

## What are Emotions?

Emotions are mental reactions (such as anger or fear) marked by strong feelings and usually causing physical effects.<sup>1</sup>

### Why are Emotions Important?

- Feelings and emotions:
  - Drive behavior, especially in young children.
  - Can be confusing.
  - Are stored in the body; when they are blocked rather than expressed, they can damage health.
  - Can signal danger, and are meant to be protective. However, children who have experienced traumatic things may perceive danger in situations where none exists, leading them to respond inappropriately.
  - Can trigger survival behaviors (fight, flight, freeze) more frequently in children who have experience with trauma, due to their tendency to be on the lookout for danger.
- When safety, stability, and nurturance are lacking, children often begin to misunderstand the emotions of others. Emotional cues signaled by others are frequently misinterpreted, leading children to respond in ways that are viewed as inappropriate by those around them. (For example, a teacher may be slightly irritated with something completely unrelated to a child, but that child interprets the teacher's cues as anger towards him/herself.)
- Sharing feelings is sometimes viewed as unsafe or unacceptable, especially for children who have experienced trauma.
- Social and emotional competence is the single most important predictor of how children will adjust to life as adults.



<sup>1</sup> Merriam-Webster. "Dictionary Definition of Emotion." Accessed Sept. 9, 2015. <http://www.wordcentral.com/cgi-bin/student?book=Student&va=emotion>

## What Can Be Done?

- Help children identify and name what they are feeling.
  - Practice makes perfect—give children lots of opportunities to identify feelings in themselves and others.
- Encourage children to talk about their feelings.
- Be a role model. Talk to someone you trust about your own feelings.
- Accept children’s feelings, whatever they are.
- Teach children that emotions are not good or bad, they just are. Help them learn that it’s ok to feel whatever they feel.
- Help children think about how to respond to feelings, conflicts, and problems in healthy and respectful ways. One way to do this is by asking them:
  - What can you do?
  - Who can you talk to?
  - How do you calm yourself down when you feel upset?



## MORE INFORMATION



### **Teaching Your Child About Feelings from Birth to Age 2**

From the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning.



### **Feelings Chart with Instructions**

From the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning.

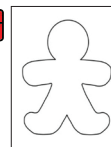


### **Teaching Your Child To Identify and Express Emotions**



### **Emotions Vocabulary Chart**

From the FASD London Region Assessment Clinic.



### **Gingerbread Cut-Outs with Instructions**