

KIDS HAVE FEELINGS TOO

Emotions are natural to every growing child. Feelings and emotions are just as strong in children as they are in adults. As adults, we need to remember to listen to the feelings and thoughts of children. We may not understand the intensity of children's feelings, but a child's emotions are very real to him or her. If we view children as the feeling thoughtful individuals that they are, we can enrich our own lives as well as theirs.

The following activities are intended to help children understand their emotions and realize that it is normal to have many different feelings and many different responses. It is equally important that adults are able to communicate and listen to children. We can teach children that every action leads to a certain feeling or emotion. And when children feel a certain way, they respond in some way to that feeling. Actions evoke feelings and those feelings bring about responses. This cycle—*action, feeling, response*—is universal.

KIDS ANGRY FEELINGS

Everyone feels angry at times and everyone expresses their anger in different ways. Many children express their anger in ways learned from their parents. Some children become loud and abusive—others may cry. Some children keep their angry feelings under control and then suddenly release their anger in destructive ways. Others keep their anger inside and withdraw, becoming silent and possibly self-destructive. Some children display anger because they feel unloved. Often, angry responses to situations provoke rejection from others, which only reinforces the feelings of feeling unlovable. Anger may also be repressed feelings of hurt. If children are taught to respond to hurt or unloved feelings in appropriate ways, it's possible to avoid angry explosions.

Explain to children that being angry means being mad about something. Ask children what makes them feel angry. Encourage children to discuss times when they felt angry and describe what happened to make them feel that way. Share your own angry feelings that you have had as well. Children might describe times when a possession of theirs was taken without permission or a friend said something hurt their feelings.

Write It, Toss It

Sometimes children have a hard time responding directly to the person with whom they are angry. Writing a letter can help release angry feelings. Suggest that each child write or dictate a letter that describes the actions of the person who made him or her angry. Encourage each child to include how he or she felt when the person did what they did and how the child would like the person to act in the future. After the letter is completed, have each child read his or her letter again to make sure he or she didn't forget anything. When the child is sure the letter is complete, he or she can deliver the letter to the person or just tear it up and throw it away.

KIDS SAD FEELINGS

Some children show their sadness by crying. Others withdraw and don't show their sad feelings at all. It doesn't occur to many children that sharing their sadness can help the uncomfortable feelings go away. Burying unpleasant feelings doesn't make them go away. The harder children try not to feel sad, the more intense the feeling may become. Encourage children to share their feelings with others.

Sadness that lasts a long time may turn into depression. If this is the case, it may be wise to talk about the situation with the family or a professional.

Sad Sock

For some children who are uncomfortable sharing sad feelings, a stuffed animal or puppet may help. Some children are more likely to open up to a stuffed animal because they know they will be listened to and not judged harshly. Help children make sock puppets. Invite children to stuff socks and add facial features using permanent markers. After children feel comfortable sharing their feelings with their handmade sock puppets, encourage them to open up to you or to any other person they might feel comfortable with. Children may first share with you or another person through the puppet, and then, if they feel comfortable, talk directly to you or another person.

SCARED FEELINGS

Fear is a normal response to certain situations or behaviors. Fear is as much a part of life as pleasure and accomplishment. Children experience fear—ranging from feeling uneasy about what is going to happen next to the fear of being physically hurt. Some children fear change, such as changing schools, moving, or going somewhere they have never been before. Some children fear getting hurt, such as falling, dogs biting them, or getting a shot. Children sometimes fear being emotionally hurt—failing a test, being teased, or losing a friend. All of these fears affect children's self-esteem.

Fear, however, can also be positive. Apprehension prepares children to defend themselves or keeps them out of potentially dangerous situations. Encouraging children to talk about their fears and listening carefully to the children can help them learn how to respond to their feelings in positive and constructive ways. All of these fears are real to a child. We as Adults need to respect and understand these fears, as well as help children find ways to alleviate them.

Imagine the Best

Instead of asking children if they are frightened, ask how something makes them feel. "How do you feel when you walk into a dark room at night?" Often children think the worst. Chances are they think there is a monster or a burglar in the dark room rather than something positive. Encourage children to identify what is happening, what they are feeling, and then help them choose a positive way to respond to their feelings. "The room is dark and I feel safe because no one is in it," for example.