

Understanding Feelings

Middle schoolers 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 to connect with one another. Learning how to notice, label, and express feelings helps middle schoolers to feel more in control of their emotional experience.

Summary of the key skills from the video:

- Label and name feelings to increase emotional vocabulary AND reinforce that you can feel more than one emotion at a time.
- Notice how body sensations are attached to different emotions and provide clues for what we are feeling. Sometimes it's easier to notice physical symptoms first.
- Rate emotions on a scale of 1 to 10 to capture that we feel emotions in different amounts or intensities.

Practice Skills:

- Start by listening and validating your middle schooler's emotions before jumping to problem-solving or fixing what is wrong. For example:
 - *"I see that you're feeling sad, and that's okay."*
 - *"I hear you feel angry and sad at the same time. That happens."*
 - *"It makes sense to feel excited and nervous!"*
- Use specific positive feedback frequently, immediately, and consistently when your middle schooler 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."*
 - *"_____, very nice job noticing you are feeling frustrated. I will take deep breaths with you to calm down our bodies."*
- Make time to ask how your middle schooler is feeling, how much of that emotion they are feeling, and what they are experiencing in their bodies.
- When watching a TV show together, help your middle schooler identify where they feel emotions in their bodies by discussing how the characters in the show might be feeling.
- Discuss and label how you feel, how your body reacts to that feeling, and how much you feel it. It is a great way to normalize all feelings and send the message that feelings are important.

Start with this →

- Validation is a foundational skill you can try at home. It can help middle schoolers increase their emotional awareness.
- Listening, reflecting, and connecting helps to increase your middle schooler's awareness of their emotional experience and helps them to know that it's okay to feel all emotions.
- Be mindful of the dos and don'ts below when it comes to validation as you encourage your middle schooler to tell you how they're feeling.

DO

Listen

Give your full attention.

Reflect

Say back what the emotion was that they shared. For example:

"I hear that it was super frustrating."

Connect

Tell them you understand. For example:

"I can understand why you would feel that way."

DON'T

Minimize Feelings

Avoid telling your child they shouldn't feel a certain way. For example:

"Don't worry about it! It will be fine!"

Shame

Avoid using language that can lead to embarrassment for feeling a certain way.

For example:

"Why do you feel sad about that? You know better."

Fix Right Away

Avoid jumping in with solutions. For example:

"I'll handle the issue with that other child."

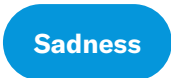
Don't worry."

On the next page there is an activity that you can share with your middle schooler. Do the activity together to help reinforce and practice the different skills for understanding feelings.

Feelings Intensity and Body Response

Use this activity to help practice labeling feelings, rating their intensity, and identifying which body sensations you may feel with these emotions. First circle the ratings below to indicate how much you've experienced each feeling within the past week, with 0 being not at all and 10 being the most intense.

joyful	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
anxious	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
frustrated	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
fearful	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
depressed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
calm	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
disgusted	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
content	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
hopeful	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10



faster heart rate	sweaty palms	clenched teeth	nausea
tension in neck and shoulders	slower heart rate	steady breath	more energy
stomachache	furrowed brows	clenched fists	shaky
tightness in chest	headache	pursed lips	urge to run
weakened or shaky legs	reddened or hot cheeks	shallow or quickened breathing	heaviness

Follow-Up

When you rate your feelings, you're gathering data about your experiences over the past week. If there are emotions that you're hoping to feel more or less, the skills reviewed in the additional videos and worksheets of this curriculum will help. You can use worksheets like this one each week to track your progress and figure out how the skills might be affecting your feelings.