Discovering Feelings

CENTER FOR
Early Childhood
Mental Health
Consultation
Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development

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Happy

Place pictures of children who appear to be **HAPPY** in the space provided on this page.

Happy

DISCUSSION

What makes you happy?

What do you do when you are happy?

On the count of three, let's put on our **happy** faces!

Activity

Telling stories is a great way to help young children understand and relate to new concepts. Create a story about a child who is happy to be eating his/her favorite snack. Encourage children to talk about their favorite snacks, and add those to the story. For infants, suggest some typical first foods they may have eaten for example, milk, bananas, apples, or sweet potatoes. Have them pretend to be eating their favorite snacks, and watch for signs of happiness. When appropriate, label their expressions and your own as being "happy."

Tips for Young Infants

With infants, you will generally need to share what you know about the baby in order to build the receptive language and understanding of younger infants. You may ask, "What else makes you happy?" and then after giving the infant wait time, say, "I know that a kiss from Grandma, eating bananas, and taking a nap make you happy." You may ask, "What do you do when you're happy?" After giving the infant wait time, you may say, "When you are happy, I see you smile and coo, and hear you gurgle." During these interactions, you should make a happy face and describe your emotions, and notice as the infant mirrors your emotion.

Sad

Place pictures of children who appear to be **SAD** in the space provided on this page.

Sad

DISCUSSION

What do you do when you are sad?

What do you do when other people are sad?

How can your feelings change when you are sad?

On the count of three, let's put on our **sad** faces!

Activity

It is often helpful to have for children draw pictures of emotions that may be hard for them to talk about, or those that are sad or scary for them to experience. Provide children with an assortment of large crayons and butcher paper so they can draw with plenty of space.

Tips for Young Infants

A simple way to introduce the concept of sadness is to look for teachable moments during the day. For example, teachable moments might come when a child is being left at child care or when all the milk in his/her bottle is gone and he/she begins to cry. Use these and other opportunities to introduce the word "sad" into the child's vocabulary. Let him/her know it's all right to be sad, and remind him/her that feelings can change. You might say, "I know that it is hard when you are wet and I need to change your diaper. In a few minutes we will have you all dry, and you may feel all better."

Excited

Place pictures of children who appear to be **EXCITED** in the space provided on this page.

Excited

DISCUSSION

What makes you excited?

What do you do when you are excited?

When the music begins again,
let's all get **excited**!

Activity

Here's a chance to show excitement in motion. Find an age appropriate song that expresses excitement in the lyrics or one that gets the children in the group energized. Encourage children to dance or move when music is played by suggesting they wave their hands, jump around, dance, and generally become animated. Identify this display of emotion as being excited. Stop and start the music, and encourage them to notice the difference in their feelings and to recognize when they experience excitement through their movement and facial expressions. This will also help them understand that feelings can change.

Tips for Young Infants

Sit with an infant and turn on some music. Begin to wave your arms, sing, and generally show excitability in your actions. Identify your emotion as being excited, and encourage the baby to mirror your actions. If he/she does, label his/her expression as being excited. You might say, "I see you're excited because you're waving your arms!"

Angry

Place pictures of children who appear to be **ANGRY** in the space provided on this page.

Angry

DISCUSSION

What makes you angry?

What do you do when you are angry?

What is a good way to handle being angry?

On the count of three, let's put on our **angry** faces!

Activity

Read a book that contains a story about a character who becomes angry. Highlight from the story what is appropriate versus inappropriate behavior, and be sure to emphasize a suitable resolution to any conflict that may have occurred. You might also use this moment to go over the rules of what is appropriate behavior in your child care or home setting for example, talking with someone about what's causing you to be angry *is* OK, but hitting is *not* OK.

Tips for Young Infants

You can use opportunities that come up naturally to help younger infants begin to recognize their own anger. When babies appear to be angry or frustrated, focus on labeling the emotion and showing the child what an angry face looks like by holding up a mirror for them to look in.

Surprised

Place pictures of children who appear to be **SURPRISED** in the space provided on this page.

Surprised

DISCUSSION

Can you tell me about a time when you were surprised?

What do you do when you are surprised?

On the count of three, let's put on our **surprised** faces!

Activity

Young children typically enjoy being surprised when they feel that they are in a safe environment. You can use stuffed animals or puppets to help you play with infants and toddlers, and use the characters to surprise them. You can hide the puppet or animal behind your back, then pull him out and say, "Surprise!" You can laugh with the child and say, "I surprised you!" or, "Your face looks surprised the doggie must have surprised you!" Allow children to reciprocate if they can, and make sure to act surprised. You can say, "You surprised me! Look at my face I am so surprised!"

Tips for Young Infants

A game of "Peekaboo" may help you convey the concept of surprise. Focus on the anticipation of being surprised when you remove your hands from your eyes, and talk about how it feels to be surprised. Label your expression as being surprised, and encourage children to mimic your facial expressions and hand gestures.