example, if your child is having a “meltdown” because she does not want to wait for a cookie until after dinner, she will not be in the mood to practice expressing her frustration with words, rather than a tantrum. In this situation, you have to be deal with her emotions (e.g., “I know you really want a cookie now, but that is not an option, we are going to eat dinner in 5 minutes. You may have a cookie after dinner.”). However, you can talk with your child about the incident after she is calm and discuss the best way for expressing those emotions (“When you are frustrated that you can’t have what you want, you can tell me, but you

can’t hit me or shout at me. Earlier, you wanted a cookie before dinner and you hit me. The next time you feel frustrated, you can tell me and then take a deep breath and calm down if you feel angry.”)

Practice Makes Perfect

Here are some activities that you can do with your child to help him or her understand feelings.

Here are some activities you can do with your child to help him or her understand feelings.

Play **Make a Face** with your child. You start the game by saying, “I am going to make a face, guess what I am feeling by looking at my face.” Then, make a happy or sad face. When your child guesses the 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 (e.g., “Going to the park makes me happy.” “I feel sad when it rains 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 (e.g., “When your Daddy doesn’t call me, I feel sad.”). Then say to your child, “Your turn, you make a face and I will guess what you are feeling.” Don’t be surprised if your child chooses the same emotion that you

just displayed; it will take time before your child can be creative with this game. Once you guess, ask your child to name what makes him have that emotion.

Keep taking turns until your child shows you that he is not interested in continuing the game.

Read **a story** in a new way. Read a book to your child that shows characters who experience different emotions (e.g., sad, happy, scared, worried, confused, etc.). Stop on a page where the character is showing the expression. Ask your child “What do you think he is feeling?” “Why is he feeling that way?” or “Look at her face, how can you tell that she is _____?” Other questions could be “Have you ever felt _____? What make you feel that way?” or “What will happen next?” or “What should he do?”

Do not pause too long on one page and only continue the discussion as long as your child shows an interest.

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, irritated, proud, 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. Warning, this activity is more likely to be enjoyable to your child if you do it together, but might be difficult for your child to do alone.

Play “**Mirror, Mirror...what do I see?**” with your child. Using a hand mirror or a mirror on the wall, play this game with your child. Look in the mirror and say “*Mirror, mirror, what do I see?*” Then make an emotion face. Follow by naming the emotion by saying, “*I see a sad Mommy looking at me.*” Turn to your child and say “your turn.” Help your child remember the phrase “*Mirror, mirror what do I see?*” You may have to say it with your child. Then, tell your child to make a face and help him say the next sentence “*I see a happy Patrick looking at me.*” Don’t be surprised if your child always wants to use the emotion that you just demonstrated. Play the game until your child loses interest.

Teaching Feeling Words

We often only think of teaching common emotions like happy, sad, mad, etc. But there are many other feeling words that children should learn to express, such as the following:

Brave	Cheerful
Cheerful	Bored
Confused	Surprised
Curious	Proud
Disappointed	Frustrated
Embarrassed	Silly
Excited	Uncomfortable
Fantastic	Worried
Friendly	Stubborn
Generous	Shy
Ignored	Satisfied
Impatient	Safe
Important	Relieved
Interested	Peaceful
Jealous	Overwhelmed
Lonely	Loving
Confused	Tense
Angry	Calm



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

Putting it All Together

Understanding emotions is a critical part of children’s overall development. It is up to adults to teach children to understand and deal with their emotions in appropriate ways. They are experiencing so many new and exciting things for the first time. It can be overwhelming! We need to be sure we always validate our children’s emotions and don’t punish them for expressing their feelings. You might want to remind your child that, “It’s ok to tell me how you feel, but it’s not ok to hurt others or things when you feel (name feeling).” Teach them about their emotions, help them come up with new ways to deal with emotions, give them lots of time to practice their new strategies, and always remember to give lots of positive encouragement when they use the new strategy instead of reacting in the “old” way!



The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning



Child Care Bureau



Office of Head Start



Feelings Charts

How Do I Use These Tools?

When we think about teaching children about words that describe feelings, what usually comes to mind are common emotions like sad, mad, glad or scared. There are many more words children can use to express the full range of emotions that we all have on a daily basis. Talking about feelings with children, helping them identify their emotions and how to express them in positive ways, helps children say what they are feeling and experiencing. Feelings Charts can be used to show children examples of facial expressions for specific emotions. They can be used to “check in” with children to help them identify how they are feeling.





Frustrated



Embarrassed

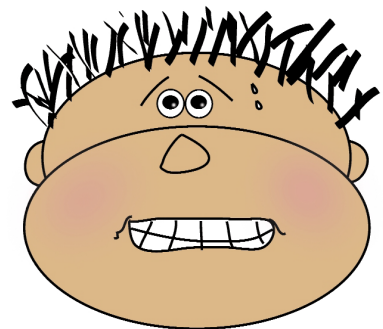


Sad

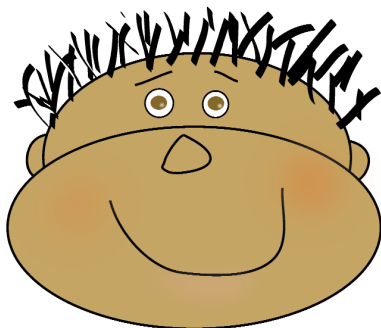


Mad

**This
is
how
I
feel
today!**



Nervous



Happy



Proud



Scared



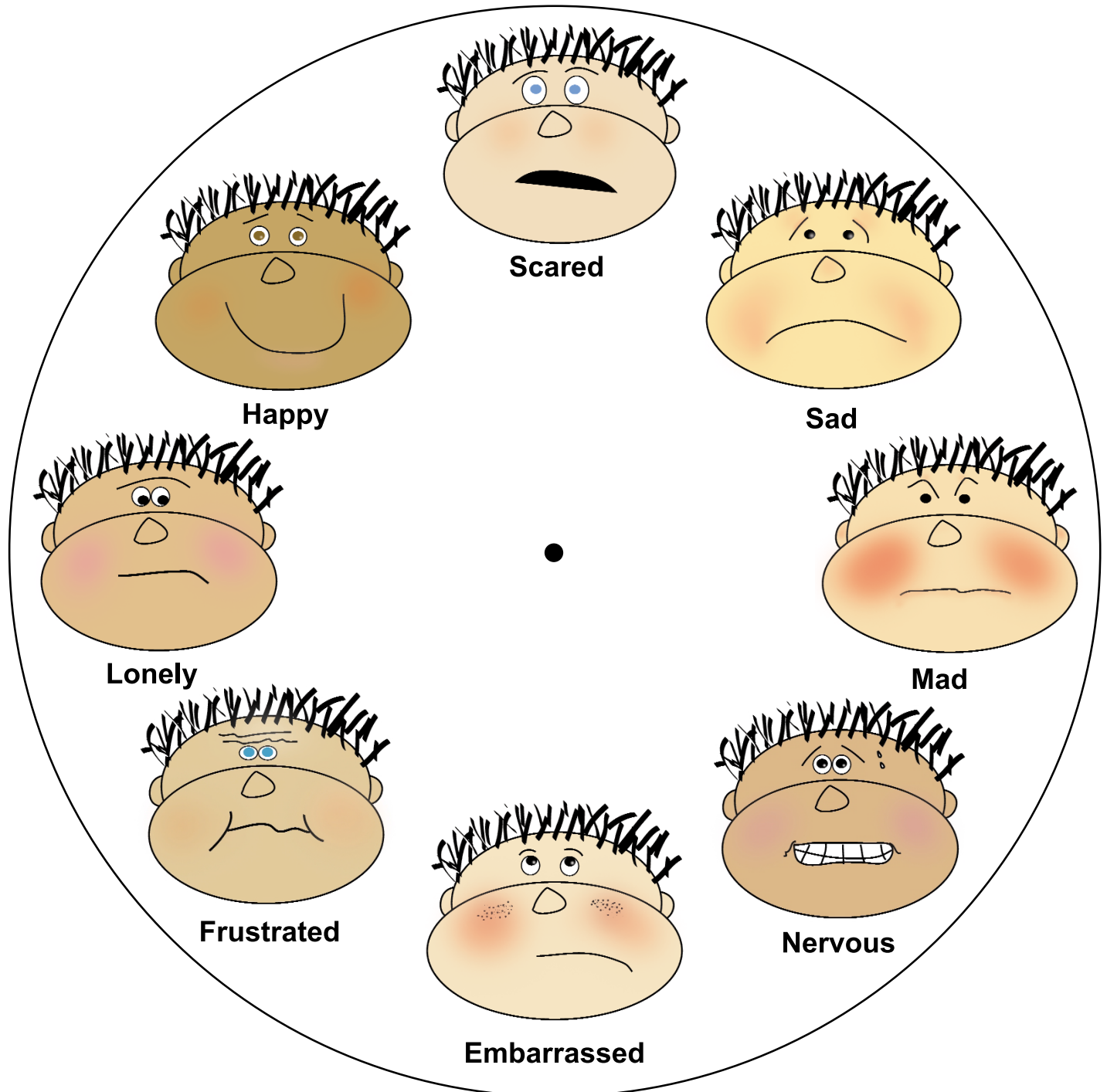
Loved



Lonely



Feelings Wheel



Emotions Vocabulary Chart



EXHAUSTED



CONFUSED



ECSTATIC



GUILTY



SUSPICIOUS



ANGRY



HYSTERICAL



FRUSTRATED



SAD



CONFIDENT



EMBARRASSED



HAPPY



MISCHIEVOUS



DISGUSTED



FRIGHTENED



ENGAGED



ASHAMED



CAUTIOUS



SMUG



DEPRESSED



OVERWHELMED



HOPEFUL



LONELY



LOVESTRUCK



JEALOUS



BORED



SURPRISED



ANXIOUS



SHOCKED



SHY



Gingerbread Cut-Outs

How Do I Use This Tool?

The cut-outs on the next page can be used with children who are verbal and able to put sentences together. It can help children understand how their emotions are felt in their bodies.

Examples

When I feel happy, this is how it feels in my body:

- I feel like smiling
- I have a ton of energy
- I have happy, active feet
- I want to sing
- My voice may be strong



When I feel sad, this is how it feels in my body:

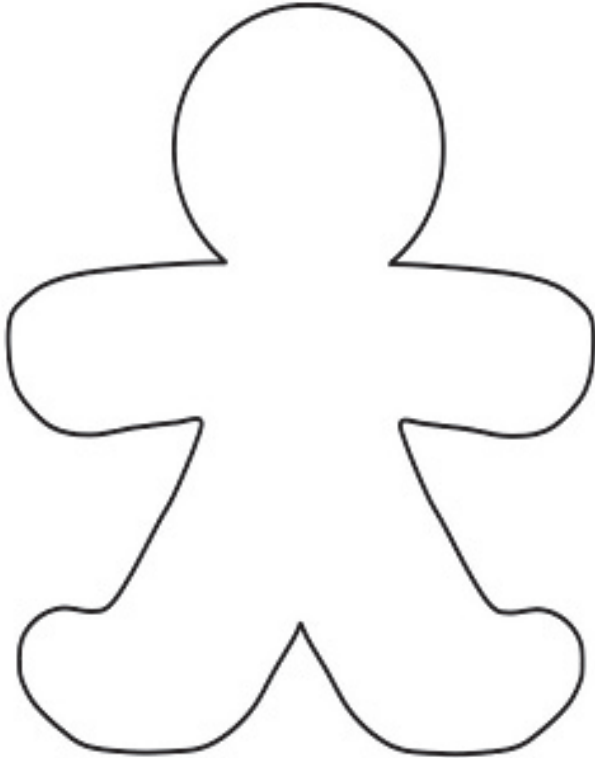
- I have very little energy
- I just want to sleep
- My face may frown
- My voice may be soft
- I may avoid eye contact



When I feel _____

This is what it looks like:

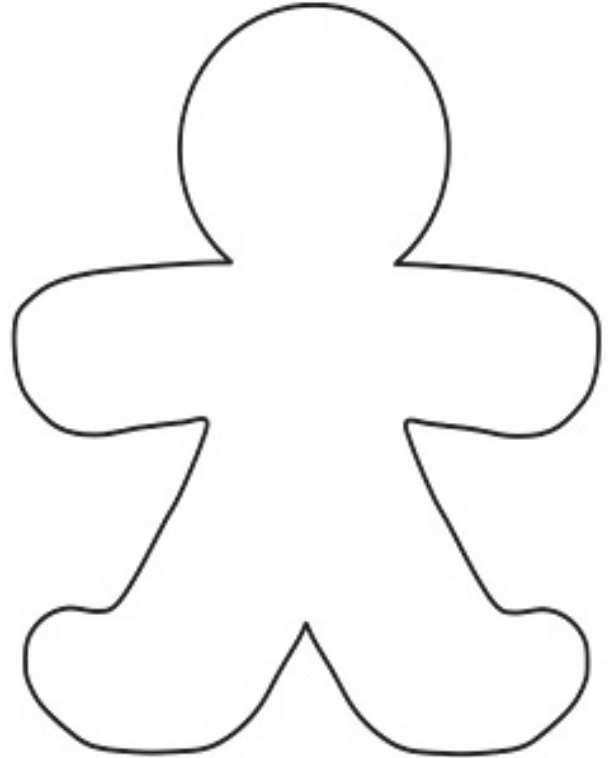
I feel it in my body here:



When I feel _____

This is what it looks like:

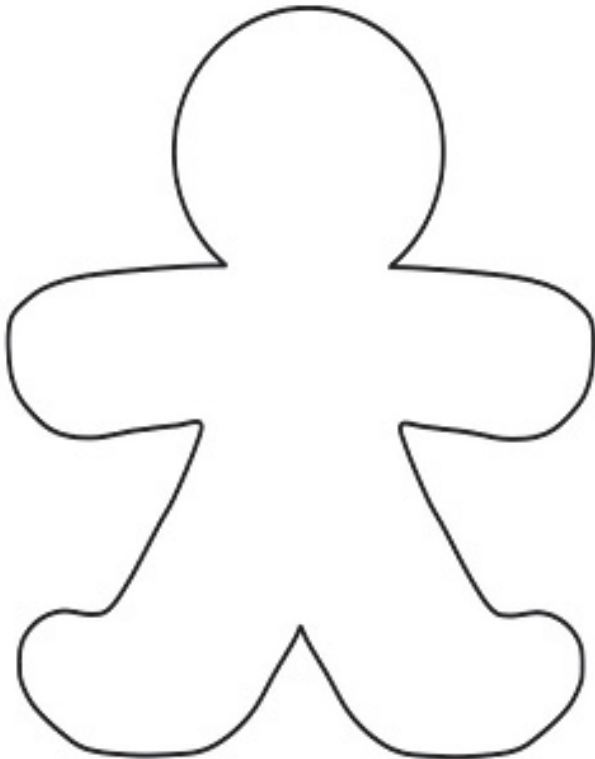
I feel it in my body here:



When I feel _____

This is what it looks like:

I feel it in my body here:



When I feel _____

This is what it looks like:

I feel it in my body here:

