

Dear Parents and Carers,

Our lives have been turned upside down in recent weeks. Routines have changed and the patterns of daily life are significantly different.

Adults managing work, alongside having children at home can be difficult for all. Children can often find it tricky to understand and express how they are feeling and this can lead to challenging behaviours.



Young children can experience strong, powerful emotions as they play learn and interact with others. They can often find it challenging to manage these in appropriate ways. This can lead to children expressing how they feel in physical ways, to withdraw from situations or become very tearful.

Adults in children's lives, can support them to develop the skills in

- *Recognising and naming their emotions*
- *Beginning to understand why they feel the way they do- what has made them angry, sad, excited etc*
- *Beginning to develop skills to find a solution or make a plan when their emotions are very strong*

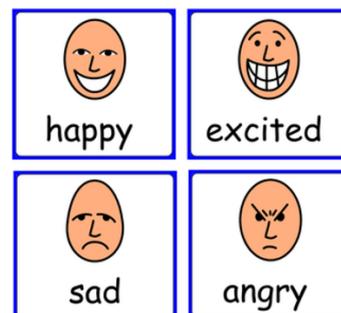
The 'Empathetic approach' is a very powerful way in supporting young children to develop their emotional vocabulary and understand their feelings. When children are overpowered by their emotions they can find it tricky to process and use language. They often need an adult to step in and verbalise their emotions when they are unable to do so. For example, when your child gets cross, sad etc ,verbalise how he/she is feeling and why- not just with words but reflect their emotion in your body language, facial expression and tone too. This not only enables your child to begin to



have a name for how they feel, but also validates their emotions. The adult then goes on to suggest a solution (which may not be acceptable to the child!) This can help children see a way to manage their emotions. When talking about a plan or solution it is important the adults tone, body language and facial expression changes to

become calm and regulated, which hopefully the child will then mirror. Using this approach each time emotions run high can really help. Also using it for positive emotions, as well as more challenging ones, is equally important.

One of the successful strategies we use in school to support children with their emotional development, are **emotion cards**. Little pictures which you can use with your child to name their emotions as they arise. Sometimes when children are in the throes of an emotion, they can find it tricky to process language, but can be receptive to visuals. We found that after using these cards consistently to help children name their emotions, many children then go on to access these pictures independently when they want to tell an adult how they are feeling. We have these cards available for families who would like to use them at home.



A strategy we were working on in school before lockdown was developing a **cosy den** where children could go when experiencing strong emotions or just to go when they needed quiet time either alone, with a friend or an adult. We had the emotion cards in there, photo images of children experiencing a range of feelings, books reflecting different emotions, cuddly toys, puppets, cushions and soft blankets etc. We were directing children to this area when they were becoming upset, sad, angry etc, or we would invite children to this area to focus on activities to support them with their emotional development. You might think about setting up a little cosy area at home for your child to do this. It is important to develop the area with your child so they feel ownership. You might like to involve brothers and sisters in developing this space.

The cosy den could just be a blanket over some chairs, a space under a table or even a cardboard box big enough for your child to fit inside. Try and spend calm, fun time in there with your child, talking about the pictures, sharing the books, snuggling up with toys etc. so they associate the area with positive experiences and it becomes a place they like to spend time.

Sharing **photos** of children experiencing a range of emotions (you can easily find these on the internet) or talking about how characters in **stories** feel and why, can be very supportive in helping young children talk about and understand their emotions.





It can also help children think of what to do when they feel a certain way. Asking open ended questions - How do you think he/she is feeling? I wonder why s/he feels sad....happy...scared? What makes you feel sad...happy...cross? I wonder what she could do to feel better? You can also offering suggestions or talking about what you would

do can help children build on their emotional resilience and ability to regulate their feeling. e.g. 'when I feel cross I can punch a pillow...stamp my feet...tell my mummy...' or 'when I'm sad, I like a cuddle to feel better'.

Exploring emotions in role play, imaginative games and using puppets can be a valuable strategy support children's emotional growth.

Introducing scenarios into play with your child can build on their emotional vocabulary and problem solving

skills to deal with emotions in real

situations. Suggesting

play ideas such as; pretending the Lego man is cross because he can't fit on the train or the tiger is sad because the elephant doesn't want to play with him opens, up lots of opportunities for talk and finding solutions when your child is feeling calm and happy.



If you would like to read more about how your child brain develops to enable them to see the world from another's point of view and manage strong emotions, go to-

'Did you know your child has three brains?'

<https://www.clinical-partners.co.uk/insights-and-news/family-issues/item/your-child-has-three-brains>

I hope these ideas are useful. Remember these are lifelong skills, which can take time to develop. A consistent approach is the key to progress, as is recognising and celebrating small steps of progress.

*Best Wishes
Caroline*