
Recognizing and Describing Emotions During COVID-19

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INSTRUCTIONS

This handout was designed for use with the “Recognize and Describe Emotions” professional development webinar from the University of Virginia. The questions and activities in this handout could be used in a work session (e.g., professional learning community, professional development session), for individual coaching, or for self-reflection.

Goals

- ◆ Understand how children’s emotions may be more complex because of changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ◆ Reflect on our judgments, assumptions, and biases about the ways other people, children, and their families express emotions.
- ◆ Explore strategies for helping children recognize and describe their emotions. Consider ways to modify the strategies to work in any learning environment (virtual, hybrid, and physically distant/in-person).
- ◆ Make a plan to support children in recognizing and describing emotions during virtual, hybrid, or physically distant learning.

Activity

- ◆ Listen to the webinar. This webinar is a production of the University of Virginia School of Education and Human Development, narrated by Caitlin Powell, Early Childhood Project Associate, and Stephanie Adams, STREAMin³ Curriculum coach.
- ◆ After listening to the webinar, use the questions below to guide your reflection on strategies to recognize and describe emotions with children.

"It's okay to not feel okay."

National Alliance on Mental Illness

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ What caught your attention from the webinar? What made that fact, excerpt, or example meaningful to you?



- ◆ Sometimes, we label and judge others because they express emotions differently than we do. We might overgeneralize how groups of people display certain emotions. These stereotypes can influence our interactions with others without us realizing what's happening.
 1. What assumptions (based on your beliefs and experiences) may you make about other people's feelings or ways they show emotions?
 2. How can this influence your interactions with children and families?
- ◆ Similarly, connecting with families can help us to better understand and support their child because each child and family will identify, value, and express emotions in different ways. For example, it is valuable to know how families discuss emotions and what signs their child shows when they are feeling certain emotions.
 1. How do you already connect with families around this topic?
 2. What is one way you can expand on your current communication to deepen your understanding and support for their child's development of this skill?



- ◆ Virtual, hybrid, and physically distant learning add new barriers to helping children recognize and describe emotions. Teachers can overcome these barriers by using the three effective practices for recognizing and describing emotions:
 - Label emotions
 - Prompt children to consider why people feel certain emotions
 - Prompt children to label their own emotions
 1. Assess each child on your roster and how they recognize and describe their emotions. Who may benefit from more support? What trends do you see across your children?
 2. Based on the needs of the children in your classroom and your current learning environment, plan for specific ways to use these practices to help children recognize and describe their emotions.
 - How will you modify to support and meet each child where they are? How will you adjust your strategies when or if your school changes its learning format?
 3. Regularly check in on your plan and assess its impact on children and adjust as needed, using the examples provided on the last page of this guide.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about how COVID-19 adaptations may be affecting children's emotions:

- ◆ **Source:** VCU Autism Center
- ◆ **Webinar:** "A Day in the Life: Supporting Emotional Regulation in Difficult Times"
- ◆ **Link:** <https://vcuautismcenter.org/earlychildhood/families/covid/>
- ◆ **Description:** A webinar to support children with ASD to label, communicate, and cope with the powerful emotions they may be experiencing due to COVID-19.

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- ◆ **Source:** Sesame Street Caring For Each Other Initiative
 - ◆ **Infographic:** "Talking to Children about COVID-19"
 - ◆ **Link:** https://cdn.sesamestreet.org/sites/default/files/media_folders/Images/PDF3V3.pdf?_ga=2.173697059.1849683920.1603372632-1716376387.1603372632
 - ◆ **Description:** An infographic to help children understand COVID-19 and the emotions they may be experiencing due to the pandemic.

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- ◆ **Source:** Virginia Department of Education
 - ◆ **Resource List:** "Centering Education Equity During COVID-19"
 - ◆ **Link:** <https://www.virginiaisforlearners.virginia.gov/centering-education-equity-during-covid-19/>
 - ◆ **Description:** A set of guidelines and resources to help educators provide equitable supports to children and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic.



LABEL EMOTIONS

- ◆ **Model** - Acknowledge and highlight your own emotions, either in the moment or by reflecting on an earlier time, such as, “I was feeling frustrated this morning when I couldn’t find the shoes I wanted!”
- ◆ **Narrate** - Point out emotions that children are demonstrating in the classroom or virtual setting. Remember to acknowledge both positive and negative emotions.
- ◆ **Use stories** - While reading stories, point out emotions the characters may be showing. For example, “They looked anxious! They had a furrowed brow like this and were picking at their nails.”
- ◆ **Play games** - Make up games where children guess what a person is feeling based on their facial expressions and actions.



PROMPT CHILDREN TO CONSIDER WHY

- ◆ **Model** - Help children understand why someone may be feeling a certain way by thinking aloud your process in figuring out how a person is feeling and why. For example, “I see they are clapping their hands and smiling. They look excited about the game we are going to play!”
- ◆ **Role play** - Set up scenarios (either in-person or virtually) for children to act out different emotions, and encourage children to talk about how each person in the scenario might be feeling and why.
- ◆ **Use stories and pictures** - Point out emotions in stories or pictures, and prompt children to think about why they might be feeling that way.



PROMPT CHILDREN TO LABEL THEIR OWN EMOTIONS

- ◆ **Use a feelings chart or check in** - Take the time to check-in on emotions daily. This could be a simple, “How are you feeling today?” or you could have each child point out how they are feeling on a feelings chart.
- ◆ **Use a mirror or camera** - Use a mirror or camera to point out different facial features as children make emotion faces.
- ◆ **Draw a picture** - Have children draw a picture of a time they felt a certain emotion.
- ◆ **Use songs** - Make emotions songs part of the daily routine to check in on emotions.
- ◆ **Use books** - When reading books point out the characters emotions and ask children questions, such as “Have you ever felt like that?”

CHECK-IN ON YOUR PLAN

- ◆ **Set a reminder** - Build in time bi-weekly to check in on your relationships with each child and consider how you’ve been using these practices. If they aren’t working, consider why and ways to adapt.
- ◆ **Find a buddy** - Sharing goals with a co-worker and checking in with each other can help keep us all on track.
- ◆ **Keep a journal** and make a quick entry when you try out a new practice. Note how the children react.
- ◆ **Record yourself** (live or video) and observe your interactions with children. Take note of how often you use these practices and how children react.