

# Recognising and naming feelings

The first step towards starting to develop emotional regulation skills is recognising and naming feelings. Firstly, this is about encouraging your child to make links between facial expressions and feelings words. Secondly it is about trying to make feelings words part of their everyday vocabulary so they understand what they are feeling and can express their emotions.

## **Identify feelings in others**

Provide lots of opportunities to identify feelings in others. Talk about how characters are feeling when watching TV and films or reading books with your child. Point out facial expressions and body language – for example, “Their mouth is turned down and they are crying. They feel sad”. Cartoons often have exaggerated facial expressions which may be easier to read so this can be a good place to start. You might also ask your child to reflect on what friends and family members may be feeling.

## **Identify and name your child's feelings**



Sometimes it can be hard to recognise how your child feels. Be like a detective – look at their body language and facial expression, listen to what they say and their tone of voice, and observe their behaviour.

When you think you know how they feel, name the feeling for them. Start with positive or neutral feelings such as happy or calm (for example, “Tommy, you look really happy. You’ve got a big smile on your face”) before moving on to more difficult feelings such as anger and anxiety. This could later be extended to asking the child how they feel in different situations.

## **Use your child's words to talk about feelings**

It will make more sense to your child if you use their own words for their feelings. For example, if they say “mad” for angry, do the same to avoid confusion. If your child does not use any feelings words, choose the feelings words you think are most appropriate for their age and level of understanding.

# Talking about feelings

## **Make feelings part of everyday conversations**

Children learn about feelings and how to express them appropriately by watching others. Talk about your own feelings in different situations to let your child know that it's normal to have lots of different feelings. Also talk to your child about how you deal with feelings like anxiety and frustration.

Praise your child when they talk about their feelings or express them in an appropriate way. It shows them that it's OK to talk about their feelings and reinforces the behaviour so they are more likely to do it again.



## **Play games**

### **Guess the feeling**

Take turns to make different facial expressions and guess the feeling.

### **Emotions Snap!**

Print some cards with facial expressions on and play Snap! with them. You could use pictures of human faces, cartoons, and Lego heads. This encourages your child to recognise facial expressions.

Alternatively, you could print out feelings words and facial expressions and match the feeling word with the correct facial expression. This encourages your child to make links between facial expressions and feeling names.

## **Use visuals**

Visual resources like feelings charts can be helpful for children who struggle to verbalise their feelings to encourage them to express how they feel.

You could also use pictures of real faces, emojis, Lego heads, Widget symbols or cartoons. If your child has a special interest which could be incorporated, this might motivate them to use the feelings chart.

If possible, have the feelings chart on display somewhere in your house for you and your child to use at points throughout the day.

To make a more portable visual resource, the faces could be laminated, cut out and attached to a keyring.