

An Easy Way In: Helping with Emotions in Young Children

Things are certainly very tricky right now for lots of us, especially those of us who are stuck at home trying our very best to manage our families, home schooling and possibly home working as well. Understandably, some of our children will also be finding this time away from school, their friends and familiar routines tricky too. You may find that your child is having mood swings, getting frustrated or even worrying more than usual. This is perfectly normal given the current circumstances.

I thought it would be helpful to share one of my favourite resources that can really help young children deal with their feelings, so that it may be of help to you too. The best thing of all is that it is simply a picture book story that can be shared as you would with any other story, but there are lots of other ideas you can use as follow up if they might be useful.



This is a lovely, bright and engaging picture book that is available on Amazon and other websites. However, there are lots of clips available free on YouTube so you can watch the story together at home free of charge e.g.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ih0iu80u04Y>

POSSIBLE FOLLOW UP ACTIVITIES

Find a quiet time, not when feelings are running high, perhaps even as part of your home learning time, so that you can explore the following suggestions together.

Stage 1: Naming our Emotions:

Some young children find it quite difficult to name how they are feeling, so a good first step is to check that they know the common names of feelings and situations where someone might feel that way. This could be simply folding an A4 piece of paper in half, then half again, and then putting the name of a feeling in each quarter starting with:

Happy, Sad, Angry, Scared.

There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers as the idea is just to explore what your child thinks; they might like to draw things that make people happy as a starting point e.g. parties, going to the park, riding a bike, chocolate cake, hugs! They could label them too, or you could help with that part. Then move on to another feeling and do the same.

You may find that your child is very familiar with these words and what might make people feel these emotions, or you may find they are a little muddled about some of them so this is an ideal opportunity to help explain and share ideas with them.

Once they have mastered these four basic emotions, you can always add or explore more feelings words, especially those from the story.

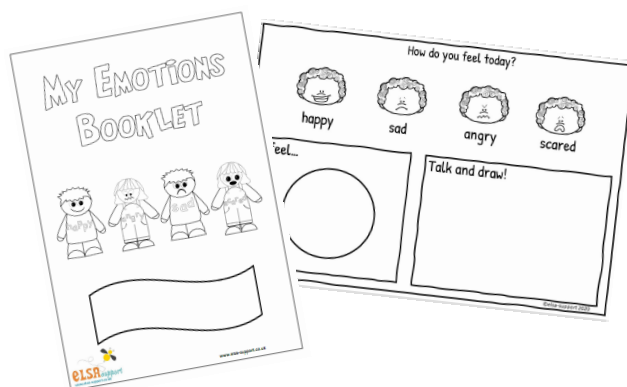
Stage 2: Recognising our Emotions.

Now you know your child is secure with naming basic emotions and identifying what might make people feel that way, they could repeat the activity but make it all about them i.e. What makes me.... happy? sad? etc. Again, there are no right or wrong answers, just let your child talk about their feelings to you. You may find you learn something new about your child. You may even find that under the current circumstances things that used to make them happy do not any longer because they can't do them right now. That is OK.

There are also lots of lovely emotions activities available at:

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/>

Some of these are free, so have a hunt and see which you like best. Here are a couple of examples so you can see for yourselves:



Stage 3: Recognising How We Feel 'In The Moment'.

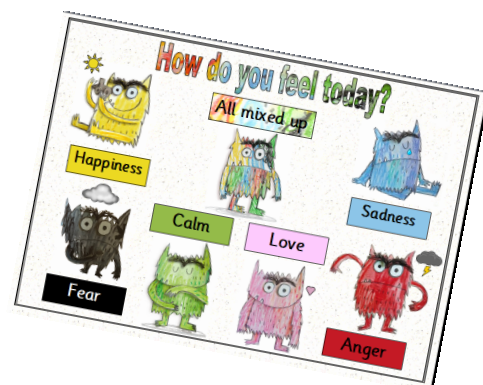
This is the hardest part of all.

It is fine when we have time to think about feelings when we are not caught up in them; it is exactly the same for young children as feelings tend to either creep up on us or pounce on us!. Even if you child understands the emotions words and can identify what makes them feel that way, actually feeling strong emotion can be very difficult to deal with 'in the moment' as their feelings all just 'spill' out.



That is why I love this story: a great way to describe strong feelings, especially those that might feel negative, is to say you feel 'all mixed up'. That's when your belly feels funny, you might feel hot and bothered, you might feel confused and not know exactly how you are feeling right now. That is OK. Just explain that it really helped the Colour Monster to sort out his feelings with different colours, and then he could work out how he was really feeling.

Your child might be able to point to one of the pictures on the Colour Monster Poster if using words is too much right now, or look at their emotions work that helped them name their feelings. They might want to add something else to the section that, for example, makes them feel sad or angry once they have felt that emotion. Just remember, once you can name your feeling you can start to feel better as you are a bit more in control and it is less scary.



And also, please remember, there are no 'good' and 'bad' feelings; every feeling is important and every feeling has a right time and place. It is important for your child to recognise this as well. We all feel lots of different emotions that are sometimes 'just right' for the situation, or maybe sometimes the feelings are just too big to deal with by yourself so you need some time and space to manage them with a little help.

Stage 4: What to Do About Strong Feelings?

OK, now we know that sometimes our feelings can just be too big to deal with by ourselves, what can we do about it? And how can you help your child learn simple self-help strategies when their feelings overwhelm them?

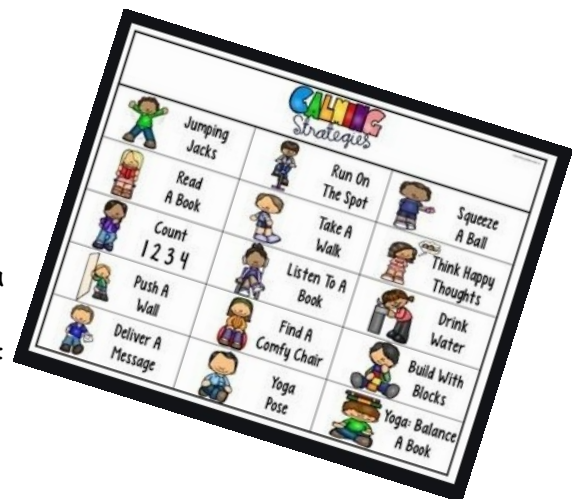
A great idea is to come up with a poster of a 'toolkit' of things that help your child feel good or help them to calm down if feeling angry, distressed or frightened.



What could go into your child's toolkit?

Well, anything that helps them feel calmer and more relaxed in fact. It will just depend what works for your child, but some ideas might be:

- Take some big, deep breaths in and out
- Have a drink of cold water
- Do something physical like 10 star jumps
- Eat a crunchy snack
- Curl up small under a warm blanket for a snuggle
- Go for a short walk (even just round the garden if you have one)
- Listen to some favourite music
- Have a warm hot chocolate drink....



Why not get your child to make a poster of all the things that they think help to keep them calm? They can come up with the ideas and then collect these as pictures for their toolkit. It is so much easier to use pictures for information when your feelings are running high, and a quick check of their poster to choose a strategy could help everyone!

Hopefully, using The Colour Monster story and these starter ideas will give you some simple tools to help your child manage their feelings during this difficult time. Just remember, it is OK to feel all different kinds of emotions, but it helps everyone feel better if you (and your child) know how to get back to a happier and calmer place with a little help and some TLC.

If you want to learn more about emotions, self regulation and anxiety, please have a look at the PowerPoint sessions that we have put on the school website to help parents at this difficult time.

Kind regards, Mrs Lewis
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