

Discovering Feelings

CONSULTANT'S NOTES



Introduction

Early childhood mental health consultation is intended to support caregivers in developing an increased awareness and understanding of the impact of their interactions on a child's social-emotional (SE) well-being. It serves as an effective strategy for addressing challenging behaviors and supporting young children's SE development in early care and education settings. The "Discovering Feelings" booklet is a tool designed to support your work as an early childhood mental health consultant. You can support caregiver practices through introducing and facilitating the use of this tool with providers and/or parents as an intentional and structured opportunity for skill building and development.

Emotional literacy refers to the developing capacity of a child to label and express emotions in socially and culturally appropriate ways and to understand and label the emotions of others. Although even young infants can sense a change in mood based on tone of voice, body language, and other cues, adults have an important role in helping babies learn to understand the emotions those cues represent. It is critical that caregivers are able to verbally acknowledge a child's emotions, validate them as acceptable and important, introduce appropriate emotional language into their vocabulary, and help them to express emotions in healthy ways. Doing this early and often will help children to better understand, communicate, and regulate their feelings in their own social and cultural settings.



What Should these Tools Be Used For?

The “Discovering Feelings” booklet is designed to assist caregivers in helping to label a young child’s feelings so the child is better able to associate “feeling terms” with actual emotions. This tool offers caregivers a simple way to:

- Introduce emotional vocabulary to a child.
- Illustrate for children a range of emotions.
- Validate the wide range of emotional experienced by children.
- Assist children in linking emotional vocabulary with specific emotive actions.

Note: This tool does not depict the full range of feelings a child may experience and is designed for use as a tool to be supported by a number of activities that help a child develop emotional literacy over time.

How Should These Tools Be Used?

You are strongly encouraged to go through the tool with Head Start teachers, home visitors, staff, or small groups of parents. It should take approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour to discuss the importance of young children developing emotional literacy, highlight the emotional vocabulary presented in the booklet, offer suggestions for completing the booklet, and answer any questions providers may have.

Supplies Needed

- Copies of the Discovering Feelings Booklet
- Paper and pen for journaling notes
- Magazines with pictures of young children

Tips

1. Prior to conducting this workshop, you should try to observe interactions between staff and children during socializations or other opportunities. As the language skills of the children onsite (ages 0-3) are still developing, pay particular attention to interactions that could benefit the children’s development of receptive or expressive emotional vocabulary and opportunities for the caregivers to label young children’s emotions.
2. Share your observations with caregivers where applicable as you move through the tool.
3. Familiarize yourself with the concept of emotional literacy and the vocabulary highlighted in the Discovering Feelings Booklet.
4. You are encouraged to go through with caregivers at least two pages of emotions covered in the tool.

Warm-Up Activity

Have providers look through the magazines you have provided for the session and pick out a picture of a child expressing an emotion. Have caregivers share the following:

1. What emotion is the child expressing?
2. How can you tell/how do you know?

3. How would you describe the emotion to a child? How would you describe the emotion to an adult?
4. What is the range of ways people you know express this emotion?

This activity is designed to get caregivers thinking about feelings and emotional language in very basic terms. They will need practice with this in order to effectively convey emotional concepts to the children they care for.

Using the Tool

Discuss with caregivers the definition of emotional literacy and briefly explain the benefits of assisting young children in developing an emotional vocabulary and associating those terms with an actual feeling. You may use the information provided in the introduction of this guide as a starting point.

When choosing pictures to include in the booklet, encourage caregivers to find pictures of children from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, genders, and ages from birth to age 3. Encourage parents and providers to use pictures of the children from the Head Start program whenever possible.

