

NAME IT TO TAME IT

COMMUNICATING & RECOGNIZING EMOTIONS

Emotional Literacy

Dr. Dan Siegel, psychiatrist and author of *The Whole Brain Child* coined the phrase Name it to Tame it. He describes it as the first step in managing big emotions and reducing our emotional reactivity.

As a parent, you have no doubt witnessed some big emotions in your child. Often, those can leave you feeling overwhelmed and unsure how to respond. Often our attempts are ineffective or can even make things worse and our children can receive the message we don't understand, or worse, that we don't care, ultimately creating a disconnect between us.

So what can we do instead? We can acknowledge how our children are feeling and label their emotions!

Key Messages

Recognizing Emotions - Naming emotions that can be pleasant or unpleasant, mild or strong can help us understand how we feel.. Physical clues like body language, facial expressions, and voice help us notice emotions in ourselves and in others.

Connecting Emotions, Thoughts, and Actions - Emotions influence our thoughts, and vice versa. Our actions are also connected. If we change our thoughts and emotions, we can choose more helpful actions. We can swap unhelpful thoughts using positive self-talk to train our brains to be optimistic and look for opportunities. What happens to us and around us also has an impact, meaning we may not always respond to the same situation in the same way, nor will others

Understanding What I Can and Cannot Control - We can't choose the first emotions we feel. They come naturally. But we can change how we think and feel by making good choices, using calming strategies, and changing into a growth mindset. A growth mindset is the idea that mistakes and challenges can help us grow and reach our goals, whereas in a fixed mindset people generally stay the same.

What are the benefits of labelling emotions?

- **A calm brain.** Research show that the simple act of labelling emotions can help us feel calmer. Labelling heightened emotions activates the prefrontal cortex (the thinking brain) and reduces activity in the amygdala (the feeling brain), which puts on the "brakes" & decreases our emotional reactivity.
- **Feeling understood.** "Calm down, you're ok. It's fine, don't worry about it." Sound familiar? I've been there myself with those attempts to distract them from their emotions or try to convince them it's not so bad. While this is well intentioned, it can be experienced as being dismissive or invalidating. Labelling your child's emotions shows them that you understand what they are going through. When children feel seen and heard, they are better able to process emotions and let them go. That can make a big difference for sense of self and can help them feel they have some control over that strong emotion. Emotional validation might sound like:
 - "It sounds like you feel nervous about your first day. I feel nervous when I start something new too. I'm right here with you."
 - "You feel really mad that I said no TV. It's hard when you don't get what you want."
 - "You seem frustrated by that homework. I bet you'd rather be riding your scooter right now."
- **Aids problem solving.** We cannot address the real issue at hand if we don't understand where the feelings are coming from. Once we identify the specific emotion and how it feels in the body, then, we can work on collaborative problem solving with our kids and guide them towards an appropriate coping strategy.
- **Improved behavior.** Overwhelming emotions can cause the area of the brain responsible for language to shut down. When children don't have the words to describe how they feel, they will show us how they feel with their behavior, often disruptive and even harmful. These fight or flight response patterns stick and processing and moving on from how they feel becomes more difficult. Research shows not acknowledging emotions, results in lower well-being and more physical symptoms of stress.
- **Builds empathy.** When children learn to identify and label emotions in themselves and have had someone model and respectfully guide them through the process of understanding and managing those emotions, they become skilled at helping others through this process too.

So how do we teach children about emotions?

Through play of course! Check out the rest of this guide for tools to build awareness of emotions and to open up a discussion about your child's own emotions and experiences.

Lower
Grades
(PreK-2nd)

EXPLORING MY EMOTIONS

Your child can learn to recognize emotions in themselves and others and talk about internal and external emotional cues. These activities provide fun ways to practice these skills daily and provide ways to further connect with your child.



CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. Talk about emotions with your child. Two vocabulary words you might use are situation (something that happens) and emotion (a feeling such as happy, or sad). We all express emotions differently and there is no one right or wrong way to feel.
2. Notice and label when your child recognizes their emotions, what is happening in their body, how strong are they, and how those emotions influence their thoughts and actions. For example, "You are feeling ___? Thank you for telling me." "You thought/did ___ because you were feeling ___? Let's talk about it."
3. Talk with your child about "self-talk" or our voice we have in our head. Have them think about whether the voice gives helpful or unhelpful messages.
4. Ask your child what it means to have fixed mindset thoughts (or thinking that people can't change) like "I'm the worst at this," or growth mindset thoughts (or thinking that people improve) like "There's still more for me to learn." Talk about why a growth mindset is important and can help us grow.

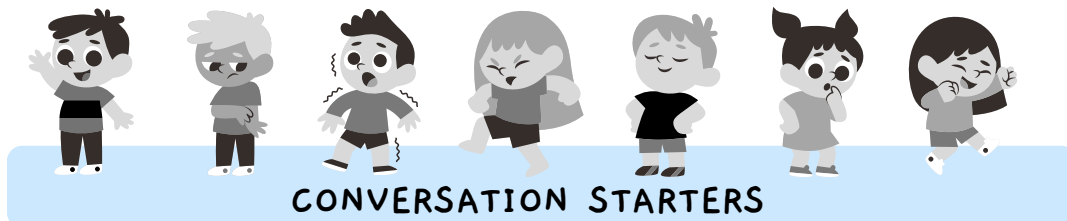
ACTIVITIES

1. Role play situations where they may get angry, sad, happy, afraid, excited, and other emotions you can think of. Encourage your child to explain why they may feel that way and/or describe the action they usually take in response to the emotion. Explain that all emotions are valid, but discuss how the way we act in response to those emotions can be helpful or unhelpful. Use examples from your lives.
- 2: Take opportunities during reading stories or watching videos, to help your child name the emotions characters are feeling and identify the situations that cause the emotions. Describe how the characters react to the emotions and suggest calming strategies the characters might use.
3. Post the Emotion Clues Chart up on your wall and talk about how emotions look on the outside and feel on the inside. Ask "What are some emotions you've had? How do they look on the outside? How do they feel in your body? When was the last time you felt that emotion? How did you behave? What can you do next time you feel this way?" Next time your child is overwhelmed by emotion, ask them to point to the chart to identify the feelings.
4. Print out the Feelings Faces Cards, a super versatile tool for teaching emotions. Play a game of feelings memory with your cards. Or choose a card at random and ask your child to find that emotion in a book. You could play feelings charades - take turns acting out the emotion on the card and have the other player try to guess what it is. After each turn, show the card to each other and ask if they would have acted out the emotion in the same way or have other ideas. Ask "How did you make your guess? What were some clues you used? Why is it good to think about how we feel? How might knowing these clues help you be a better friend?"

Older
Grades
(3rd-6th)

EXPLORING MY EMOTIONS

Your child can learn to recognize emotions in themselves and others and that people experience different emotions based on the situation. These activities provide fun ways to practice these skills and provide ways to connect with your child.

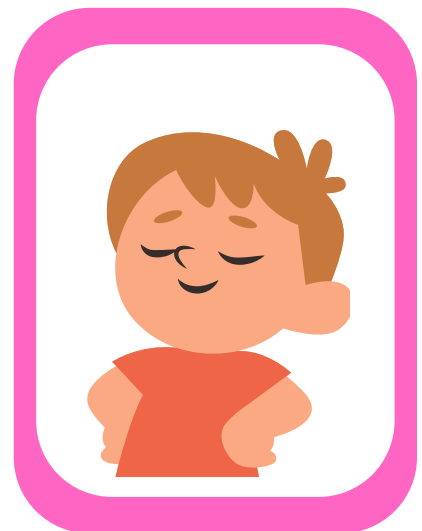
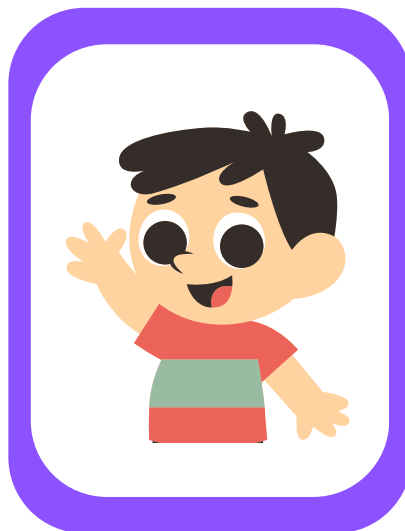


1. Increase your child's vocabulary by using words like mindful (noticing what is happening inside of you or around you; paying close attention). Talk about the outward clues that help us identify emotions like anger, surprise, joy, fear, loneliness, and sadness in ourselves and friends and family. Remind them emotions are part of who we are as humans, but how we experience them may be different based on who we are and what the situation is, and that is okay. There is not one right way to experience emotions.
2. Ask your child to explain self-talk to you. Helpful self-talk can help them reach their goals and can lead to improved self-confidence and happiness. Help them practice positive self-talk with the following starters...
 - I believe that I can.....I am kind to myself by.....I am grateful for.....I am proud that I can.....
3. Go over these 3 steps in regulating strong emotions. Ask them to explain why it is important not to skip any.
 - Stop: Notice—What is happening in my body? What are my emotions?
 - Think: Process—How strong is my emotional reaction?
 - Cool Off: Get calm—What strategy should I use to calm my reaction?
4. Help your child practice changing fixed mindset statements (“I can’t do it”) to growth mindset ones (“I can’t do it, YET”) that reflect we can all grow and learn, it may take more practice and making mistakes on the way.

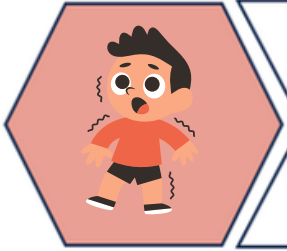
ACTIVITIES

1. Use role-play to help your child think back on and ahead to reactions when they experience strong emotions. For example, ask, “How would you react if someone splashed paint on you? How would you react if you opened the door, and there was a surprise party for you? How would you react if your best friend moved away?”
2. When reading books or watching TV or movies with your child, discuss the emotions that different characters may be feeling, why they have those feelings, and what actions they take as a result. Talk about how their actions might be different if they had or hadn't stopped, thought, and cooled off first. Look for opportunities to talk about whether people or characters are using growth or fixed mindsets.
3. Post or display the Emotions Clues Chart and discuss that emotions can look, sound, and feel differently based on the emotion. ASK: Tell me about a time when you experienced one of these emotions. What happened? What did it look like, sound like, and feel like?
4. Take turns acting out the below scenarios (or scenarios more relevant to your child) using the face, body, and tone of voice to show how you would feel. Then discuss what the other noticed and if you would feel similar or different. ASK: Why is it important to pay attention to how we feel? Why is it important to pay attention to how others feel?
 - At a soccer game, you accidentally kick the ball into the other team's goal—scoring for the wrong team!
 - You have worked really hard on your school science project/community art contest, and today is the fair.
 - You decide you want to try karate. At the first class, you are paired with someone who is really great at karate.

FEELINGS FACES CARDS



EMOTION CLUES

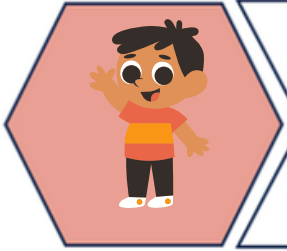


AFRAID

Looks like: Raised eyebrows, Opened eyes, Pulled back corners of the mouth, Limbs pulled into body, Shaking

Sounds like: Quivering voice, Whimpering, Fast breathing

Feels like: Dry mouth, Stiff, Sweaty, Pounding heart, Holding breath



HAPPY

Looks like: Raised corners of the mouth, Crinkled eyes

Sounds like: Clapping, Cheerful voice, Laughing

Feels like: Bubbling, Jumping, Relaxed

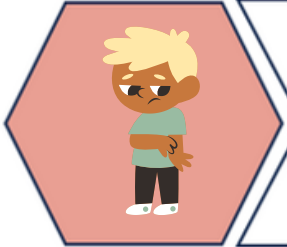


MAD

Looks like: Lowered inner eyebrows, Bulging or squinting eyes, Tightly pressed lips, Crossed arms, Clenched fists

Sounds like: Yelling, Shouting, Stomping

Feels like: Hot, Boiling, Tight



SAD

Looks like: Raised inner eyebrows, Lowered eyelids, Lowered corners of the mouth, Trembling lip, Slumped body

Sounds like: Crying, Moaning, Whining

Feels like: Weak, Droopy



FRUSTRATED

Looks like: Furrowed brow, Squinting eyes, Tight lips, Stiff body

Sounds like: Grunting, Growling, Stomping

Feels like: Stuck, Tight

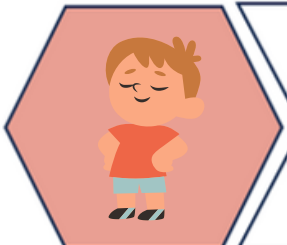


SURPRISED

Looks like: Arched eyebrows, Widely opened eyes, Dropped jaw, Palms up, Sudden backward movement

Sounds like: Gasping, Screaming, Cheering

Feels like: Racing heart, Jumpy



PROUD

Looks like: Chin up, Shoulders back, Raised arms

Sounds like: Clear voice, Deep breath and exhale

Feels like: Full, Light, Strong heartbeat