

Lesson 5: Feelings Awareness: Identifying and Managing Our Feelings

Introduction:

Feeling big emotions goes along with being human, and especially when you are 3 or 4! Children this age are just beginning to learn how to manage their feelings, and rely on the responsiveness of the adult (parent, teacher, caregiver) for guidance. Knowing your feelings, and being able to name them is the first step in taming them.



The tenants of “co-regulation”:

Co-regulation is a way of communicating with the child that helps her make sense of her emotions and can help her learn that feelings matter and that there are ways to manage them.

Staying calm when a child is overwhelmed helps contain the child’s emotion.

Naming emotions when a child has them can tame them.

Talking about your feelings and how you manage them can help kids develop their strategies.

Activities that give emotions shape, color, a place in our body, or a way to be expressed in a breath allows children to experience their feelings in many ways. They learn to be aware of and identify their emotions, that they are not permanent but change as we go through the day, and that we can be in charge of managing those feelings.

Goals of this Lesson:

Children will be able to identify feelings based on facial expressions.

Children will learn to experience their emotions in their body, through different body postures.

Children will develop images of feelings, where they are in their body, and how to diminish them.

Adults will learn what their role is in assisting children to identify and manage their emotional and physical states using co-regulation.

Exercises:

Making a Feelings Chart

The Breath

The smile breath - happy

The sigh - sad

The Body

Mirror, Mirror

The Feelings Beat

The Senses

Paint a feeling

Color Your Feelings in Your Body

Visualization

“My Creature”

The Feelings Container

Materials:

Any storybook

Cut out pictures of children displaying different emotions

Poster board

Reusable name cards

Feelings/Body Sheet (attached)

Creature Sheet (attached)

Crayons

Let's start the Lesson

Introduce emotion concepts during story time or activity time using pictures and facial expressions in the book to help children better understand the connection between feelings and self-expression. In any storybook you are reading, ask children to identify how the characters are feeling. Ask them how they know that.

Making a Feelings Chart

Create a feelings chart using a large poster board and cut out children's faces of different emotions you want the children to learn. We start with mad, sad, happy, scared, silly, and excited. Give each child an adhesive name tag with his or her name on it. Allow each child to place their name below the feeling on the chart they are experiencing. Have them show that emotion on their face, and invite them to share why they are feeling this way. Ask the rest of the class to make the same feeling face. Repeat for each child.



The Breath

The Smile Breath

Breathing in, I calm my body.
Breathing out, I smile.

The Silent Sigh

Take in a deep breath. Let out a long, deep, slightly audible breath with a sigh.

The Body

Using their bodies to demonstrate emotions allows children to experience them physically, and to integrate the learning. Doing it together with an adult or with peers helps them to recognize a feeling in others.

Mirror, Mirror:

1. Start with the four basic feelings: mad, sad, glad, and scared

2. Model the shape of one feeling with your body. Have the children guess which feeling you are demonstrating and have them mirror back to you that feeling with their bodies. 3. Do this for each emotion.

Mad: Hands on hips, frown on face, stomping feet.

Sad: Hands hugging body, lips turned down and eyes closed, torso slumped over from the waist

Glad (happy): Big smile, hands, and arms swinging at sides jumping up and down

Scared: Cowering, hands to mouth, eyes wide

4. Pair the children up. One child makes an emotion face and their partner identifies the emotion and duplicates it.



Painting to the Feelings Beat

1. In advance, make a CD that has different tempos of music: classical, reggae, hard rock, jazz, big band

2. The children paint to the beat. They can move their bodies as they paint.

3. During this time, ask them how this music makes them feel--happy, sad, excited, angry, etc.



The Senses

Paint a Feeling

1. Using paints and brushes, or finger paints, this is a completely free art choice. Ask them to paint whatever they feel like.
2. When they are done, ask them to name their picture with a feeling.
"Let's name our pictures with a feeling. When you were painting today, how were you feeling, happy, sad, angry, scared, etc. and why"
3. Hang paintings with their descriptions.

Optional: Add these senses to the descriptions.

How does "mad" smell?
How does scared look?
Describe how sad tastes.
Can you hear happy? How does it sound?

Color Your Feelings in Your Body:

A good book to use with this exercise is *The Color Monster*, by Anna Lines. Help children identify what color each feeling might be (ex: red for mad). It can be different for each child.

Then talk about where they experience the feeling is in their body (ex: sad is tears in their eyes)

Allow each child to decide color and location for each emotion (it is different for each of us)

Write each feeling in the corresponding color on the paper with the body.

Finally, color the feelings on the body. (can be any shape, in the location they identified for each emotion, using the colors they assigned.)



* Story: I once worked with a five-year-old boy whose parents were divorcing. He was quite stressed and needed a way to identify how he was feeling. We did the above exercise. However, we traced his body on a large piece of paper, and that is where he colored his feelings. It was quite an elaborate expression, and when he finished, he asked to cut it out. He then requested I tape it onto the front of him. I did that. Heaving a big sigh, he left the office wearing his feelings!

Visualization: "My Creature."

Description:

A 3-4-year-old has not yet mastered the ability to talk about her feelings, and developmentally often cannot distinguish between who she is and her behavior. In therapy with children, I often help them depersonalize the feeling/behavior by giving it a name of its own and referring to that instead of her actions. The child then can take correction less personally, and begin to feel she can manage it as her creature.



The feeling can be positive or negative. For example, a child may name it "wild thing," or "silly willy," or "Mad Mable." The object is to develop an identity separate from herself that she then can help when the creature shows up. Some kids imagine a box for their creature as a way to control it. You can suggest more self-regulatory ideas like having the creature take a breath, or talk to an adult, or using any of the other strategies we have learned.

The point is, children can customize what works for their particular difficulty helping them to feel in charge when it shows up. Adults can shift from asking questions like "Why are you acting so crazy?" to "Looks like Wild Thing is in charge right now. Wonder what you can do to help?"

Instruction:

Write down the answers to these questions:

Ask the child what feeling they are having. State that sometimes it helps to think of emotion as a creature that comes to visit, one that you can name. Give a couple of examples.

Have the child close her eyes and imagine the feeling she is having and what creature it might be. Ask her to notice how it looks. Ask her how big and what color it is, what shape, and maybe even how it smells and tastes.

Ask what is usually happening around her when the creature shows up.

Then ask her to think of some ways she could help it.

Have her color a picture of it, and write both the child's name and the creature's name on it.

If you are doing this as a class, you might want to make it a week-long lesson and post all of them on the wall. Kids can share their ideas and strategies.

Meet My Creature!

My Creature's name is: _____

My Creature visits me when: _____

I can tame my Creature by: _____

My Creature looks like this:

My name is _____

Feelings Container

Instruction:

Providing children with the opportunity to talk about any negative events that have taken place during the day is a way of emptying the “feelings container” to leave room for the rest of the day. You can help them use this concept by creating a visual or physical container, and label it “The Feelings Container.”

SCARED

MAD

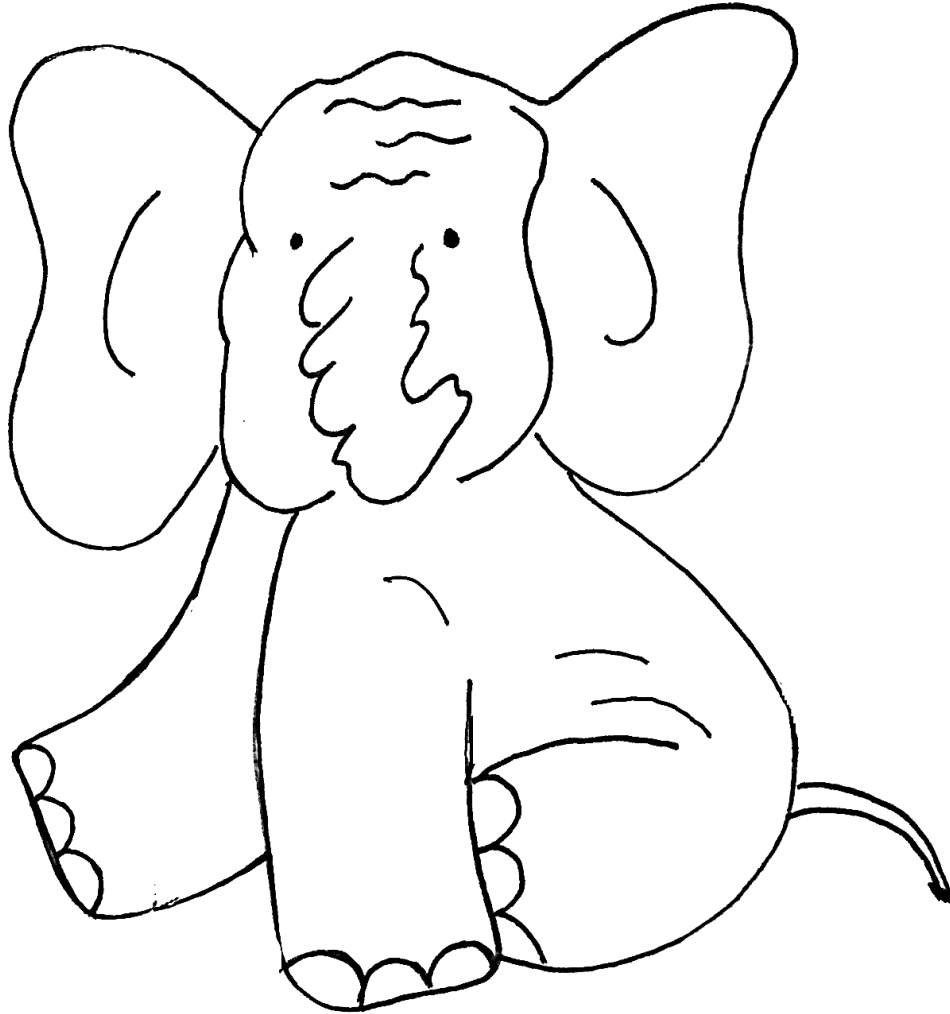
HAPPY

SAD

FEELINGS CONTAINER



Managing Big Feelings...



When we are frustrated, Ms Elefante has a hard time 'remembering' what to do to feel better. Can you help her calm down?

What We Learned Today

We learned to name our emotions, and where they occur in our body. We gave them shape and color, song, and even “acted” them out. We created a creature to represent a big feeling and learned how to help when it shows up. We learned we could release feelings from the 'feelings container' to make room for more.

Integrating the Lesson

Each day: Help the child put feeling words into context when he is experiencing any emotional moment. For example, you might say, "You are excited about that puppy," or "You feel frustrated with this puzzle right now." By learning to name the feeling, they are on their way to taming it! They are beginning to be able to identify their emotions as well as those of others.

Resources

The Color Monster, by Anna Lienes

Todd Parr Feelings Flash Cards, Todd Parr

Glad Monster, Sad Monster: Ed Emberley, Anne Miranda

Preschool Plan It: <http://www.preschool-plan-it.com/preschool-feelings-theme.html>