

Feelings and Emotions

Emotional skills include being able to recognise, express, understand and manage a wide range of feelings. These skills are important for a child's ability to learn to interact successfully with others and the world around them.

Children who can understand and manage their feelings, stay calm and enjoy their experiences, are more likely to develop a positive sense of self and be better equipped to learn at school.

Children develop emotional skills through their relationships with the important people in their lives. They learn to manage their emotions and feelings by observing how others respond and how those important people react and respond to them.

Here are some ways to help your child manage his or her emotions:

- Soothe your child when they are upset. Be warm, caring and responsive to your child.
- Model effective ways to manage feelings e.g. "I'm feeling upset, I just need some time to calm down." Show your child that having difficult feelings is part of everyday life
- Encourage your child to talk about their feelings and to help them to explain why they are feeling that way. Problem solve ways to become calm and move on to more pleasant activities.
- Talk about feelings in every day conversations. Name feelings in yourself and others, not just focusing on feelings of sadness and anger, but also happiness, surprise and being excited. Link emotions to behaviours that occur during every day experiences e.g. ask your child how they felt when a particular thing happened.
- Try to understand the meaning of your child's behaviour and respond accordingly
- Teach children to consider the feelings of others e.g. show them how to comfort a child who has fallen over.

Shared book reading is also a great way to teach your child about feelings and emotions. Here are some tips for reading together:

- Encourage your child to think about how a character in the story might be feeling and why.
- Ask your child open ended questions to encourage him or her to connect with the story on a deeper level e.g. "Why does the boy feel sad?"
- Discuss with your child what the character could do calm down or feel better.
- Study the facial expressions of the characters and describe how they might be feeling by the way they look e.g. down turned lips indicate sad or upset; furrowed brow indicates confused or angry. Both you and your child could copy these facial expressions in the mirror.
- Link characters' emotions to your child's previous experiences e.g. "Remember the time when you fell over, you felt sad. What did we do to make you feel better? Do you think that would help the character in the story to feel better too?"
- Re-enact the story! Children gain a more sophisticated understanding of a story by acting it out.