

Early Learners, Big Emotions

Why are emotions important?

Emotions play a critical role in everyday life. Children will feel many different emotions throughout a day. Learning to express, regulate and understand these emotions helps children to become emotionally competent. It is important to remember there is nothing wrong with having big feelings. Children should be encouraged to feel whatever they feel, what is important is how those feelings are managed. The key is being able to teach children to recognize and express those feelings in healthy way.

What is self-regulation?

Young children have many emotions and most do not yet have the tools to handle these emotions. Self-regulation refers to a child's ability to manage their emotions and behaviour. It includes being able to resist highly emotional reactions to upsetting situations, to calm themselves down when they get upset, to adjust to a change in expectations, and to handle frustration without an outburst.

A large part of helping a child develop self regulation over their emotions is teaching them what emotions are, so they can recognize what they are feeling. Here are some tips to help facilitate that learning:

1. Teach your child simple feeling words – begin with simple feeling words (sad, mad, happy, scared) and progress to more complex feeling words (frustrated, nervous, disappointed).
2. Create opportunities to talk about feelings – ask your child: how are you feeling today?, point out when you notice them having a particular feeling.
3. Share with your child when you are feeling a certain way, (ie. I am happy today because we are together. How can you tell that I am happy, What is my face doing?).
4. Sing songs or read books about feelings.
5. Use picture cards with faces expressing different emotions, talk about them and see if your child can tell what emotion it is based on the face.

A big event is happening in our world right now. COVID-19 is likely to have or will have a big impact on your child's emotions. They have not been able to see their friends or family for a while. As things are reopening like your local childcare centre, school or EarlyON; new emotions are sure to come to the surface. Seeing many people in masks, face shields and having to keep a distance can be scary or confusing for our children.

Here are some tips for talking to your child about their emotions surrounding COVID-19:

- Start by asking your child what they know about this situation.
- Pay attention to what your child says and really listen with your head and heart.
- Encourage them to talk about their feelings and thoughts. If they have difficulty expressing their emotions in words, help them express their feelings through creativity (e.g., drawing, music).
- Accept their feelings without judging. Emotions come and go, it's okay to feel sad, upset, or distressed.
- Answer questions calmly, reassuringly, and honestly. Give answers that your child will understand for their age and ability.
- Correct misinformation.
- Avoid telling them not to worry. The goal is to help your child realistically evaluate risk, based on reliable information.
- Focus on how they can protect themselves and others from getting sick.
- Ask your child to come to you if they have questions or concerns as they may hear or see strange things and wonder if they are true.
- Provide comfort and be patient.
- Check on your child's feelings on a regular basis

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/amh/if-amh-mhpiip-disaster-pandemic-coping-for-children-families.pdf>

Here are some children's books that teach about emotions:

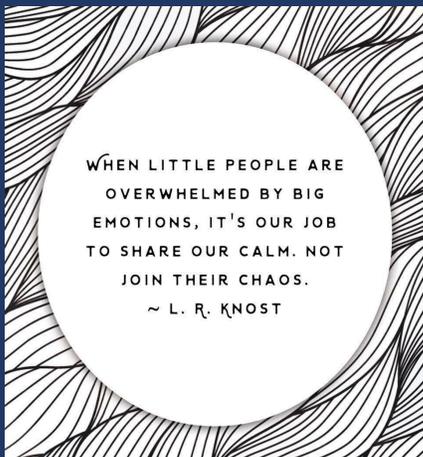
The Way I feel – Janan Cain

The Feelings Book – Todd Parr

Duck & Goose How Are You Feeling – Tad Hills

Today I Feel Silly & Other Moods That Make My Day – Jamie Lee Curtis

My Many Coloured Days – Dr. Seuss



YouTube Reference Videos for emotions surrounding COVID-19

Coping With Big Emotions: Hamilton Health Sciences

Talking To Children About COVID-19: Hamilton Health Sciences

Coronavirus Explained (For Kids!): Dr. Michelle Dickinson