

HELPING YOUR CHILD LEARN APPROPRIATE WAYS TO EXPRESS FEELINGS

Actively listen - catch your child expressing feelings and demonstrate your interest in listening through encouraging remarks, body language, silent listening and eye contact.

Help your child express and label feelings - encourage the expression of feelings with open ended questions. Example: How did you feel when that happened?

Praise - praise your child's appropriate expression of feelings
Example: Your child says, "I'm angry at my friend." Instead of: hitting his/her friend.

Homework: More feelings activities to try with your child.

Role plays - act out scenes that allow your child to practice expressing his/her feelings. See sample role plays on the next page.

During role plays, children are likely to demonstrate more and less appropriate ways of expressing feelings. Offer a great deal of specific, enthusiastic praise when your child demonstrates effective ways of expressing feelings. When your child suggests ineffective ways of expressing negative emotions (e.g. using bad language or doing something destructive), actively ignore this or briefly ask the child how that would make the other person feel and then quickly move on to another role play using a more effective way of expressing the same negative feeling

(e.g. talking it out or writing about the problem). Parents can end role plays with negative feelings with a question like: Now, what can you do to help yourself feel better?"

Sample role plays:

Below are examples of role plays that you can use. If you like, you may come up with your own ideas for role plays.

MAD: Parent sets up the role play saying something like:
"Pretend that I'm your friend and you want to watch your favorite TV show and I won't let you. What's a good way to let me know you are mad?"
Or for older children,
"Pretend I am your friend and I spread a rumor about you at school. What's a good way to let me know you are mad?" Child will give some response and parent should finish the role play by responding the way another child might. Parent should praise the child for appropriate expression of feelings.

EXCITED: Parent sets up the role play saying something like:
"Pretend that you are feeling very excited because it is your birthday. What is a good way to let me know how excited you are?" Child will give some response and parent should finish role play by sharing in the child's excitement. Parent should praise the child for appropriate expression of excitement.

SAD: Parent sets up the role play saying something like: "Pretend that you are feeling sad because a friend is angry at you and you wanted to talk to me about it, but I wasn't home from work yet. What can you do?" Child will give some response and parent can encourage the child to draw or write about what happened and share it with them later. Then the parent continues the role play saying : "Pretend that I just came home and you are going to tell me about what happened. "Hi, how was your day?" Allow the child to tell the parent about what happened. Parent praises the child for sharing his/her feelings.

ANGER: Parent sets up the role play saying something like: "Let's pretend that you are asking me to have a friend over and you feel angry when I say no. Let's practice some good ways to let me know you are angry." Child: "Mom, can I have a friend over?" Parent: "Not right now." Allow child to continue and help child express anger appropriately (e.g. "Mom, that makes me angry because I'm bored and I really want my friend to come over"). Parent should offer some response that acknowledges the child's anger and praises him/her for sharing his/her feelings (e.g. "I'm sorry that you are angry, but your friend can't come today. Maybe she can come another day. I'm very glad you shared your feelings about this with me.") Parent could also help child identify other feelings he/she may have in addition to anger (e.g. disappointment, loneliness) and encourage child to talk about those feelings as well.