

Early Years Library

READ THE
INTRODUCTION
TO THIS SERIES

Part of the **Social and Emotional Learning** Series

RECOGNISING AND EXPRESSING EMOTIONS

What do we mean by recognising and expressing emotions

From a very young age, children experience a wide range of emotions. Developing an understanding of what they themselves and others are feeling helps to build strong relationships with others. Many children need adult support to recognise their feelings. Using words and body language to describe and express emotions like sadness, anger, surprise and joy is the first step in helping children to manage their feelings.

Why is it important

Children who learn to identify and express their feelings in a healthy way are more likely to develop positive relationships with others. Helping children to develop a sense of empathy encourages tolerance and acceptance of others.

Learning feeling words

Introducing 'feeling' words into children's daily vocabulary helps them to identify and label how they themselves or others are feeling. Discussing the meaning of new feeling words is important so that children understand different feelings.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Introduce and discuss feeling words and reflect on what they mean
- Use visual tools like feelings faces and photos to support children to label emotions

Inspiring Ideas

- Introduce new and interesting feeling words regularly with matching expressions. *"If you're happy and you know it, laugh out loud, HA HA! If you're cross and you know it, give a growl, GRR, GRR! If you're proud and you know it, say 'Go me!'"*
- Add a Little Literacy! Introduce a new feeling word for each letter of the alphabet *"A is for Angry, B is for Bored"* See how far you can get!
- When reading or telling a story, describe the character's feelings to children using a wide range of feeling words and help to explain their meaning. *"She took so long to bake her cake, but she feels so satisfied! Satisfied means happy with how things have turned out"*

Tip

Begin with 'simple' feelings like happy, sad and angry before moving on to more complicated feelings like frustrated, jealous or proud.

Identifying feelings using facial expressions and body language

Being able to tell what other people are feeling by looking at their face or body language is an important skill that also helps children to recognise their own emotions. Giving children opportunities to discuss facial expression/body posture, and to practise making their own facial expressions, can help them make the connection with how we feel on the inside.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Discuss and reflect on how we feel inside during different emotions
- Use visual tools such as feelings faces and photos to encourage children's understanding of the facial expressions tied to emotions

Inspiring Ideas

- When you feel a strong emotion, talk to children about how your face looks and how you are holding your body. *"I'm feeling so happy, can you see that my mouth is smiling and my eyes are crinkled at the edges? I look different when I'm sad, though. My face frowns and sometimes I curl my body up like this..."* As well as happy and sad, some interesting feelings to act out could include feeling scared, proud or cross!
- Using pictures of faces from storybooks, magazines or drawings, ask: *"can you spot someone who is feeling sad? How is this person feeling? How can you tell they are feeling sad?"*
- Feelings Charades! Whisper a feeling word to one child and have them act out clues for the other children with their face, body language and tone of voice.

Tip

Mirrors are a great resource that children can use for practising their feelings faces.

Describing how we feel

Children express their emotions through their behaviour before they learn ways of expressing their needs and emotions with words. Putting feelings into words helps children to manage situations, particularly with strong emotions like feeling cross or upset.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Discuss with children times when they have felt particular emotions and reflect on other situations which might make them feel the same way. Use visual tools such as feelings faces or posters to support the discussions
- Use scenarios and stories to encourage children to identify how they might feel in those situations

Inspiring Ideas

- Let's Talk! So children can learn about feelings and how to express them, demonstrate talking about a time when you felt scared, angry, surprised or excited. *"Sometimes I feel a bit scared when it's very dark. When do you feel scared?"* To extend the activity, you might give children an opportunity to pick a 'feelings face' that is the same as the feeling you have just described and talk about a time when they felt the same.
- Show children photographs of themselves from their observations. *"There you are! How did you feel when you were doing this?"*
- So children can learn that feelings change over time, when reading or telling a story, have the children give a thumbs up when the character has a comfortable feeling or a thumbs down if they have an uncomfortable feeling. At the end of the story ask: *"How did [the character] feel at the start of the story? Do they feel different now?"*

Tip

To support children to describe and express their feelings, puppets can be used to show what it's like to describe a particular feeling: *"I feel happy today because we had so much fun playing."*

Tip

To expand children's feelings vocabulary, ask: *"Can you think of another word for that feeling?"*

Tip

Use praise when children talk about their feelings or describe them well. Use 'comfortable' and 'uncomfortable' to describe emotions rather than good or bad. This helps to show children that feelings are normal and that it's good to talk about them.

RECOGNISING AND EXPRESSING EMOTIONS

Recognising other people's feelings

Considering other people's perspectives helps to develop empathy and the ability to respond sensitively to others. This involves thinking about how somebody might be feeling and why. It is important for children to have lots of opportunities to practise this skill during the day.

Most commonly used strategies in evidence-based manuals:

- Encourage children to reflect on how others feel during daily activities
- Use stories and pictures to encourage children to identify how the people in the images are feeling

Inspiring Ideas

- Show children a photograph or a feeling face and ask: *"How does this person feel? Why do they feel surprised/frustrated/upset? What do you think happened to make them feel that way?"*
- When reading or telling a story, ask: *"How do you think [the character] is feeling? What happened to make them feel that way? Would you feel the same or different if it happened to you?"*
- Place 'feeling faces' in spots around the room and say: *"You have to stand up on stage and sing a song, run to how you feel!"* and *"You have to search for treasure under ooey-gooey slime, run to how you feel!"* Point out that children can feel different ways about the same things!
- Practise recognising emotions throughout the day, particularly when other children are feeling strong emotions: *"How does your friend feel? How do you feel when that happens to you?"*