

## Feelings

Teaching children to recognize feelings is an important element in guiding their behavior, says parent educator and author, Myrna Shure. Young children are able to understand and correctly label their own feelings and by age four or five, they are more able to recognize feelings of others.

The main reason for teaching about feelings is to help children develop empathy, says Shure. She says that a child who feels genuine empathy won't want to hurt others and the child is genuinely bothered by the idea of hurting others. This contrasts to a child behaving out of fear of punishment. The feeling comes from the inside and goes with the child for life. Fear of punishment comes from the outside.

In order for children to genuinely care about others, they have to first care about themselves. That's why we ask a child how he feels, not just the other child. Start by helping your children become aware of their own feelings; then guide them to realize that others also have feelings.

### Develop Feelings Vocabulary

Help your preschooler develop a vocabulary to describe feelings. In her book, Dealing with Disappointment, Elizabeth Crary offers four strategies to help your child increase an understanding of feelings.

#### 1. Read books that illustrate feelings.

Books can be used in several ways. As you read, ask your preschooler to guess the feeling

by looking at pictures. Ask what feelings are shown on faces. Read the text with expression showing excitement, anger, frustration, and other feelings. Talk about a time when you felt the way a character in the story feels. Ask your preschooler if he has had feelings like those in the story.



To get you started, here are some suggested books for teaching about feelings:

- I Like Me by Nancy Carlson
- I'm Mad by Elizabeth Crary
- Glad Monster Sad Monster by Ed Emberley & Anne Mirand
- Wemberly Worried by Kevin Henkes
- On Monday When It Rained by Cherry Kchenmeister
- When I Feel Jealous by Cornelia Maude Spelman
- Sometimes I'm Bombaloo by Rachel Vail

#### 2. Talk about your own feelings.

"I'm anxious about driving on snowy roads." "I'm so happy that Grandma will join us for Thanksgiving dinner." "I'm confident that I will get that new job." Share both your feeling and the cause of the feeling. Your ability to share your feelings gives your child a model for learning about feelings.

Your child learns that the "same" person can have "different" feelings at different times. Also, your child can learn that another's feelings may be different from their feelings. This perspective-

taking gives a child the ability to appreciate that other people can feel differently than they do about something, and includes awareness and sensitivity to other's feelings.

Becoming aware of others' feelings is a valuable social skill. For example: A child is able to respond with sympathy to another child who is feeling hurt or your preschooler knows better when to approach grandma with a request by "reading" her current feeling.

### 3. Reflect your child's feelings.

Watch your child and take note of feelings. "You are frustrated when you can't get your puzzle piece to fit." "You seem excited about opening your gift." "The loud sirens in the parade scared you." Reflect both pleasant and unpleasant feelings. Include both the feeling and cause of the feeling.

In the book, Between Parent and Child, Haim Ginnot says, "Only when children feel right can they think clearly, and act right." Strong feelings do not disappear when someone says, "Do not feel that way." Only when the listener accepts the feelings with sympathy and understanding, do strong feelings diminish in intensity.

Use many different words to describe feelings you observe in your preschooler. Using the words when a child is actually feeling that way gives the child words to describe how they feel. Some words to use are:

Happy	Guilty
Sad	Disappointed
Angry	Jealous
Afraid	Suspicious
Proud	Mischievous
Frustrated	Hopeful
Anxious	Surprised
Lonely	Bored
Embarrassed	Ecstatic
Interested	Exhausted
Confused	Joyful
Contented	Shy



Remember all feelings are valuable, not just the ones that make you feel good. Show you respect your preschooler's feelings and that they are important by letting your child talk freely. Ask your child to complete the following:

- I feel happy when....
- I feel angry when....
- Everyone feels afraid sometimes. Was there a time when you felt afraid?
- What makes you laugh? Why is that so funny?

### 4. Do people watching.

Go someplace where people gather—park, store, sporting event. Comment on what you see. Ask your child: How do you think that person is feeling? Discuss feelings and the possible causes of feelings that you observe. Remember feelings are not bad or good—keep your observations neutral.



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Prepared by: Joan E. LeFebvre, Professor, Department of Family Development, University of Wisconsin-Extension  
 Reviewer: Dave Riley, Extension Specialist, Child Development and Early Education, UW-Madison  
 Layout: Penny Otte, Office Operations Associate, Family Living Area Office, Vilas County

For more information on Parenting and Child Development, contact: Joan E. LeFebvre, Area Family Living Agent, University of Wisconsin, Extension, 330 Court Street, Courthouse, Eagle River WI 54521-8362, 715-479-3653, FAX 715-479-3605, E-Mail joan.lefebvre@ces.uwex.edu  
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