

This is a sample photocopied from My First Emotions
Activity Book by Dr John Lambie and Molly Potter
pages 26-29

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My First
Emotions
Learn to understand and manage feelings together



Activity Book

Written by Dr John Lambie and Molly Potter
Illustrated by Kate Daubney

This book contains a wealth of ideas for fun and engaging games parents can play with their children. These activities help you to explore the emotions of love, happiness, sadness, anger and fear with your child in a safe, fun way, and offer good ways to interact with your child and create a strong connection.

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for children age 6 months to one year

A Wall Of Faces



You will need: Pictures and photos of faces, a large piece of paper or card, and glue.

As social creatures, we tend to be naturally interested in looking at people's faces. Create a poster for your child of faces with different expressions and demonstrating different emotions. You could include pictures from magazines, from the internet and photos of members of your family with different expressions on their faces.

Point to each of the faces on your poster and tell your child what emotion it is showing. As your child gets older, you can use the poster to ask questions like:

- How is this person feeling?
- What might have happened to make them feel that way?
- Are there other words we could use to describe how they are feeling?
- How do you feel when you look at that person?

You can ask your child similar questions whenever you see a picture of a face showing an emotion somewhere else, for example in a book or photo.

Marked Emotion Mirroring



Copy your child's naturally occurring emotion face, but make your face an *exaggerated* version of their face (see page 43 in the Parent's Guide). You can also label the expression on their face at the same time, eg "Ooh ... you look sad".

Joint Attention: Puppet



You will need: The puppet or another toy.

This activity is all about engaging your child in a game in which you are both looking at (and sharing the experience of) the same thing. Using the puppet (or another toy), make him do something silly like a funny dance. Say to your child "Look! What's he doing?" See how they look at the puppet and then look back at you. When your baby looks back at you, smile, and say "He's doing a funny dance, isn't he?" Then say "Oh, look, what's he doing now?" Make the puppet fall down. Your baby will now look at the puppet again. Say "He's fallen down!" and so on. The idea is that your baby looks from you to the puppet, and you both share the experience of looking at the puppet and finding the puppet funny.

You could narrate what's happening in a similar way about lots of other things you and your child encounter, eg animals or people you see when you are out and about.

Verbal Emotional Validation



When your child has an emotion (that has occurred naturally), comment on it in an accepting way, by saying "You look sad/angry/scared/happy." Also, state the cause of their emotion too if it is known, eg "You're angry because you're not allowed to go outside." or "You're sad because you've lost Bunny." (See the section on emotional validation on page 37 of the Parent's Guide for more advice on how to do this.)

for children age 12-15 months

I'm Wondering ...



Whenever you suspect your child is feeling an emotion, you may not know exactly what is going on, especially when they are very young. However, you can start to build up your child's understanding of emotions and what causes them by doing a running commentary that starts with "I am wondering if ...". This is a helpful habit to start developing when your child is young and to continue as they grow up.

So if your child looks annoyed but they can't (or won't) say anything about it, speculate with, for example, "I am wondering if you are annoyed because you wanted ice cream. Yes? But I gave you cake instead and you don't want it. Is that right?" You can then go on to validate your child's emotion by saying that you can understand it and you would probably feel the same (and then explain to your child why they have got cake instead of ice cream).

The good thing about 'wondering' is that you can connect what happened with how they are feeling using words. It's also good because, if you are wrong, you have only been wondering, not forcing your view onto them. As your child gets older, they will be able to express themselves and correct you if your guess is completely wrong.

Find The Treat



You will need: A treat for your child.

Show your child a treat that you want them to have, for example a new toy or a sweet. Say with a lot of enthusiasm and excitement that you are going to let them have the treat but that you are going to hide it and they are going to find it. Ask your child to cover their eyes while you hide the treat. Walk around the room and hide the treat somewhere in the room without your child seeing where you have put it.

Explain that when they are getting close to the treat you will do a happy face because you are happy they are going to find it, but if they are moving away from the treat you will do a sad face. Do an exaggerated and silly version of each emotion. Start the game and see how quickly your child finds the treat. If your child enjoys the game, repeat it.

If your child is old enough, let them hide something for you to find and ask them to make a happy or sad face depending on how close you are.



for children age 18 months or more

Activities from 18⁺_m

Boo Hoo

18⁺_m



You will need: Building blocks, a rattle, and a storybook.

Older infants can find pretend crying amusing and it is a gentle and safe way for them to explore negative emotions as they intuitively know you are not really upset.

Create a variety of situations that will result in you pretending to cry. These can include:

- You building up a tower for your child to knock down. Pretend to cry as soon as your child knocks the tower down.
- You holding a rattle and looking happy about shaking it within reach of your child. Pretend to cry when your child takes it off you.
- Looking enjoyably at one of the storybooks (or another book) and pretending to cry when you (initially) snap it shut. Stop crying as soon as it is opened again. Eventually your child will probably snap it shut and you can continue to play with pretend crying. Your child will enjoy 'controlling' your pretend emotions.

If your child does react negatively to your pretend crying, you need to reassure them that you are fine. Cuddle your child and smile at them. You could try the game another time, but this time put more of a 'smile' into your fake crying and make it even less realistic.

Empathy

18⁺_m



You will need: The puppet or another toy.

Using the puppet (or another toy), pretend that the puppet has hurt his head after banging it slightly. Turn to your child and say "Oh dear! What shall we do? Robbie [or the toy's name] has hurt his head." See what actions or ideas your child comes up with and encourage them to think what it must be like for the puppet to be hurt. Give them enough time to think for themselves before you make suggestions.

You can then also suggest and show them things like rubbing the puppet's head, kissing it better, or taking him to the doctor.

Alternatively, you can pretend that you have hurt your finger (eg by banging it with a toy hammer) and make a sad face, and say "Oh dear, I've hurt my finger! What shall I do?"

You can do the same in other situations where the puppet is feeling sad or lonely. You could also ask your child for ideas if someone hurts themselves slightly or feels sad in real life.

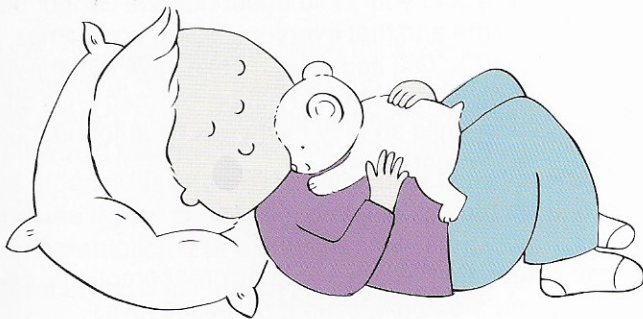
for children age 18 months or more

Mindfulness



Here is a simple technique that you can use when your child seems stressed, at nap time, or at any time just for fun. Ask your child to lie down on a mat or on the floor. Put their favourite cuddly toy on their tummy and ask them to gently rock their cuddly toy to sleep using the movement of their tummy as they breathe in and out. This way they can learn to pay attention to their breathing and this will help them learn to calm down and regulate their emotions.

For older children, you could also ask them to count from 1 to 4 as they breathe in and as they breathe out.



Giving Emotions To Characters



You will need: The puppet or another toy, and the emotion toys (optional).

Using the puppet (or another toy), act out scenarios in which characters have different emotions. You could use Robbie the rabbit as your character, or use some other characters if you prefer. Some ideas for scenarios are provided below, or you can look at the story cards for inspiration, or make up your own scenarios.

You can use the emotion toys to show what the puppet is feeling, by putting the relevant emotion toy into his pocket.

Give reasons why the character has the emotion. If your child is old enough (30 months+), you can involve them more in the game, by asking them what the character might feel and do, and why.

Emotion	Scenario
Happy	It is Robbie's birthday. He is given a party with cake and fun games to play, and presents.
Happy	Robbie gets a new toy that he wanted.
Sad	Robbie loses his favourite toy.
Sad	Robbie can't play a game very well and some of the other children laugh at him.
Angry	Robbie is building a sandcastle. His friend comes along and treads on it, ruining it.
Angry	Robbie lets his best friend use his new ball. His friend isn't very careful and loses the ball and won't give Robbie another one.
Scared	Robbie is dreaming about a ghost in his nightmare.
Scared	Robbie meets a hungry wolf while walking through the woods.