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Understanding, Responding to, and Describing Emotions Using Photos

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Emotions are an important part of human interaction and overall communication. Sometimes a child has difficulty expressing and/or interpreting emotions. Using photos is a technique to help him/her understand, respond to, and describe emotions.



Understanding Emotions

- Begin by teaching the child to focus on parts of the face that relate to emotion: the mouth, cheeks, nose, eyes, forehead, eyebrows, etc. Use a hand-held mirror and have him/her practice moving these parts to make a smile, frown, furrowed or surprised brow, etc.
- Choose photos that show a specific category of emotion (e.g., happy or sad) and review the body parts that makes these expressions. Be sure to show a variety of people making these expressions because people express emotion

differently. Then, have the child use his/her mirror to practice these expressions.

- Place three photos with the same emotion and one with a different emotion in front of the child. Have him/her identify the emotions that are the same and the one that is different. Discuss which facial expressions or body gestures make the photo different.
- As you progress with the photos, introduce more complex emotions such as confidence, embarrassment, loneliness, etc. Then, begin using black and white drawings to help generalize these emotions to various contexts.




Responding to Emotions

- Read children's books that deal with emotions. Discuss the feelings in the books and how the characters resolved them.



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- Discuss and make a list of times when the child feels angry, happy, lonely, embarrassed, etc. Problem-solve whether his/her reactions are appropriate for the situation. Role-play appropriate reactions.
 - Use photos to discuss the emotion the person is showing. Ask the child what he/she thinks might have caused this emotion and what he/she thinks the person should do. If the response is negative (e.g., he should hit the other person), then teach a better way to cope in these situations. Use the mirrors to practice making appropriate expressions for the situation.
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- ## Describing Emotions
- For a child who can read, create a “word wall” of emotion words. Begin with a category of emotions—like happiness—and teach other words that have the same meaning. Add new words and categories every week.
 - Use photos to play a describing game. Have the child list as many words as he/she can that describe each emotion in the photo.
 - When a child is unable to express an emotion and behaves inappropriately, tell him/her to “use words” instead of actions. Help him/her find these words by using photo cues. When you reach one that describes his/her emotion, tell him/her the word for this. Discuss how it is better to tell someone how you feel than to react negatively toward that person.
 - When the child is expressing an emotion, have him/her use rating scales (such as 1-10) to describe the degree of emotion.
 - Create emotion books. You and the child can create a Happy Book, Sad Book, Mad Book, etc. Cut out pictures from magazines, draw pictures, or use the book as a diary to describe emotions.

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