

# Helping children to manage feelings

"Let's go, let's go. Come on Dad!"

This is the family outing that everyone in the family has been waiting for.

Seven-year-old Voula has been up since dawn jumping around excitedly.

When Voula gets wound up it can be difficult to keep things under control. She doesn't seem to understand that her baby brother doesn't like her jumping around and poking at him, or that her Dad is a bit slower in the mornings and needs his space. You don't want to dampen her enthusiasm, but you'd like her to be able to express it in ways that are less annoying to others!

## Learning to manage feelings

Children's feelings are often intense. They can be quickly taken over by feelings of excitement, frustration, fear or joy.

When feelings take over children's behaviour, they can find it difficult to manage without adult support. This is why learning how to recognise and manage feelings is a very important part of children's social and emotional development.

Understanding that all sorts of feelings are normal, that they can be named, and that there are ways of handling them are the first things children need to learn about feelings. Understanding that feelings affect behaviour, and being able to recognise how this happens are important steps for learning to manage feelings.



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# How parents and carers can help children manage feelings

## 1 Notice feelings

Before we can learn how to control feelings, we first have to notice them. You can help your children notice feelings by noticing them yourself and giving them labels: happy, sad, excited, frustrated, angry, embarrassed, surprised, etcetera. Giving feelings names helps to make them more manageable for children.

Learning to pay attention to how they are feeling helps children understand that all feelings are okay and that they can have emotions without being controlled by them.

## 2 Talk about everyday feelings

Talking with children about what it's like when you're angry, sad, nervous or excited helps them find ways to express feelings without having to act them out through negative behaviours. Children learn these skills best when they hear adults and peers using words to express feelings and when they are encouraged to use words like this too.

Learning to name feelings helps children find ways to express them without having to act them out.

## 3 Create space for talking about difficult feelings

Although all feelings are okay, some feelings can be more difficult to cope with than others. Help children to separate a feeling from a difficult reaction by helping them name it. Being able to say or think, "I am feeling angry," means that children don't have to act really angry before anyone takes notice. It allows them to choose how they will respond. The same idea works with other difficult feelings like nervousness or fear.

Learning to cope with feelings helps children manage their behaviour at school and at home. It helps them learn better, relate to others better and feel better about themselves.

Things to remember:

- Learning skills for managing feelings takes practice.
- Noticing and naming feelings comes first.
- Talking about everyday feelings in normal conversations makes it easier when the difficult feelings come up.
- Talking about difficult feelings is usually best tried after the feelings have calmed down a bit, and when children, parents and carers are feeling relaxed.

Things to try at home:

- Use feeling words when you talk with children about everyday situations (eg "You scored a goal! How **exciting** was that!" or "It's pretty **disappointing** that Kati can't play with you today").
- Invite children to describe their own feelings (eg "I'm feeling pretty **nervous** about going to the dentist. **How about you?**" or "How did **you feel** when?").

This resource is part of a range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets for families and school staff. View them all online at [www.kidsmatter.edu.au](http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au)



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