

CORE SKILL: REGULATE

Recognize and Describe Emotions



What You Need to Know

Children express a wide range of emotions. At times, these emotions can be strong and overwhelming for them. Because they are still learning to understand and regulate their needs, wants, and feelings, these strong emotions sometimes lead to the display of behaviors adults find challenging, such as hitting, yelling, or even tantrums. Working with children to connect what they are feeling with language will help them to be able to understand their own emotions and behavior and learn social skills such as empathy (i.e., being able to relate to others' feelings). Similarly, helping children understand *why* they feel what they feel can help them communicate with their feelings in the moment.

Things to Consider

Sometimes the *reason* children get upset may seem unreasonable. But it's important to recognize that what they are feeling is **real to them**, no matter how small or silly it may seem. Say, "I see you are feeling sad," rather than, "Oh, don't cry; there's no need to be sad."

Development of Emotional Expression and Recognition

Between 36 and 48 months, children <i>may</i> :	Between 48 and 60 months, children <i>may</i> :
Express a broad range of emotions across contexts.	Begin to notice subtler or complex emotions in self and others (e.g., embarrassed, worried).
Notice when others exhibit strong emotions.	Use words to describe feelings of self and others.
Begin to use words to describe basic emotions.	

Setting the Stage

Activities and materials that support the development of an understanding of emotions:

- ◆ Introduce a feelings chart and use it as part of your routine (morning greetings and check-ins when needed throughout the day). Whenever possible, incorporate real photos of faces and feelings to make emotions relatable and more concrete for children.
- ◆ Similar to the feelings chart, use emotion picture cards to help children identify emotions throughout the day.
- ◆ Introduce a feelings thermometer and check-in with "how big/small" a child's emotions are in the moment.
- ◆ Read books about feelings. Consider reading books that address the difficult and strong emotions experienced by children with disabilities, such as "Why Does Izzy Cover Her Ears?" by Jennifer Veenendall.
- ◆ Incorporate social stories into your routine that preview feelings and emotions children may feel during different parts of the day or new experiences.
- ◆ Use puppets to model feelings.
- ◆ Sing songs about feelings and emotions (e.g., "If you're happy and you know it" with various feelings).
- ◆ Engage in dramatic play and act out different feelings or describe those of dolls or animals.



OBSERVE	<p>OBSERVE</p> <p>Carefully observe how children recognize and describe emotions. Listen closely to how they use (or don't use) vocabulary or non-verbal communication to express their emotions.</p>
FOCUS	<p>Label Emotions</p> <p>Focus children's attention to emotions by explicitly labeling your <i>own</i> emotions and children's and character's. Be sure to include both positive AND negative emotions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ While reading, "They look really angry. I can tell because their hands are in a fist and they are frowning." ◆ "I see you are clapping and jumping. I think you are feeling excited to hear this song!" ◆ "I'm feeling really frustrated that I can't open this jar." ◆ "I heard (Child) squeal loudly when we looked at this silly picture. Did you think the picture was funny too, (Child)?"
SCAFFOLD I	<p>Prompt Children to Consider "Why" Someone May be Feeling a Certain Way</p> <p>Help children consider the causes of emotions or appropriate responses to emotions. Label and describe emotions with characters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ "How are they feeling? How do you know that?" ◆ "Show me your happy face...what does happy look like? What makes you happy?" ◆ "What do you think made them feel so mad?" ◆ "Show me the feeling on the Feelings Chart that they are feeling. Point to the picture that shows <i>why</i> they may be feeling that way."
SCAFFOLD II	<p>Prompt Children to Label Their Own Emotions</p> <p>Prompt children to label their <i>own</i> emotions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ "Good morning! How are you feeling today? Can you point to the picture that shows how you feel?" ◆ "I see that they took your book. How does that make you feel inside? Let's tell them how it makes you feel." <p>For children who are nonverbal or have limited language skills, offer visuals or a choice between two options whenever possible. For example, "Your block tower fell. Are you feeling happy or sad?"</p>
KEEP IT GOING	<p>Consider what you learned from observing children on Monday, as well as their reaction to your Focus and Scaffolds. Find ways to build the activities in Setting the Stage into your regular routines.</p>