

Helping Kids Understand Big Feelings

Age-appropriate strategies for teaching emotional literacy — because children learn from watching us model it.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Clinician: _____

For parents and caregivers: Children who learn to identify, name, and manage their emotions develop stronger mental health, better relationships, and greater resilience. This guide helps you teach emotional literacy to children in age-appropriate, engaging ways.

THE BASICS OF EMOTIONAL LITERACY FOR KIDS

Emotional literacy means being able to: (1) Identify what you are feeling, (2) Name it, (3) Understand where it comes from, and (4) Know what to do with it. Children learn this primarily from watching trusted adults model it — which means your own emotional literacy directly teaches theirs.

AGE-BY-AGE STRATEGIES

Ages 2–4

Name emotions simply and frequently. "You seem frustrated." Use picture books about feelings. Validate before redirecting. Keep it simple: mad, sad, happy, scared.

Ages 5–7

Expand the feelings vocabulary. Introduce a feelings chart. Use play and puppets to talk about feelings. Teach simple coping: deep breaths, wiggling it out, hugs.

Ages 8–12

Explore nuanced emotions. Talk about your own feelings openly. Problem-solve together. Teach that all feelings are okay — but not all behaviours.

Teens

Create space without pressure. Validate without minimising. Avoid lectures. Share your own emotional experiences. Respect their privacy while staying present.

REFLECTION & INTEGRATION

My child's current emotional vocabulary — what feelings can they identify?

A situation where my child struggled with big feelings recently:

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What I tried and what I will do differently next time:

One new strategy I want to introduce this week:
