



Ways to Help Children Learn about Facial Expressions

Learning to read facial expressions is important for social interactions. When children are able to identify how a friend, classmate, sibling, parent, or person in the community feels, they can respond appropriately. This article includes ways to help children practice identifying feelings based on facial expressions.

1. Role Play – Role play is a fun way to practice identifying feelings. Role play can be a group activity or a one on one game. Write down a list of feelings or have pictures or drawings of people showing different feelings. Take turns picking a card and acting out the feeling paying special attention to facial expressions. Ask questions like, “How do your eyes look when you are angry?” “How is this different from what your eyes look like when you are surprised?” Discuss each feeling by asking questions like: “When have you felt angry?” “What do you do if a friend is angry?” “How do you calm down when you are angry?”

2. Use a Mirror – Make a game of identifying feelings by having children practice facial expressions in a mirror. Name a facial expression and have the child look in a mirror and make the expression. Point out how their eyes, eyebrows, nose, and mouth change shapes as they practice different facial expressions. Change roles and let them pick the emotions while you make the expressions. While making the facial expressions, change different facial features and ask questions like, “If I am making a surprised face should my eyes be large and round or should I squint?”

3. Use Natural Opportunities – Children see a variety of emotions at school, home, and in the community. These natural opportunities are invaluable learning experiences. Take time to talk to children about what is happening around them. For example, if a child is smiling as they go down a slide, ask how they feel and what facial clues your student or child noticed that led them to that conclusion. If you see an emotion like sadness or fear ask the child what they can do to help the other person and then offer assistance. Another natural opportunity is when watching television or movies. Pause the show or movie and discuss the character’s feelings and facial expressions.



From *Understanding Faces and Feelings*

4. Bring Out Their Creativity – Art is a fun way to learn about facial expressions. Children can draw or paint a picture showing people with different feelings. Another project is a collage of emotions. Assign each child or group a different feeling. Have children work in small groups or independently to find pictures of the emotion in magazines or print images from online. After the collages are finished have each child or group talk about the feeling and what facial cues they used to identify it.

5. Make a Game of Feelings – Cut out sets of eyes, eyebrows, mouths, and noses of people showing different emotions. Show only one feature at a time and discuss how this part of the face gives us clues about the feeling. After identifying different feelings based on individual parts of the face, put the face together and discuss times when people feel a specific emotion.

To receive a **free customizable children’s book** on waiting, visit our website: