

## Top Tips to Teach Kids about Feelings

### Use Storybooks to Talk about Feelings

Use books to talk about feelings with your child. Ask questions like “How is the boy feeling?”, “Why is he feeling like that?”, and “What can the girl do to help the boy feel better?” to help your child identify feelings, understand the relationship between events and feelings, and to learn about coping. There are also some great feelings books for children, like “Today I feel silly and other moods that make my day” by Jamie Lee Curtis or the “When I’m feeling...” book series by Tracey Moroney.

### Use Feeling Faces to Talk about Feelings

Draw 4 feeling faces on a piece of paper – happy, sad, angry, and scared. Once or twice per week sit down with your child and ask them to point to the face that shows how they felt today – explain that we get lots of feelings in a day so it’s ok to pick more than one face.

### Help Your Child Keep a Feelings Journal

Ask your child to help you decorate a special book and explain that this is going to be their feelings journal. For each entry help your child to draw the feeling face that represents how they felt today. Older children might also be able to write or draw what made them feel this way. Initially you may need to prompt this – “hmmm, so you felt sad today, let’s see if we can figure out what happened today to make you feel sad. So we went shopping this morning, did that make you feel sad? No, ok, after we went shopping you asked if we could go to the park and I said no, did that make you feel sad? Ok, let’s draw that”.

### Label Your Child’s Emotions

Children act out when they’re feeling frustrated and upset and it’s easy to get distracted by behaviour and ignore the underlying emotion. Tuning into and empathising with your child’s emotion can help your child to better understand their feelings – “I think you’re throwing things because you’re frustrated that we can’t go swimming today. It’s hard when we can’t do something that we really want to do. It’s ok to feel frustrated and upset but it’s not ok to throw things around the room.”

### Model Emotion Regulation Skills

Model how you want your child to manage their emotions. Where it’s appropriate, verbalise how you’re feeling and how you’re going to cope. For example, if you’re feeling disappointed because your friend cancelled your movie plans at the last minute you might say “I’m sad that Amy can’t come today, I was really looking forward to seeing her. I’ll call her tonight to reschedule and maybe I’ll do something else I love to do now, like baking, instead”

## Understanding Feelings

**Learning to identify feelings and to be aware of the feelings of others is an important part of a child’s development.**

**Little kids can have big feelings and these feelings can be hard to understand. When a child can’t identify or verbally express how they feel, they express their feelings behaviourally through tantrums and challenging behaviour.**

**Without an understanding of their own feelings, kids will also struggle to understand the feelings of those around them which can make navigating peer relationships even more challenging.**

**Some kids will develop emotion skills naturally over their development, while others will need a bit of extra coaching.**

**Teaching your child to understand their feelings will help them to:**

- Express their feelings in a more appropriate way
- Feel less overwhelmed by distress
- Regulate their social behaviour in response to feedback from peers
- Recognise and respond appropriately to the emotional reactions of others

**This tips sheet covers strategies for teaching kids about emotions. If your child continues to have difficulty managing emotions speak to your GP about a referral to a child psychologist.**