



4 EMPOWERING EMOTIONS



Emotions play an important role in our life and upbringing, which cannot be replaced by rational reasoning or theoretical knowledge. Countless numbers of emotions come and go in the life of children and adults. Emotions can be heard, seen and felt in the body and mind.

Which emotions has your group of children experienced over the last week? Has any particular question related to emotions come up in discussions with parents? How did the youngest child in your group feel about staying in day care today? Does the tetchiness of a tired child impact you too? How do your emotions affect how you are received?

Dealing with emotions

Children's emotions can swing from one moment to the next, and children often still lack the ability to contain them or express them verbally. At times, adults may struggle with these strong emotions and find them difficult to accept or respond to. Sometimes adults are at the receiving end of children's outbursts, the lightning rods for their emotions. This role may feel occasionally exhausting, and adults can feel powerless and incompetent.

However, adults should consider it an honour to be the recipient of these releases of strong emotion. Adults give children a valuable gift by respecting their feelings and encouraging them to tell about their emotions and by accepting the emotions. In the whirlwind of their emotions, children are looking for confirmation that they are loved equally as little princes and princesses as raging monsters. The world won't shatter due to their jealousy or excessive joy. For children, many emotions are completely new experiences. Talking about emotions, recognising where you feel emotions and naming them allow children to identify and get to know their emotions. All kinds of emotions are part of life, and children are entitled to experience them. Everyone has the right to feel happy, sad and dark emotions. The most important thing is to pay attention to how we show emotions and what we do when we are overwhelmed by them. Adults do not always need to be in a good mood and in control - they can be angry too - but aggressive behaviour is always detrimental. No one must be hurt no matter how angry

WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOUR OWN EMOTIONS BOIL OVER?

HOW DID YOUR EMOTIONS AFFECT THE CHILDREN IN YOUR GROUP TODAY?

HOW DO YOU DISCUSS DIFFICULT EMOTIONS IN YOUR WORK COMMUNITY?

When children's emotions are recognised, verbalised and accepted, they feel better and sense that adults respect their words. When children tell that they feel scared, adults should not dismiss the feeling and say that there is nothing to be scared about. Instead, the best way to help children is to accept their emotion by replying, for example that it is not a nice feeling to be scared, but let me help you. This makes children feel accepted and heard. (Sajaniemi 2013, Kanninen & Sigfrids 2011)

WHAT KINDS OF WORDS THAT DESCRIBE JOY DO YOU USE WITH CHILDREN?

you may feel. It is the adults' duty to teach children how to regulate their behaviour.

Children watch the adults around them closely. The way adults talk and act become models that impact children. The ways in which adults express and verbalise their emotions and how they act when they are governed by them teach children more than just explanations. ECEC and child health clinics often provide opportunities for sharing emotional experiences and discussing emotions with parents and children. They offer a chance to discuss with parents, how they could support their children's abilities to cope with their emotions and, thus, help parents acknowledge their own emotions. It is important to offer parents a chance to tell how they are feeling and allow them to talk about difficult emotions. What kinds of emotions did the children in your group experience today?

Scale of emotions as a life force

Verbalising emotions – finding words to describe them – is not always easy. Small children do not have the words for them yet, but by learning together, listening to their body and through discussions, emotions begin to get names. Giving names to different emotions starts activating the part in your brain responsible for language and logical thinking, and it is easier to deal with emotions once you have names and explanation for them. Naming has a calming effect on emotions, and it helps in many problem-solving situations too. It is important for adults to acknowledge that a power relationship exists between adults and children, which is why adults always have the responsibility to listen and give attention to children. Children feel protected when they are heard and understood.

Joyful atmosphere

Joy is an empowering life force. Joy, astonishment, gratefulness, amusement and other positive emotions make people flourish. In a positive emotional state, people are also more likely to embrace a wider perspective on things, are more equipped to deal with their own behaviour and have better resources to adopt new ways of looking at things. Childhood experiences of joy boost mental health in adulthood helping us experience a connection with others including falling in love or forming friendships. Joy is essentially a shared experience at its deepest; thus, shared laughter brings people together.

Joy has many hugely positive effects. People who are capable of maintaining a feeling of happiness, are less vulnerable to cardiovascular diseases and their ability to fight infectious diseases is better too. (Mäkelä 2011)

Thus, it is important to make the positive emotions we feel visible by paying attention to them and verbalising them. Sharing positive emotions and joy with children strengthens them and promotes their development.

Fear and the feeling of safety

The feeling of safety is at the basis of our mental health and self-esteem. The experience of basic security is formed in early childhood. At times, fears may

play a major role in children's mind, which can be a cause of concern for adults. However, fear has its own task within our emotional scale. It protects children at different emotional stages, warns them of potential dangers and prepares the body and mind for action. Children's biggest fears include being left alone and being rejected. It is important to strengthen the feelings of safety, particularly in new situations, such as starting day care. It is also not wise to expect children to become independent too early. Children have the right to be little people who need protection and care. Dangers and harmful things should be discussed with children. It is essential to ensure that their fears do not become forces that limit and cripple their life.

Disappointments and frustration

Children face frustration and disappointments daily. Their expectations may not be fulfilled; they cannot do everything they wish they could, because they still lack the required skills. Frustration stirs strong, even unbearable emotions in children. Completely normal challenges and development crises often demand the ability and means to adapt.


Children must be allowed to safely practice dealing with the feelings of disappointment, without their emotions dominating the adults around them. Adults are there to create safety and security for children, whilst they are growing up and going through different challenges. Children must be heard, comforted and cuddled, and they must not be left alone with their feelings of disappointment. Adult presence allows children to learn that even a torturous feeling will pass and that difficult situations will eventually be solved. Putting up with children's expressions of disappointment is not always pleasant for adults. However, learning to put up with disappointments is part of growing up, and it strengthens the mind and provides life skills.

Defiance


Adults also have to face the defiance of children who are learning life skills. Tiny, adorable human beings can in just moments turn into unbelievable forces of anger. What to do? How to react? What if you do not have what it takes to accept those emotions? Children's anger often irritates adults, but even if the situation takes the adults by surprise, children in an emotional state should never be left on their own. If adults submit themselves to the same emotions or reject them, the situation becomes scary and threatening for children. Despite their grandiosity, children expect to gain adults' approval, love and safe boundaries.

You must stay close to children experiencing a tantrum, cuddle them or hold them by the hand, if they let you. The adults must manage the situations in which children's emotions exceed their ability to control them. With the help of adults, children get through scary and unsafe emotional states, and that re-enforces their emotional skills.


It is the adults' duty to ensure that children feel safe even when they are experiencing powerful emotions. Every child has their own unique way of calming down and gaining the ability to come close and be held by an adult. If the adults do not respond to children's emotions, it may mean that those emotions become subconscious and undeveloped. There are numerous ways to teach emotional skills in early childhood education. Child health clinic



HOW DO I
VERBALISE
EMOTIONS TO
CHILDREN?



HOW DO YOU
ENCOURAGE AND
HELP PARENTS TO
FACE THEIR CHILD'S
CHALLENGING FEELINGS
AND EXPRESSIONS OF
DISAPPOINTMENT?



HOW DO YOU SUPPORT
PARENTS TO FACE
THEIR CHILD'S
DEFIANCE AND ANGER?

**All emotions have a
lifespan and even the
most powerful emotion
will not last forever.
(Tuija Aro)**

professionals also have a unique opportunity to offer parents information and support to help them cope with and accept their children's emotions at home.

Supporting children's emotions

- Be a mindfully present, safe adult.
- Consider how you show your emotions.
- Talk to children about your emotions.
- Encourage children to tell about theirs.
- Create an atmosphere that permits emotions by talking about and showing your emotions.
- Calm yourself down in challenging situations.
- Apologise if you lose your temper.
- Do not allow children's anger to get hold of you.
- Accept children's feelings but guide their behaviour.
- Tell children that emotions have a lifespan – even unpleasant feelings fade with time.
- Try and understand the reasons for children's emotions, for example, why they may be angry or sad.
- Show that even when adults lose their temper, they also solve the difficult situations and apologise if needed.

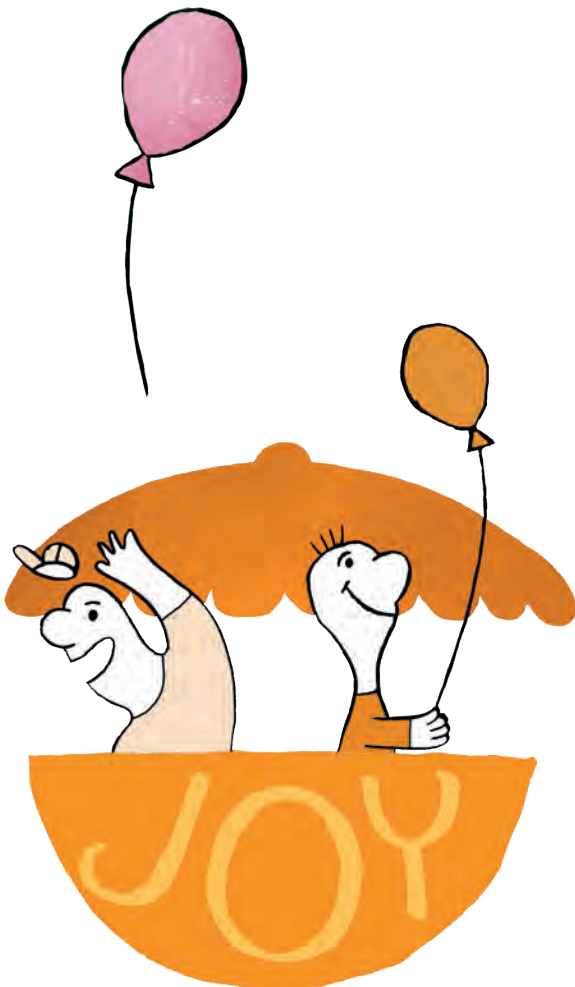
Emotional skills supporting children's mental health

TEACH AND HELP CHILDREN TO

- connect physical messages to different emotions
- verbalise and name different emotions
- see alternative reasons to events
- express even difficult emotions.

Cooperation with parents

Utilise the Ferris Wheel of Emotions poster and the exercises connected to it.





FEELINGS

Tuuli Paasolainen

1. I am fee - ling jol - ly as I clap I am ri - ding on my dad - dy's back!

This I woul - dn't miss, dad - dy's lit - tle kiss. I am fee - ling jol - ly as I clap!

Action suggestion:

1. I am feeling jolly as I clap -
 I am riding on my daddy's back!
 This I wouldn't miss, daddy's little kiss.
 I am feeling jolly as I clap!

Clapping

2. I don't wanna stop this game now.
 It's only gonna cause a big row.
 When playing's interrupted, the day is just disrupted!
 I don't wanna stop this game now!

2. Arms akimbo swinging from side to side

3. Oh, how very angry I am feeling,
 since my sister ripped my pretty drawing!
 I am full of rage, because of that page,
 since my sister ripped my pretty drawing!

3. Thumping feet

4. Mummy knows how to comfort me,
 she holds me gently on her right knee.
 Mummy reads a book, in a quiet nook.
 Mummy knows how to comfort me.

4. Cuddling yourself

5. I know I will feel much better then,
 when the tantrum has gone again.
 Joy, grief, anger, tears, smile, laughter -
 All these feelings are part of life.

5. Arms folded over your chest

(The words mum and dad can be changed in verses 1 and 4.)

Tuuli Paasolainen • Translation: Aino Kattelus

When we sing about emotions together, they gain the right to exist: "All these feelings are part of life." This song helps children understand their emotions and verbalises them. Children learn that there is a reason for sometimes feeling sad, angry or happy. When children learn to understand that there is a reason for feeling a certain way, they will find it easier to examine and analyse different life situations as they grow up. This song provides a way to discuss these important issues. The song teaches children to relate to different emotions and to deal with them.

(Paasolainen, T. Musiikki-iloa kymmenen kiloa. 2015, Laula lelut laatikkoon. 2016.)



Emotional storm

You need a play parachute and a few balls. You can also use a sheet instead of a play parachute. The group pretends that the parachute is the sea and the balls are boats bobbing about on the water. The children hold on to the parachute and steer the boats. The weather is first calm and tranquil, and the boats sail on small waves. The waves are peaceful, maybe even a little timid. Gradually the timidity gives way to bigger, braver waves. Suddenly the wind starts blowing, and a storm rises. The angry storm starts raging, and the children shake the parachute so that the boats jump on the waves. Then the angry storm calms down, and the waves are peaceful and jolly again. The children sway the parachute carefully, and the boats can once again continue their journeys on cheerful little waves. The children could also experiment what sad, surprised or infatuated waves might be like.



Naming emotions

Children sit in a circle on the floor. An adult spreads the pack of art cards with the colour side up in front of the children. The children take turns in choosing the colour that describes how they are feeling. Each child can interpret how the colour reflects their emotion and tell why they chose a particular colour to express the way they are feeling. The aim of the exercise is to learn different emotions and to practise how you can verbalise your emotions and deal with them.

Alternatively, the adult can play music, and when it stops, the adult points at one emotion picture. (The Ferris Wheel of Emotions can be used here.) The children then mimic the emotion the adult is pointing at and tell which emotion it is.

- Have you ever looked at clouds? How does it feel?
- What kinds of things and shapes have you seen in clouds?
- What kinds of thoughts would go in your thought cloud right now?
- How do you feel just now?
- What colour or shape would a cloud depicting your feelings be?



Let's look at art: Clouds

This artwork is by artist Eero Järnefelt. The artwork is called *Clouds*. It has been painted with oil colours on canvas. We don't know exactly when Eero painted this artwork. The size of the painting is 16 x 23 cm.

Eero was very fond of clouds and liked painting them. He painted many artworks with just clouds on them, and many of his landscapes feature clouds. Painting clouds can be seen as Eero's own emotions and thoughts. Just like cartoon characters have thought bubbles and different symbols that describe emotions, Eero's feelings and thoughts come up in his paintings as thought and emotion clouds.

Do you wonder why Eero painted clouds and liked them so much? Have you ever looked at clouds and their shapes? Often looking at clouds is fascinating because they move and change shape and colour, sometimes quite quickly too. Looking at clouds can be fun, and with a friend, you can spot different shapes in the clouds.

Eero's painting with the clouds is peaceful. There aren't many colours in it. Which colours can you see? An artwork does not always have to be colourful to look cheerful and beautiful. However, colours can be used to affect what the painting looks like and what kind of a mood it conveys. Colours can have an impact on whether the mood of an artwork is jolly or sad. Which colours make you happy and which ones make you feel sad? What would your happy cloud look like? What about a wistful or sad cloud?



Let's make a painting!

Let's think about what kinds of feelings people might have and which emotions you can find among your group of children just now. The group can discuss which shape or colour different emotions could be.

Use natural yoghurt or finger paints to paint emotion clouds on glass doors and windows.





