Teaching Children a Vocabulary for Emotions

Did you know that children who have a large vocabulary of “feeling words” can better express their emotions using language rather than through problem behavior? The feelings activities that follow are fun ways to teach children a vocabulary for emotions. Many of the activities use “feeling faces”—faces expressing a variety of emotions. Drawings of children’s faces representing 10 feelings are available online at www.csefel.uiuc.edu—under Resources, click on Practical Strategies, and go to Feeling Chart in the section Teaching Social-Emotional Skills.

Dice—Print drawings of children’s faces representing different emotions. Glue the faces and feeling words you want to teach on the six sides of a small box (a collapsible gift box works well). Have children toss the box (as if tossing a die), and when it settles, read the feeling word for the face on top or have the children identify the feeling. Ask the children to remember a time they felt that way, or ask them to imitate the expression in the drawing.

Spinner—Print the pictures representing feeling words and paste them on a game spinner board. (A Feeling Wheel is available online in the Feeling Chart pages—see Web address above.) Have a child spin the spinner, identify the feeling it points to, and talk about a time he or she experienced the feeling. Children can also use the spinner to point to an emotion that a character in a story may feel.

Classroom book—Create a classroom book of feeling words using photographs you’ve taken of the children demonstrating feelings. The book can be about one feeling or many. For individual children you can make books about one feeling—having the child provide the text by talking about what triggers the emotion—or many feelings.

Check-in board—Create a check-in board where children place their name tag or photo next to a feeling picture. Follow up with children, talking with them about the emotion they chose and the circumstances related to their feelings. As the day progresses and feelings change, you can facilitate

Lise Fox, PhD, is a professor in the Department of Child and Family Studies of the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute of the University of South Florida in Tampa. She conducts research and training and develops support programs focused on young children with challenging behavior.

Rochelle Harper Lentini, MEd, is a faculty member in the Department of Child and Family Studies of the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute. She provides training and technical assistance to early educators and families on supporting young children with challenging behavior and promoting social and emotional competence.

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children's changing the placement of their name tag to indicate their new feelings.

**Puppets**—Children can create puppets that discuss feelings and role-play classroom situations. Print pictures of a variety of feeling faces and give children each a set of faces with Velcro tabs to attach interchangeably on their puppet's face. Children can complete the puppet by adding hair and clothing.

**Bingo**—Children can play bingo using feeling pictures in place of the traditional numbers. When you pull a card with a feeling picture out of a bag, ask the children to identify the feeling, make the expression on their faces, and then place a marker on the appropriate face on their bingo card.

**Thinking about emotions during story time**—While reading children's books, stop periodically and ask the children what a character is feeling. You may wish to have a chart of feeling pictures for the children to scan or point to when responding.
Child-Friendly Ideas for Teaching Problem Solving

Problem solving is a complex skill for young children to master. Yet, children’s inability to problem solve can often lead to challenging behavior. Here are some child-friendly ideas for teaching problem solving.

Find graphics for the four Problem-Solving Steps (in the puppet activity) and for the Solution Kit activity online at www.csefel.uiuc.edu—under Resources, click on Practical Strategies, and go to the section Teaching Social-Emotional Skills.

**Problem-solver puppet**—Have a class puppet help you teach children how to problem solve. The puppet can show the children picture cards to teach them the steps to problem solving. The puppet can also provide feedback and encouragement to children when they use their problem-solving skills and review at the end of the day who was a problem solver and why.

**Solution Kit**—The Solution Kit can be used to teach children possible solutions to a variety of problems (the kit is available at http://csefel.uiuc.edu/modules-archive/module2/handouts/9.pdf). You can use the pictures from the kit to teach, cue, and assist with problem solving during classroom situations.

**Role play**—You can use role-playing to show children examples of both effective and inappropriate ways to problem solve. You can share situations with the children to act out or read scenarios from a storybook.