

Understanding Your Child's Feelings



Do you know the first step in helping a child learn? It is for you to understand how a child is feeling or what a child needs. Yes, it can be hard to know what young children are communicating. But when a caregiver understands a child and responds in a supportive way, the child learns to trust the caregiver and feel safe. Then, he can learn and feel good about himself.

Kids give lots of cues to tell you how they feel. Learn to read them. You will do a better job of taking care of their needs and interests.

Common signs and signals that young children use to tell you about their feelings are:

Crying and fussing babies.

What it means: These signs can mean, “I’m hungry, wet, tired, bored, hurt, need a change of scenery or a hug.”

Response: Ask yourself, “Is it time to eat? Sleep? Change activities? Does something hurt? If your child doesn’t seem hungry, tired, feverish or wet, try to calm her with things like singing, walking, rocking or holding her close.

Crying and turning away head.

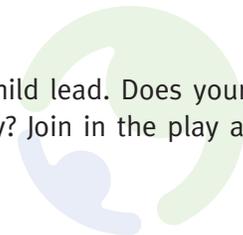
What it means: Babies and older children use this to say, “I’m tired of this activity. It’s too much.”

Response: Take your child away from the situation or stop what you are doing. Rest or move on to something else.

Wide eyes, happy sounds, smiles, hand claps, pointing, bouncing or jumping.

What it means: Children of all ages do things like this. They mean, “I’m interested. This looks fun. Let’s keep doing it.”

Response: Let your child lead. Does your child seem excited by a toy? Join in the play and help her explore.



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Crying, screaming, or throwing self on ground.

What it means: “I’m too upset, tired or wired to keep it together. I can’t handle what’s going on. I don’t have the words to tell you.” The child does not mean to act out on purpose.

Response: Stay calm. Make sure your child is safe. Take him away from the situation if you can. Help older children calm down and express their feelings with words. Say things like, “I can see you are angry and upset.”

Note:

These responses are only suggestions. As long as you treat your child with love and attention, you can answer by doing what works best for you and your child.

Here are some things to remember when learning to understand your child's feelings:

Stop, look, listen and think.

The best way to catch on to what your child is telling you is to pay attention. Use your eyes, ears and instincts. Think about what is happening at a given time. Also think about changes to your routines each day, like missing a nap or taking a trip.

Be patient.

Trying to understand why your child is upset can be hard. You may not always get it right. But don't stop trying! You will get better with practice and your child will appreciate your efforts.



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