

Deep Breaths and Happy Dances

Learning to manage feelings

Really happy, really sad, or really mad—feelings can be hard to manage. When a child can manage their feelings, they are able to show their feelings without losing control.

The Basics

Everyone has big feelings. Babies often cry to tell you how they feel. Older children might also cry, but they have more ways of showing their feelings. They might “go wild” when they are excited or act out when they are upset.

Learning to manage feelings is about choosing healthy ways to handle them. For example, a child can be frustrated, but they can also learn to stay calm. Even adults sometimes have a hard time controlling their feelings!

Note

Supplies that are underlined can be found in your kit.

Things to Try with Ages 2 to 5

Blowing and popping bubbles

- Show your child how to take a deep breath in. Then blow out slowly to blow bubbles. Invite your child to blow bubbles while you hold the wand. Long, slow breaths in and out make great bubbles. They also help children calm down.
- Invite your child to think of things that make them upset. “I feel frustrated when I can’t watch a video!” “I feel disappointed when I can’t eat ice cream!” Encourage your child to pop the bubbles with a clap or a stomp. It’s okay if it gets silly!

Getting Started

First, acknowledge how your child is feeling. Then, help them find ways of showing their feelings without hurting themselves or others. “It’s okay to feel mad. But it’s not okay to hit someone. Let’s practice asking for a turn.” Learning to manage big feelings takes lots of patience from both children and adults.

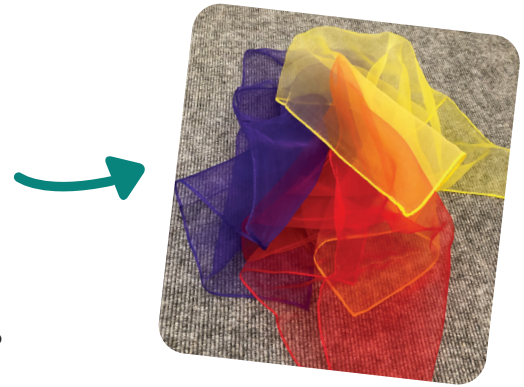


More! 

Things to Try with Ages 2 to 5

Feelings and movements

- Play some music or sing songs. Fast music, then slow. Soft, then loud. Talk with your child about which type of music matches different feelings. “How does the fast music make you feel?” Dance with the scarves to the music.
- Invite your child to make up a different movement for each feeling. Maybe a clap for feeling happy? A twirl for excited? A jump for upset? Encourage them to use their new movements to dance out their feelings.



Squeeze it! Squish it!

- Encourage your child to play with playdough in their own way. Offer some tools from your home, like forks, straws, and cookie cutters. Playing with playdough focuses children’s minds and can be very calming.
- Squeeze the playdough really tightly! Make shapes and squish them. Talk about when your child might feel worried or mad. Practice calming down by squeezing and squishing those feelings!



Everyday Interactions

Practice “calming down” as part of your daily routine. Take deep breaths together. Count to ten. Or do some simple stretching.

Use cardboard boxes, blankets, and pillows to make a cozy corner in your home. Fill it with things that will help your child relax—maybe stuffed animals, crayons and paper, and books. Invite your child to use their cozy corner as a place to take a break when they are having a big feeling.

Model, Notice, Practice

“I’m getting really upset. I will take a break.”

Model healthy ways to respond to your own big feelings.

“You chose to put your arms behind your back instead of hitting your sister. Nicely done!”

Notice when your child chooses a healthy way to handle their feelings. Let them know why you like their choice.

“I see you’re having a hard time with your feelings. Do you want to try blowing bubbles? Or squeezing a squishy ball?”

Practice making healthy choices with your child. Give options or ask what ideas they have.