

This week's skill:

Identifying Feelings



Like adults, children experience feelings, such as sadness, anger, fear, frustration and grief. Recognising feelings of sadness and anger, as well as other feelings, is important for two reasons.

Firstly, some children who are impulsive just hit out without thinking. Recognising their own feelings of sadness or anger is the first step in helping them to control their feelings appropriately. Instead of hitting someone, a child who can recognise his or her own angry feelings can learn to calm down, to speak assertively to the person

who upset him or her, or to ask for help. Secondly, recognising sadness and anger in themselves allows children to better understand other people which is essential for relationships.

In addition, being able to identify feelings enables children to understand the impact of their behaviour on others, and may help them modify their actions.

What your child learnt this week

This week your child learnt how to identify feelings of happiness, sadness and anger in themselves and in others by looking at:

- facial expression, such as smiling, frowning and a red face;
- posture, such as looking at the ground and hands held in fists;
- tone of voice, such as a sad or angry tone, crying and shouting.

Your child also learnt that it's okay for everyone to feel sad or angry at times.



All children need help to understand their own feelings.

Supporting this skill at home

Step 1: Recognise feelings in yourself, your child and others.

- This week make a special attempt to recognise and label feelings — your own as well as your child's. When talking about feelings also talk about what caused the feeling, and/or the physical signs that go with the feeling.
'You feel frustrated and want to give up when you can't do up your buttons.'
'I just broke my favourite vase. I feel sad and annoyed.'
'I saw you sitting on your own looking sad. It seems like you're sad because your teddy is lost.'
'I feel so proud when you try hard.'
'I'm so happy you had a good day.'
- Communicate by your attitude that what your child feels is important. Try not to make judgements about whether your child 'should' or 'shouldn't' feel that way. Things that make children feel sad, angry or worried may seem minor to adults. When adults communicate that the way a child feels is silly or wrong, the child learns to ignore his or her own feelings. Ignoring or undervaluing a child's feelings can mean the child does not develop a good understanding of him- or herself or of other people. The child is also more likely to cope poorly with feelings of anger, sadness and anxiety, because he or she doesn't have the skill of identifying and managing these feelings.

Step 2: Help your child to learn helpful ways to deal with emotions.

- Help your child consider the best thing to do when he or she knows how he or she is feeling. The plan of action may involve walking away from a conflict, calming him- or herself down, expressing his or her hurt or anger verbally instead of physically, asking an adult for suggestions, or using a strategy that's worked before. This step is vital — it reassures children that they can manage and gives them a feeling of confidence and control.
'Kyle, you were angry at Tyler but throwing the blocks is not allowed. What can you do when you're angry?'
'You feel really sad because teddy is lost. Remember last time teddy was lost and we found him? How did we find him last time?'
- Use labelled praise when your child copes well.
'You were really annoyed when you couldn't put the blocks together but you kept trying and made this all by yourself!'
- Read books to your child, such as *Feelings* by Alike and *I Have Feelings* by Jana Novotny Hunter.

Children need to learn how to label their feelings — happy, sad, worried, angry, scared, embarrassed, frustrated, disappointed or proud.

