

Waltham Forest Early Years Guidance

Supporting children's emotions and feelings

This guidance will help you in supporting children's emotions and feelings. Using some of the examples in this guidance will help you to understand and meet the needs of children in your early years provision.

How can you recognise that a child is feeling a certain way, including if they are non-verbal?

Sad – stomping feet, crying, sitting alone.

Angry/Frustrated – shouting, throwing objects, causing harm to others and themselves, biting.

Happy – smiling, laughing, interacting with others, displaying their work to practitioners, talking about positive past experiences.

Confused – wandering around, withdrawn, quiet, sitting alone, non-approachable.

Excited – Flapping, jumping, biting, laughing, smiling, hitting.

Anxious – quickly getting angry, irritable, lack of sleep, tired.

Jealous – overly possessive, aggressive behaviour, insecure, isolated, low self-esteem.

Embarrassed – awkward, self-conscious, anxious, avoidance.

Frightened – upset, tantrums, sad, withdrawn.



Emotional Development

- Emotional development refers to the ability to recognise, express, and manage feelings at different stages of life and to have empathy for the feelings of others. The development of these emotions, which include both positive and negative

emotions, is largely affected by relationships with parents/carers, siblings, and peers.

What to expect from children and their emotions?

A 2-year-old will begin expressing shame, embarrassment, and pride, which are learned emotions based on their culture. As they acquire language and learn to verbalise their feelings, they can express their emotions of affection, distress, pain, and fatigue.

The ability to recognise and label emotions and then to control emotional expression in ways that are consistent with cultural expectations is called emotion regulation.

Children learn to self-regulate their emotions to be able to cope with difficult situations. Usually by age two, children also begin to acquire the complex emotional response of empathy by reading others' emotional cues and understanding their perspectives.

At around 3-4 years children will:

- use words to describe basic feelings like sad, happy, angry and excited.
- feel sorry and understand when they upset another person – although you'll probably need to give plenty of reminders.
- feel generous and show that they understand the idea of sharing – but don't expect them to share all the time.

How can you help children learn to express their feelings?

- Tune into cues – tune into children's feeling by looking at their body language, listening to what they are saying and observing their behaviour.
- Behind every behaviour is a feeling – try to understand the meaning and feeling behind children's behaviour. You can help children to express their feelings once you know what is driving the behaviour.
- Name the feeling – help children name their feelings by giving them a label. Naming feelings is the first step in helping children to identify them. It allows children to develop an emotional vocabulary so they can talk about their feelings.
- Identify feelings in others – provide lots of opportunities to identify feelings in others. Use this as a teaching opportunity to explore emotions and feelings.
- Picture books are a great way to discuss feelings and help children learn how to recognise facial expressions.
- Be a role model – children learn about feelings and how to express them appropriately by watching others.
- Encourage with praise – praise children when they talk about their feelings or express them in an appropriate way. Not only does this show that feelings are normal and it's ok to talk about them, it also reinforces the behaviour so they are likely to repeat it.
- Listen to children's feelings – stay present and resist the urge to make children's bad feelings go away. Support children to identify and express their feelings so they are heard. When feelings are minimised or dismissed, they will often be expressed in unhealthy ways.



Play ideas to encourage a child's emotions.

Playing with practitioners and others helps children to explore and understand their feelings. Here are some play tips for practitioners and children:

- Give the child opportunities for messy play, like playing with sand, mud or paints. This is a great way for children to express feelings like happiness or sadness.
- Look for imaginative and creative ways for children to play. Children could act out feelings with puppets or toys or use old clothes for dress-up and pretend play. For example, the child could pretend to be kind and concerned like a teacher or a doctor.
- Take the children outside to play in an open area with lots of space for running, tumbling and rolling. This can help them to let out emotions.
 - Encourage children to jump around and 'act out' music or make music with simple instruments.
 - Read stories that feature characters who are experiencing similar situations and emotions to the child. This can really help the child understand new emotions including grief or worry about starting school.
 - Children might find it easier to express feelings if they feel in charge. Letting a child choose what and how to play can help with this.

Some children may benefit from having a 'Happiness Box' at an early years provision and/or at home. Find out about the benefits of Happiness Boxes and how to create them by visiting [here](#)

Useful websites

[CBeebies](#) – Helping children to cope with their feelings

[GOV.UK](#) – Emotions

[Highspeedtraining](#) – Encouraging children to express their emotions

[Waltham Forest EYs Training](#) – Supporting children's self-regulation and well-being

