



Handy Handouts®

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Helping Children Understand and Deal with Emotions

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How does your child react when he or she is sad, angry, worried, or embarrassed? Learning how to manage emotions is an important aspect of emotional development. Children learn to manage their emotions by watching the examples set by significant adults in their lives — parents, teachers, caregivers, etc. When children watch their parents have yelling and screaming tantrums when they're angry, they are more likely to carry out the same behaviors. Parents can help children learn to manage their behaviors by teaching them to identify their emotions by name and express them in acceptable ways. *"I'm sorry. I know you're angry and upset, but kicking the wall doesn't help. You can hit your punching bag, scream into your pillow, go out and kick your football, or lie on your bed until you calm down."*

Telling children to "calm down" or "stop crying" when they are being completely irrational is not effective in helping them get through an emotional trauma. Instead, offer your empathy and, as they become calmer, ask them to explain what upset them and triggered their meltdown. Help them understand that everyone has bad emotions that come and go, and even though they don't last very long, we must learn how to conduct ourselves appropriately when these emotions arise.



Identifying and recognizing the feelings of others, as well as our own, is another essential social skill. Discuss events that happen to them, their friends, and you at home, school, or work. Read stories and picture books with little ones. Watch television shows as a family. These are all excellent ways for children to observe a variety of people in different situations dealing with their emotions and watching how they react (positively and negatively). Discuss how those displaying negative reactions may have handled their emotions more appropriately.

To help children develop emotional security and positive social skills and habits, we must take the time to:



- Notice our children's positive behaviors (even when they are unaware that we are watching them),

- Praise their accomplishments (regardless of how insignificant),

- Listen to the stories and adventures of their day (with interest),



- Demonstrate patience when they make mistakes (that we've all probably made),

- Encourage their talents and interests (even if they are not your own),

- Show consideration for their feelings (even when they are overly dramatic), and



- Show them love unconditionally (because they are your children and depend on your support).

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Our emotions shape everything we are, everything we learn, and everything we do. As parents, we take a lot of time teaching our children to fix their own cereal, ride a bike, and make their bed. But how much time do we spend teaching children about emotions and appropriate reactions to them?

Positive emotions are easy to talk about, but what about the child who is angry, sad, afraid, or frustrated? This takes more practice, especially if the child has special needs.

Here is a list of children's books for targeting a variety of emotions. Talk about characters' facial expressions, particular situations that the characters share with your child, how they react (positively and negatively), and if they handled their emotions appropriately.

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- **When I'm Angry** – Aaron, J.; Explains anger and how to deal with it. Includes a parent guide.
 - **Dealing with Hurt Feelings** – Adams, L.; What to do when your feelings get hurt or you hurt someone's feelings.
 - **Mean Soup** – Everitt, B.; Horace feels mean until he helps his mother make Mean Soup.
 - **It's Hard To Be Five** – Curtis, Jamie L.; A five-year-old learns self-control.
 - **Being Angry** – Johnson, J.; Young people discuss what makes them angry and their feelings.
 - **Annie Bananie** – Komaiko, Leah; Annie's best friend moves out of town.

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- **Let's Talk About Being Afraid** – Kreiner, A.; What causes fear and how to handle being afraid.
 - **Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day** – Viorst, J; Alexander is consoled by the thought that other people have bad days too.
 - **I Was So Mad** – Mayer, M.; A child tries a variety of ways to dissolve anger.
 - **Ira Sleeps Over** – Waber, Bernard.; Ira's sister reminds him not to take his teddy bear to the sleepover because his friends will laugh at him.
 - **Can't You Sleep, Little Bear?** – Waddell, Martin; Little Bear learns to deal with being afraid of the dark.
 - **How To Take the Grrr Out of Anger** – Verdick, Elizabeth and Lisovskis, Marjorie. Strategies for children on dealing with anger.



Resources:

Vanderbilt University. 2012. Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early, The. *Teaching Your Child to Identify and Express Emotions*. http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/documents/teaching_emotions.pdf Retrieved July, 2013.

Perez, Angelica. 2010. *Teaching Children How to Handle Their Emotions: As Simple as PIE*. <http://simplekids.net/pie-approach-to-emotions/>. Retrieved July 2013.

Blau, Liza. 2013. *How To Help Children Deal with Expressing Their Emotions*. <http://everydaylife.globalpost.com/children-deal-expressing-emotions-8281.html> Retrieved July, 2013.

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