



Your Child's Feelings

Even before they learn and understand language, children feel emotions. They can tell if you are happy and relaxed or tense and upset. They are aware of the people, emotions expressed around them, and the environment in which they live. Children have the same feelings as adults. They may not know the words angry, sad, happy, or scared, but they will experience these feelings.

Value Children

You are your child's mirror. They will value themselves in direct relationship to how you value them. It is very important to show your child that you love them all the time – even when you get angry with them.

Let your child know you love them by smiling, touching, talking, listening, watching and being there and taking care of them.

If you are feeling angry or sad, talk to your child and tell them why. Your child may feel your emotions and think they are the cause. Own your own feelings and say these are temporary.

Notice cues that say distress

You cannot spoil a baby with too much attention. Do not ignore distress cues that tell you when your baby is hurt, sick, afraid, or lonely. Researchers tell us that babies whose cries are responded to right away cry less after the first year than babies whose parents let them “cry it out.”

After the newborn period, babies can tolerate short times of mild distress, such as when they are learning to sleep longer periods at night. Young children need to know they can always rely on an adult to soothe them and help them manage difficult feelings.

Challenges

Every day, your child will face challenges such as developing new skills and abilities. They have to learn everything – how to crawl, walk, talk, and be respectful towards others.

While learning new skills, your child may experience frustration. At times, they may even have tantrums. Have patience and stay calm. Your child's sense of security depends on knowing they are safe, so soothe or

comfort them. Once they master the new skill, they will usually become more content.

Anticipate how your child will feel in particular situations and what you can realistically expect of them. If they have been shopping in the mall with you all day, they will be exhausted and overexcited by dinner; this may cause tears and tantrums.

Some suggestions to help your child include:

- whenever possible, give your child choices;
- try to plan your day around a routine that works for your child;
- have healthy snacks, activities and toys available;
- try to spend some time outside every day;
- communicate and explain yourself - for example, “In 5 minutes we need to go because we need to go home and make supper”; and
- do not sweat the small stuff.

If your child behaves aggressively, look for the reasons and offer help. Keep your voice calm and be respectful and let your child tell their side of the story. “I can see how angry you feel. Please tell me why you are so angry.” Being treated with respect teaches children to solve problems by talking, rather than by using aggression or physical force. In clear, simple language, talk about behaviours and consequences as well. “If you throw sand, you will have to leave.”

Time outs are also helpful for aggressive behaviour. A time out means that your child is removed from whatever they are doing for a short period of time. Time outs work best if you do the following:

- use a time out right away;
- keep time outs short and let your child return to the activity or group when ready;
- make time outs very boring; and
- do not use time outs too often.

For more information about positive discipline, visit Caring for Kids at www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/guiding_with_positive_discipline.

Express Feelings

Help your child express emotions. Teach your child words for their feelings so they can tell you how they feel. By giving a name to feelings and talking about your child's emotions, you can help your child understand feelings like happy, sad, excited, and angry. Children who are able to express their feelings and know they will get a soothing response are less likely to act out to make their needs known.

You can also assure your child that crying or feeling other emotions can be natural. Tears are an emotional release, and sometimes children or adults just need to cry. At times, it is okay to be mad or angry or hurt or frustrated as well. However, it is not okay to be destructive or to hurt anyone, including themselves.

Build Self-Esteem

The definition of self-esteem is 'belief in one's self'. We know that children's ability to handle themselves and participate in the world depends on their sense of self-esteem. It is very important that you create an environment to help your child's self-esteem and confidence grow.

Set the Stage for Success

Help your child learn and succeed. Create an environment that makes success more possible. For example, place a stool in front of the sink so they can wash their own hands, or choose slippers that are easy for them to put on.

Let Them Do It Themselves

Plan your activities with enough time for your child to do some things for themselves. If your child asks for help, you can offer support or guidance but avoid taking over. They may not do the task as well or as quickly, but they will have a sense of achievement by putting on their own shoes or clothes.

Choice is Power

People need to have some power over their own lives. Children need to make age-appropriate decisions. For example:

- if a 6-month-old baby refuses to eat solid food that you have offered, try again later;
- a 2-year-old child can decide which shirt to wear; and
- a 3-year-old child can decide between two options that you offer for breakfast (e.g. whole-grain cereal

with milk and a banana, or toast and peanut butter with an orange).

Whenever possible, allow your child to have some choice or control over their own life. They will make some mistakes, but this is how most of us learn. Making good decisions is a skill which your child can develop if they practice.

Show Respect

Encourage your child to speak up and give their point of view, and then carefully consider it. Children can be very creative and solve problems. Show respect and treat them with the same courtesy you expect of them. By modeling good manners, you make your child feel respected and set a standard for behaviour in your home and for your family.

Children Like Routine

Children are most comfortable with routine and when they know what to expect. You can prepare your child and talk about a new experience, such as the first visit to the dentist. Tell your child about changes in routine. For example, "Instead of going to playschool tomorrow, you will play with Jessie."

For More Information

For more information about child health and development, visit Healthy Families BC at www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/parenting, or read the Baby's Best Chance handbook, available at www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2017/BabysBestChance-Sept2017.pdf (PDF 16.67 MB)

For more HealthLinkBC Files on child development, see:

- [HealthLinkBC File #92a Your Child and Play From Birth to 3 Years](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #92b Your Child's Development from Birth to 3 Years](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #92d Toilet Learning](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #92e Time for Bed](#)

Some information in this file has been adapted with the permission of the BC Healthy Child Development Alliance. For more information, visit <http://childhealthbc.ca/initiatives/bc-healthy-child-development-alliance>.

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