



School Readiness Tip Sheet

Expressing Emotions

Young children deal with many of the same emotions adults do. Children often do not have the words to name or describe how they feel. Instead, they sometimes act out these emotions in physical ways or have a hard time calming down. Children who can regain or maintain emotional control and express their feelings in appropriate ways feel more confident in relating to others and getting what they need. This makes them more successful in school and life.

The following ideas are some ways you can help your child express and control his or her feelings:

- Acknowledge how your child feels without judgement.
- Help children identify feelings in themselves and others. You might say, “Riding your bike is so much fun. I see you are smiling. You look so happy.” “Your brother fell and hurt his knee. He is crying. He must feel pretty sad.”
- Set clear expectations for the safe expression of strong feelings. Ensure your child understands that feelings are OK, but hurting others is not OK.
- Teach your child the words she can use to tell others how she feels. Talk about examples that might come up at home or at school. Practice what your child could say in different situations. For example, “I was using that. It makes me mad that you took it. Give it back.”
- Express your own emotions appropriately. Use words to explain how you are feeling and show your child how you calm down when your emotions are strong. Talk about taking deep breaths, walking away, or counting to 10. Children need to see and understand how adults use these healthy techniques.
- Help your child learn to control his or her emotions. See Tip Sheet about Developing Self-Regulation. Encourage your child to “STOP” before acting on strong emotions. Practice calming down steps: guide your child to place hands on tummy and take slow, deep breaths. This can help your to use words to express him or herself self in a safe and appropriate ways.
- Remind your child that he or she can talk to a trusted adult about strong feelings. Stop and listen attentively when your child is trying to express emotions in words.
- While reading a story or watching a movie ask your child how the characters feel and why they might feel that way. Ask your child to tell you about a time he or she may have felt like that.
- Sit with your child in front of a mirror and say a feeling such as “sad” then have both of you makes a “sad” face in the mirror. Point out what your eyes, mouth, eyebrows, and cheeks look like when expressing different emotions. Try scared, happy, surprised, and mad. Ask your child what might make them feel this way.
- Give your child frequent opportunities for messy play, such as playing with sand, mud, water or paint. This is a great way for kids to express feelings particularly if they are upset or angry.

