

## Family Pack 2 – Self-awareness - Emotions

You may have heard of the terms, emotional intelligence or emotional capability. These terms refer to the of set of skills required to manage our own emotions and respond to other people’s. Identifying, understanding and responding to our emotions and the emotions of others are very important skills for all of us to have.

Children experience a whole range of different feelings just like you do as adults. Learning about our emotions and how to manage them, particularly our unpleasant emotions, helps us to form happy relationships with others. We all need help to do this, even as adults.

We often talk about our feelings. Feelings are directly linked to our emotions. For example - we may feel happy because we have received a present. When this feeling continues, we are experiencing the emotion of happiness. Feelings and emotions come and go throughout the day. Some emotions may last only a short time for such as surprise. Sometimes emotions linger and become a mood.

### Skills for children’s learning about their own emotions include:

- Learning to name their own emotions.
- Recognising the physical and emotional responses we have to each of these emotions.
- Learning to express their own feelings verbally.
- Learning effective strategies for managing feelings.
- Learning to calm oneself down in the face of overwhelming emotions.
- Learning strategies for helping themselves to feel better when they are experiencing unpleasant emotions.



### The first step to identifying and managing our emotions is to be able to ‘name them’.

Children often don’t have a wide range of vocabulary to describe how they are really feeling and usually use the basic terms such as; happy, sad, angry, scared, to describe their feelings. As adults, we know there are many more words to accurately describe our emotions. For example - when we are looking forward to Christmas, we might say we say we are feeling excited, curious, thrilled, eager, enthusiastic which are all different intensities of the emotion of happiness.

Children need our support to learn about their emotions and talk about them. This is not just for younger children. Older children can also struggle with emotions. Particularly as they become more independent in their thinking and start to explore their own self- identity and social status. It is very useful for them to have good skills for expressing their own emotions and reading the emotions of others in social situations.

## Tips for helping your child identify and name emotions

- **Bring your child's attention to emotions.** When someone (family members, friends, character in a book or on TV) is expressing an emotion, use this opportunity to label the particular emotion.
- **Help them learn the names of emotions.** Talk to your children about how they feel about everyday things going on around them and encourage them to use descriptive words to describe how they feel.
- **Talk about how you feel.** Demonstrate the use of different language to describe how you feel to demonstrate how feelings can change throughout the day.
- **Use literature.** A great way for children to explore emotions is through literature, no matter what age they are. Stories that describe people expressing their emotions can help your child to relate the characters and how they are feeling. This can also help your child to develop empathy for others.
- **Watch television or movies together and identify the emotions of the characters.** Discuss the reasons for the emotions and the character's responses. Ask children "How might you feel if that happened to you?"

## Emotional regulation

Emotional regulation refers to a child's ability to manage their own emotions, and the thoughts and behaviour that go with these emotions. Children learn to regulate their emotions initially by watching the adults in their lives. Eventually children will develop skills to manage and regulate their own behaviours.

### Big Emotions

The emotions we all struggle with the most are the more intense emotions, or they are sometimes called, the 'big emotions'. As a child, these intense or big emotions can sometimes be overwhelming, frightening and very hard to understand. We all know that some emotions can make us feel a range of unpleasant feelings that can affect our whole body.

With an emotional reaction, the brain changes what is happening in the body. For example, we may experience tensed muscles, faster breathing, heart racing or sweating as a response to fear or anger. We know that these responses form part of our fight and flight response for survival. For children, these very unpleasant feelings can be distressing and confusing. This explains why children may respond by lashing out, having a meltdown or a tantrum because they just can't cope.



### It is normal for children to sometimes struggle with emotions especially more intense emotions or 'big' emotions.

The higher the intensity of the emotion you experience, that harder it is to control. The aim is to give children the skills to keep their emotions at a manageable level of intensity. As children are learning about their emotions, they need lots of parental support and patience. Just as they do with all the other things they are learning, they will sometimes struggle, and sometimes make mistakes.

### Key messages for kids

- It's ok to feel angry or upset: We sometimes can't help feeling angry or upset but we can manage how we act when we are feeling like this.
- When we are feeling unpleasant feelings, there are things we can do to help ourselves feel better.
- Big (intense) emotions can be hard to deal with for everyone and sometimes we just need to stop, calm down and take some deep breaths. If you are struggling, always ask for help.

## Skills for emotional regulation

Supporting children to understand and manage emotions is very important in their day to day life. The skills children need for emotional regulation include:

- Understanding their own emotions and being able to communicate how they feel.
- Knowing the triggers for their emotions and how these emotions can build in intensity.
- Managing unpleasant, intense or big emotions in appropriate ways.
- Using strategies to calm down when experiencing unpleasant or big emotions.
- Maintaining calm and focus of thought during periods of stress or in challenging situations.



## Tips for helping your child manage emotions

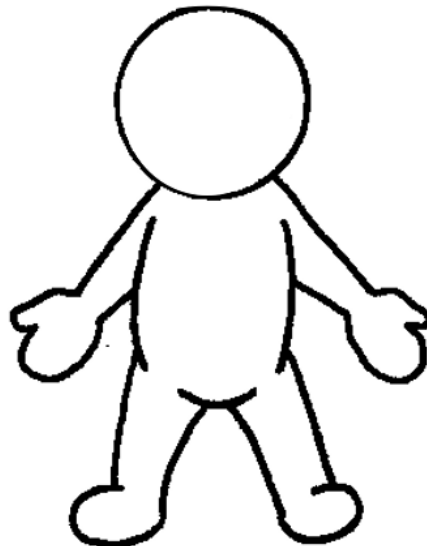
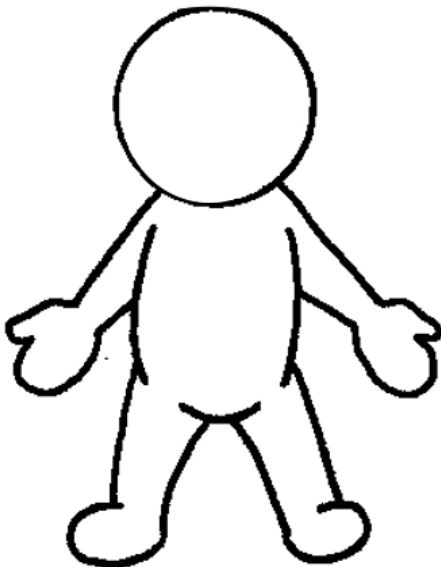
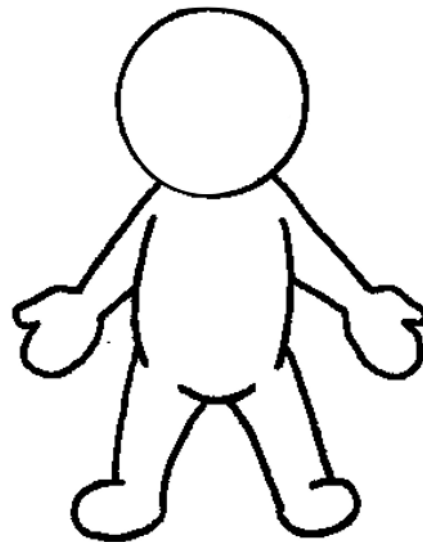
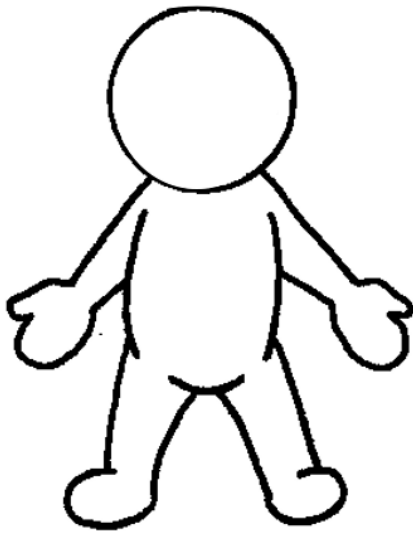
- **Model positive emotional regulation skills** for your child with warm responses.
- **Help them to read the body cues.** When an emotion is building in intensity, we experience changes in our bodies we call body cues. By helping your children recognise these body cues they have more chance of managing the emotion before it gets too big.
- **Help them to discover their emotional triggers.** There are often triggers that are more likely to lead a particular child to have emotional issues. Help them to see what sets them off or makes them get emotional (e.g., being over tired, getting overheated, being frustrated, being hungry, being embarrassed or jealous).
- **Explore coping strategies together.**
  - **Calm-down strategies:** taking deep breaths, counting to ten, belly breathing (put your hands on your belly and breath slowly in and out).
  - **Identifying and naming the emotion:** remember this powerful tool for managing emotions.
  - **Redirecting or distraction techniques** away from the issue: by refocussing the mind onto something else you automatically slow down it's emotional response. That is why exercise is such a good tool. The brain is then focussing on the activity you are doing and letting you get control over the emotional reaction. If your child is highly emotional, try distracting them with play or take them out for a game until they calm down enough to talk about and manage the situation.
  - **Reframing:** by looking at it from a different view. How we feel about a situation is driven by what we are thinking about the situation and these feelings will affect what actions we take. By helping your child to think at the situation in a more calm, controlled and positive manner you can bring the emotion level down. For example: "It is okay to make mistakes, we all make mistakes, it is part of learning" or "I know you are upset about selling our home, but on the bright side we are going to a lovely brand new house which is closer to your friends".
- **Give loads of praise and encouragement** when your children are trying to effectively manage their emotions, be generous with your acknowledgement and praise.

If you feel that your child is struggling with emotional regulation after you have tried these tips you can seek advice from your GP or your child's teacher for guidance and support.

## Family Activity Sheet 2 – Emotions

### Emotions – Looks, feels, sounds like.

Print out a copy of this sheet for your children - if you want, you can do this as a whole family. Illustrate what the emotions of happiness, sadness, anger and excitement look like, feel like and sound like. This can be done using colours, pictures, symbols, words, speech bubbles etc. Once you have finished, as a family discuss how you could help each other to feel better if you were feeling sad. Then discuss ways you could calm down if you were feeling angry.



## Building an emotional vocabulary

<b>Afraid</b>	<b>Angry</b>	<b>Happy</b>	<b>Sad</b>	<b>Surprised</b>	<b>Stressed</b>	<b>Disgusted</b>	<b>Calm</b>
concerned	aggravated	cheerful	unhappy	amazed	anxious	appalled	relaxed
distressed	annoyed	delighted	crushed	astonished	confused	horrified	chilled
fearful	mad	ecstatic	depressed	astounded	flustered	offended	comfortable
frightened	bothered	enthusiastic	disappointed	dazzled	hassled	outraged	contented
worried	enraged	excited	down	stunned	overwhelmed	shocked	mellow
nervous	irritated	glad	grumpy	gobsmacked	tense	sickened	peaceful
panicked	explosive	joyful	upset	perplexed	troubled	revolted	serene
scared	frustrated	thrilled	hurt	puzzled	uneasy		soothed
startled	furious	overjoyed	lonely	stumped	uptight		
terrified		pleased	miserable				