

Emotion Cards: Noticing, Naming and Understanding Feelings



Purpose

These emotion cards can help children explore thoughts, feelings, and behaviours linked to different emotions.

They can also be used to express emotion if a child is struggling to find the words. For example, you could ask a child, “Which card shows how you are feeling today?”

Things to keep in mind

Children with more advanced language and social skills may be ready to use more complex words to describe emotions, or they may even identify more complex emotions than expected for their age.

Other children may find emotions trickier to understand and may not always recognise different emotions and expressions or know how they feel.

Some neurodivergent children may also show emotions differently: for example, they may flap their hands when excited or display neutral facial expressions even when they feel a strong emotion.

It is important to remind children that there are many ways to feel, express, and label emotions, and that no emotion is “bad”. Emotions also show up in the body, and these physical responses look different for everyone. Helping learners connect their feelings with their body cues is an important part of emotional development.

Ideas for educators to introduce the emotion cards to children

- Start with the four core emotions: Happy, Sad, Angry, Scared. Build up from there.
- Everyone has feelings. We also call them “emotions”.
- Emotions can show up in different ways. These cards talk about what children think, notice in their body, or do when they have different emotions.
- There is no such thing as a “bad” emotion - it is okay to experience any emotion!
- Emotions can come and go. We can feel them for a short or a long time.

Ideas for using the emotion cards

Identifying body cues and thoughts linked with emotions can be difficult for young children. Adults can scaffold by modelling, offering simple choices or examples, using toys or pictures, and wondering aloud. Children can participate and respond in whatever way works for them, such as through words, pointing, gesture, movement, drawing, or simply listening and watching.

- Ask children to **choose one or more emotion cards that match how they feel right now**. If helpful, explore together any body cues they notice.
- **Pick an emotion card and a toy**. Ask “Can you make the toy show that feeling?” Look together at what its face and body might be doing. For children who are ready, wonder together about what the toy might be thinking.
- Encourage children to **match emotion cards with illustrated faces or toy characters**. Talk together about the cues they notice in the character’s face and body, while recognising that people can show emotions in different ways.
- **Choose an emotion and explore it together**. Wonder about how that feeling might show up in the body. Then think together about when someone might feel that way. Adults can offer examples, choices, or prompts as needed. For children who are ready, you can also wonder together about what someone might be thinking when they feel that way.
- **Use everyday moments to help children connect their feelings with body cues**. You might say, “Your face is all scrunched - I wonder if that tasted yucky?” or “Your hands are squeezed tight. I wonder what you might be feeling?”



Print and laminate these cards. A6 is a common size.



Happy

Feeling joyful or
cheerful.

You might think

“I feel great!”

“I’m having a good day”

Your body might

Feel light and bouncy

Smile or laugh

Want to play



What is your way?



Sad

Feeling down
or upset.

You might think

"I feel upset"
"I feel like crying"

Your body might

Feel slow and heavy
Cry
Want a hug



What is your way?



Scared

Feeling frightened
or unsafe.

You might think

"I'm scared"

"I'm not sure"

Your body might

Feel fast inside

Shake

Hide or run



What is your way?



Angry

Feeling mad, grumpy,
or cranky.

You might think

“Stop!”
“Go away!”

Your body might

Feel hot
Squeeze your hands tight
Feel like fighting or running away



What is your way?



Surprised

Feeling shocked or
not expecting it.

You might think

Oh!
What's that?!

Your body might

Feel fast inside
Cover your mouth
Feel like screaming



What is your way?



Calm

Feeling relaxed
or peaceful.

You might think

“I feel relaxed”

“I feel good”

Your body might

Feel soft and still

Play quietly

Share



What is your way?



Tired

Feeling worn out
or sleepy.

You might think

"I just want to go to sleep"
"I don't want to do anything"

Your body might

Feel slow and heavy
Want to lie down
Yawn



What is your way?



Silly

Feeling playful
and giggly.

You might think

“This is funny”
“Let’s keep playing!”

Your body might

Feel wriggly and fast
Laugh
Make silly faces



What is your way?



Jealous

Feeling upset someone else
is getting something you want

You might think

“What about me?”
“Why can’t I do that with you?”

Your body might

Feel tense and hot
Cry
Say something unkind



What is your way?



Worried

Feeling nervous
or unsure.

You might think

“I don’t want to do that”
“Something might go wrong”

Your body might

Feel sick in the tummy
Want to say “no”
Want to hold someone’s hand



What is your way?



Disgusted

Feeling something is yucky
or gross.

You might think

“Ewww” or “Yuck!”
“That smells or tastes bad”

Your body might

Feel squirmy
Feel sick in the tummy
Cover your nose or mouth



What is your way?



Embarrassed

Feeling shy after
something doesn't go to plan

You might think

"I want to hide"
"Everyone is laughing at me"

Your body might

Feel hot and red in the face
Look away
Want to hide



What is your way?



Proud

Feeling happy about
something you did.

You might think

“I worked it out!”

“I did it all by myself!”

Your body might

Feel relaxed

Smile

Want to show or tell someone



What is your way?



Excited

Looking forward to something
or having lots of energy.

You might think

"This is fun"
"I can't wait!"

Your body might

Feel fast and bouncy
Talk a lot
Play quickly



What is your way?



Brave

Doing something even though
you feel scared

You might think

"I am ready to try"
"I need to say something"

Your body might

Feel shaky or strong
Want to speak up
Ask someone to do it with you



What is your way?