

Addressing Kids' Emotions

It's not easy to put feelings into words, even for adults. Children in particular struggle to talk about their feeling, especially when they are intense or complicated. Here's an activity for parents and caregivers to use to help children open up and sort through their emotions in response to COVID-19.

Step 1: Make a List of Feelings

- Work together to come up with a list of feelings. Make it fun – pair facial expressions or emoji's with the list of emotions.
- Write each feeling on a separate index card (e.g. **happy**, **excited**, **content**, **grateful**, **loving**, **sad**, **disappointed**, **discouraged**, **lonely**, **grieving**, **scared**, **worried**, **overwhelmed**, **anxious**, **terrified**, **mad**, **furious**, **annoyed**, **irritated**, **frustrated**, **proud**, **guilty**, **ashamed**, **jealous**).
- Try including *made-up* feelings based on your family's vocabulary like "prickly," which could describe "that feeling when everything bothers you".



Step 2: Sort Through the Feelings

- Have the child sort the feelings cards into three piles.
 - On the left, the "Yes" pile - cards that describe how they're feeling right now.
 - On the right, the "No" pile, cards that don't fit their current feelings.
 - In the middle, the "Maybe a Little" pile.

Step 3: Discuss the Feelings

- Go through the "Yes" pile, ask the child to explain what is making her/him feel that way. If there are few or no cards in the "Yes" pile, have the child explain the "Maybe a Little" pile.
- Just listen. Don't correct, debate, or dismiss your child's feelings. Say, "Thank you for telling me."
- If your child seems open to it, you could then shift to talking about how to process these emotions to cope.

Save the cards you created and use them as a future tool for helping children to practice verbalizing their feelings. Using the cards can help make feelings seem more manageable, as well as teach children (and adults) that we rarely have just one feeling at a time, and that feelings, even strong ones, can change over time.

Whatever feelings children are experiencing right now won't last. Helping kids to slow down and providing a space for them to connect their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors will reduce on reactive behaviors, and the need for interventions.