



## 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 they live in. 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

It's very important for a child to feel confident that there is someone in their life who loves them no matter what. Show your child that you love them all the time – even when you are angry with them. Let your child know you love them by smiling, touching, talking, listening, watching and being empathetic with their feelings.

### Express feelings

Teach your children to name their feelings. 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. They will learn to tell you what they are feeling and why.

Children learn how to understand their feelings and what to do about them by watching you. Talk to your child about how you are feeling and why. By doing this you help your child understand that feelings (even "bad" feelings) are normal and that there are healthy ways to respond to them. For example, "I'm feeling upset because grandma had to cancel her visit. I'm going to take some deep breaths to calm down, but it's okay for me to feel sad and cry for a little while."

When your child has upset you, calmly explain how you are feeling while assuring them that they are loved. This helps them learn empathy and how their actions impact others while still feeling safe and accepted.

When you're upset about something unrelated to your child, your child may still pick up on your feelings and become stressed if they think that they are the cause. Talk about these situations, too. For example, "I am feeling sad because Grandma can't come for a visit. You haven't done anything wrong."

### 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. Responding to your baby's cues help you form the strong bond that your baby's brain and body needs to develop in a healthy way. Research also 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, physical activity and periods of rest each day
- Try to spend some time outside every day
- Let your child know if there is going to be a change. For example, "In 5 minutes we need to go home and make supper"
- 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." Treating children with respect teaches them to solve problems by talking, instead of by aggression or physical force. In clear, simple language, talk about behaviours and consequences as well. "If you throw sand, you will have to leave."

Avoid time outs, as feeling isolated or rejected can make it harder for your child to cope with the feelings that have overwhelmed them. Try a "time in" instead with the goal of comforting and teaching. Make sure that your own emotions are under control, and then:

- Have your child sit with you in a quiet space for comfort and calming
- Ask your child about what they are feeling and empathize with them
- Explain why certain behaviors were not appropriate and talk about what your child could do differently in the future

For more information about positive discipline, visit Caring for Kids at [www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/behavior-and-development/positive-discipline-for-young-children](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/behavior-and-development/positive-discipline-for-young-children).

## Build Self-Esteem

The definition of self-esteem is 'belief in one's self'. A child's ability to handle themselves and participate in the world depends on their sense of self-esteem. Create an environment to help your child's self-esteem and confidence grow. Give them chances to explore, experiment and have adventures, knowing that you are there if they need you.

## Set the stage for success

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
- 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)

When possible, allow your child to have some choice or control over their own life. They will make some mistakes, but this is how they learn. Making good decisions is a skill your child can develop with 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 thrive on routine and can struggle with change. You can help your child by talking about new experiences like the first visit to the dentist. Also, tell you child in advance if their routine is going to change. For example, tell your child, "Instead of going to playschool tomorrow, you will play with Jessie."

## For more information

For more information about child health and development, see Baby's Best Chance at

[www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2019/BBC-7th-edition-FINAL-Nov2019.pdf](http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2019/BBC-7th-edition-FINAL-Nov2019.pdf) (PDF 14.88 MB) or Toddler's First Steps at [www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2019/TFS-3rd-edition-FINAL-Nov2019.pdf](http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2019/TFS-3rd-edition-FINAL-Nov2019.pdf) (PDF 14.46 MB).

For more information, see the following HealthLinkBC Files:

- [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 [www.childhealthbc.ca/initiatives/bc-healthy-child-development-alliance](http://www.childhealthbc.ca/initiatives/bc-healthy-child-development-alliance).**

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