

Presentation Plan

Total Time: 59 minutes

Teaching Kids about Feelings

Objectives

Parents will learn:

- the importance of emotional literacy and competency;
- how to introduce talk about emotions in their children's daily lives; and
- how to use games to discuss feelings

Materials and Preparation

- Handout for each participant
- *How Do You Feel?* poster
- Whiteboard or easel with pad of paper and markers
- Optional: such children's books on feelings as:

The Way I Feel by Janan Cain

When You're Mad and You Know It by

Elizabeth Crary and Shari Steelsmith

I'm Mad by Elizabeth Crary

All My Feelings at Home: Ellie's Day and *All*

My Feelings at Preschool: Nathan's Day, both by

Susan Levine Friedman and Susan Conlin

Background for Educator

Children who can identify, understand and manage their emotions do better in life. They get along better in school, at work, with friends and in their important personal relationships. But people need help understanding the range of emotions, what prompts these emotions, how to identify feelings and what is causing them and, of course, how to manage very strong emotions. This presentation is designed to introduce the concepts of emotional literacy and emotional competency. It is also intended to help parents talk with kids about emotions and teach children coping mechanisms.

Introduce Topic (1 minute)

"Emotional literacy" is a concept that was introduced decades ago—but we don't always understand what it means in relation to children. If you recognize and understand your emotions, you're emotionally literate. If you can manage your emotions, you're emotionally "competent." Often "emotional literacy" and "emotional competency" focus on avoiding unpleasant emotions such as

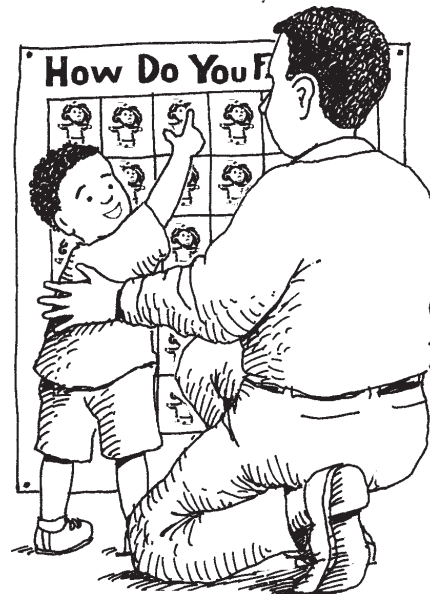
anger and sadness. But all of us need to be able to identify a wide range of emotions, including joy, excitement, pride and fear. We also need to know that emotions are neither bad nor good; they are simply part of life.

Parents cannot—and should not try to—make their children happy. But you can help your children by modelling appropriate ways to deal with feelings (including talking about them), by helping children learn the skills of dealing with emotions and by giving them opportunities to practice and test their emotional competency skills.

Small Group Exercise (20 minutes)

Divide your class into small groups and ask each group to discuss what children need to know about feelings—their own and those of others. After five minutes, reconvene the class. On the whiteboard, jot down ideas as each group shares two to three points about emotions that they want to teach children.

Your list may include at least the following: the vocabulary for feelings (words such as sad, happy, proud); the fact that feelings change; that feelings differ from actions; that feelings are a normal part of life, and not something to be ashamed of or embarrassed by.



Presentation plans are designed to help you present new or classic material. Each plan includes activities and discussion questions to help make the material relevant to parents.

Adapt this material to suit your groups. Permission to reprint the handout granted for educational purposes only.

Teaching Kids about Feelings

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Mini-Lecture (2 minutes)

Tell your class, “It’s important that talking about emotions be natural, that your children think it’s normal to share their disappointments, frustrations, fears, pride and joy with you. The challenge is making this talk routine.

“If I were to ask you why you don’t talk more about emotions, you’d have several reasons. One would probably be time. Who has time to sit down and say, ‘Let’s talk about how we feel?’ Besides, many of us are very private about our emotions. So are some kids, especially as they grow into adolescence. If you go home from this class and start quizzing your family members about how they feel, you’re not going to get far. In fact, that may make everyone even more reticent about discussing emotions. So look at what in your daily life, what in your home, can be used as a springboard for casual discussions about feelings.

“The *How Do You Feel?* poster is one example that works especially well with younger children. You can put this on your refrigerator or on the child’s bulletin board and use it to indicate how you or your children feel. For example, you can point to the poster and say to your toddler, ‘Let’s be silly like this elf!’ With an older child, you might say, ‘I’m annoyed—just like that elf—when you leave the milk carton on the counter.’ When a child seems troubled, you can ask him to describe his feelings by pointing to the elf that seems to feel the same way your child does.

“Talking about emotions is also often easier when the conversation is incorporated into an existing routine—mealtime, story time, bedtime. This reinforces the concept that discussing feelings should be routine, that the conversation doesn’t require a special time. Some of these routines also are—or can be—parent and child one-on-one, so a child may be more willing to share fears and disappointments.”

Group Exercise (15 minutes)

Now ask your group to suggest all the routines that involve parents and children. List these on the whiteboard. Besides story time, mealtime and bedtime, your list may include walking to school (or bus stop), driving somewhere, reading the newspaper comics together, chores such as kitchen clean-up or walking the dog, or bathtime. Some routines may be regular, but not daily: watching television or a video together, looking at the family photo album or, especially with older children, discussing news events. You may also want your group to add events and occasions that occur in daily life but are not routine—the death of a neighbor, the adoption of a baby by friends, a teammate’s move away, attending a play or puppet show, visiting an art

exhibit. These can also prompt discussions of emotions.

Once you have several activities on your list, say to your group: “Story time is an important routine in a child’s life. It’s also an ideal time to talk about feelings, even with toddlers.” Ask your group to brainstorm how to use time with books to discuss emotions.

Optional: show examples of books about feelings with the following comments:

“Picture books of almost every kind can be used to introduce the words for feelings. You can point to a picture and talk about what the person might be feeling. Certain books are written specifically to help children identify emotions, reassure them that these emotions are normal and acceptable and suggest how they can manage emotions. For example, books like *The Way I Feel* describe different emotions, especially emotions such as pride and frustration that adults don’t always expect kids to experience. Books like *Ellie’s Day* and *Nathan’s Day* show how feelings change throughout the day. *I’m Mad* and similar books help children develop coping and problem-solving skills so that they can learn to manage their emotions. Board books like *When You’re Mad and You Know It* help even toddlers understand the difference between feelings and actions.”

Small Group Exercise (10 minutes)

Now divide your class into groups of three or four. Ask participants to suggest how and when they can initiate conversations about emotions in daily routines. Assign each group a different routine; for example, one group has breakfast, another walking to school, a third bathtime. After five minutes, reconvene the group and ask a member of each group to report the ideas. Write down the ideas on the whiteboard.

Small Group Exercise (10 minutes)

Break your class into small groups again. Ask each group to discuss ways of using several of the ideas on the board to initiate conversations regarding feelings. If possible, assign each group a different age level of child. Allow enough time for role-playing through different situations. Encourage parents to identify feelings in every interaction. For example, “I feel so sad that Sara is moving . . .” or “I am excited about Mac and Dolly adopting a baby.”

Conclusion (1 minute)

Understanding your feelings, what causes them and how to manage them is an important life skill. Most children need help learning this skill. Regardless of your child’s age, you can start teaching about emotions right now. The best time: when your child is calm, not when she’s excited or frustrated or angry. That’s when she’s most able to absorb what you’re trying to communicate.

Teaching Kids about Feelings

Inventorying Your Child's "Feelings" Skills

Identifies Feelings

- ___ Uses words for comfortable and uncomfortable emotions
- ___ Uses gradations of feelings

Understands Feelings

- ___ Believes all feelings are acceptable
- ___ Knows feelings change
- ___ Knows feelings can be expressed in different ways

Copes with Emotions

- ___ Can explain how she feels
- ___ Has one self-calming strategy for each year of age
- ___ Can separate his feelings from his actions
- ___ Can negotiate with others and accept a compromise
- ___ Accepts responsibility for her own emotions and actions

Excerpted from *Dealing with Disappointment: Helping Kids Cope When Things Don't Go Their Way*

Make "Feelings Talk" Routine

Here are some suggestions for incorporating the vocabulary of feelings and comments about your emotions in daily life, to ensure that children learn the words for different feelings.

1. Use books such as *The Way I Feel*, by Janan Cain, to help your children identify different feelings. Look at the pictures in the book and ask your children to choose what looks like "silly" or "frustrated" (or other emotions) to them.
2. Show your children pictures—even old family photos—and ask questions such as "How do you think Mom felt after running that race?" or "How do you think your brother felt when he caught that fish?" Talk about a time when you felt the same as the person in the photo.
3. Mirror your children's feelings with comments such as, "You two look so contented, curled up with your books."
4. Articulate your own feelings. "I was so frustrated that I couldn't get the checkbook to balance, but I kept working at it and I'm proud that I found the mistake." "I'm worried that we won't get to the appointment on time."

Add other suggestions from the class discussion:

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How to Create Feelings Games Using the *How Do You Feel?* Poster

When you identify feelings, children learn both the words for those feelings and that the feelings are normal. Children who do not talk well or who are overcome with emotion can use pictures in books, the poster *How Do You Feel?* or a poster you create with snapshots of children's faces to signal how they feel. Some ideas for using posters:

1. When a child appears very upset, ask him to point to the image that describes his emotion. Acknowledge the feeling: "I see, you are scared." Ask the child if he wants to tell you what frightened him. If he says no, reassure him that you are available whenever he does want to talk.
2. Put a small picture of your child in a magnetized frame that can be placed on the appropriate emotion on the poster. Encourage your child to check the poster often. If she moves the picture as her feelings change throughout the day, she will learn that it's natural for emotions to change.
3. At the end of the day, use the poster to review the different emotions the child (and you, too) experienced throughout the day. Talk about what caused each emotion.

Other ways to use posters to talk about emotions:

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Parent educator Elizabeth Crary has written more than thirty books for parents and children, including several about children's emotions. Her newest publications are *Dealing with Disappointment: Helping Kids Cope When Things Don't Go Their Way* and the *Feeling Elf* cards. She speaks internationally on parenting topics; she has just returned from a fifth speaking tour in Japan. She can be reached at ecrary@STARparent.com, (206) 367-6425.

REFERENCE

Crary, Elizabeth. *Dealing with Disappointment: Helping Kids Cope When Things Don't Go Their Way*. Seattle: Parenting Press, Inc., 2003, and such other Parenting Press publications as:

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How Do You Feel? poster (2003).

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