

»»» Mental Health Fitness

Elementary School Skills Sheet

Children experience all the same complicated, wonderful, confusing, and big emotions that adults do. **It's okay to feel all emotions, including feelings that are pleasant and feelings that are uncomfortable.**

Emotions are important because they provide us with information about ourselves and our environment, and they help us connect with one another. Learning how to notice, label, and express their feelings helps children feel more in control of their emotional experience.

Understanding »»» Feelings

- Label and name feelings to increase emotional vocabulary AND reinforce that you can feel more than one emotion at a time.
- Use check-in moments as part of your daily routine to ask how your child is feeling and how much of that emotion they are feeling on a rating scale of 1 to 10. Rating emotions captures that we feel emotions in different amounts or intensities.
- Listen to and validate your child's emotions (do this before jumping to problem-solving or fixing what is wrong).
For example: "I see that you're feeling sad, and that's okay."
- Use specific positive feedback frequently, immediately, and consistently when your child identifies how they are feeling or recognizes someone else's feelings.
For example: "Great job recognizing that you feel nervous, and thank you for letting me know."

Understanding »»» Thoughts

- Our thoughts can be overwhelming at times and can cause us to feel stressed and anxious. It can be easy to overthink and get stuck thinking unhelpful thoughts that may not be true.
- Help your child practice identifying helpful and unhelpful thoughts and describing how their thoughts make them feel.
- If you recognize that your child is expressing an unhelpful thought, encourage them to replace the thought with a more helpful or realistic thought.
For example: Your child states that their best friend doesn't like them anymore because the best friend was playing with someone else at recess. You can ask your child, "What could be another reason your friend was playing with someone else?"

Managing »»» Emotions

- Everyone has urges to act that are caused by big, intense, and uncomfortable emotions. The key is riding out the urge and waiting for big feelings to lessen.
- You can ride out big feelings by using your five senses (sight, sound, taste, touch, smell) to ground to the present.
- Validate your child's emotional experience by listening without judgment and paraphrase what you are hearing.
You might say: "I can tell that you're feeling very angry."
Helping them to feel heard and understood is foundational when it comes to tolerating emotions.
- Use specific positive reinforcement when your child utilizes a strategy to ride out a big emotion and impulse. Using specific positive feedback frequently, immediately, and consistently is the best way to shape behaviors you want to see.
You might say: "I see you were feeling overwhelmed, and I love how you're working on riding out those big feelings."