

Stomp. Slam! Loud sighs....

There is no question that children have strong emotions because we can often hear them before we can even see it in their face, clenched fists, or tears.

Helping children name their emotions is a key mental health skill that will teach them to better understand the feelings that they are having. Whether you have babies, preschoolers, or school aged children, they will benefit. It is one of the first things you can do to talk about mental health at home.

Even tween and teens may need some help understanding whether they are feeling angry, frustrated, or disgusted.

Talking openly about various emotions, whether we are seeing them in each other or in a character on a show or movie we are watching together, helps children to understand that all feelings are okay. And the more we discuss emotions, the more children will feel like they can come to us.

The ability to name and distinguish between different emotions is a core skill children start learning early in life. As early as 6 months old, most children can distinguish between major emotions like anger, fear, sadness, and happiness. They learn to read faces, tone of voice and body language, and can tell the difference between these emotional states in those around them.

As children start to develop language skills, it is important we teach them the words to associate with these emotions.

Activities and Ideas to Help Children Understand Emotions

1. **Name emotions.** Normalize emotions and help children learn emotion words by saying how you are feeling out loud.
 - For example, "I am feeling so happy because I get to spend time with you," or "I am feeling frustrated because I dropped my glass of milk."
 - You can also practice naming emotions when reading books or watching television as they get older. "Wow, she is crying- she must be really sad."
2. **Feelings charades.** You can write the name of different emotions on pieces of paper, fold them up, and put them in a jar. Take turns pulling out an emotion and acting out the emotion while the rest of the family guesses what you are feeling!
3. **Emotion check-in.** Develop the habit of checking-in with your child on how they are feeling. You can do this multiple times a day, for example before and after school or right before bed. This could lead to great conversations about what is on their mind.

Talking about and naming emotions is something you can continue doing throughout a child's development. To build on this skill and help them learn emotion regulation, you can start teaching them how their emotions feel in their body.