

Labeling, Validating, and Supporting Feelings

Labeling, validating, and supporting children's feelings enhances a child's emotional competence, allowing them to reflect on their experiences in the world. As children grow, they rely on the adults in their world to help them understand feelings and ways to express them in a healthy manner. Children who understand and can express their feelings will tolerate frustration better, engage in more prosocial behavior, and have greater academic achievement.

The attuned professional anticipates and accepts all feelings and helps children to understand and manage those feelings. This professional also recognizes that young children have feelings but don't yet know what to call them.

Variables that may impact a child's emotional competence:

1. Developmental stage
2. Temperament
3. Early experiences
4. Environment and relationships

Benefits:

1. Builds understanding of and the ability to express feelings.
2. Promotes self-esteem and the development of empathy.
3. Establishes a secure attachment and trust.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR ACTIVITIES OR EXPERIENCES FOR HELPING CHILDREN EXPRESS FEELINGS

1. Express your own feelings and model healthy emotional expression this assists children in learning to label their own feelings too.
2. Talk with children about their feelings and encourage children to use their feeling words.
3. Label children's feelings by providing feeling names for children's emotional expressions, this helps them grow their emotional vocabulary.
4. Use a broad vocabulary when asking about feelings to include worried, lonely, frustrated, etc.
5. Help children think about ways they can express or work through their feelings. "Next time when you are feeling sad, you can come to me and ask for a hug".
6. Acknowledge the child's feeling and help them decide what to do next. For example, "You are upset because you wanted to play with the truck. What can you do to have a turn playing with the truck?"
7. Play, read, and get creative. Adults can enhance children's feeling vocabularies by introducing games, songs, and storybooks featuring new feeling words.
8. When the child is experiencing "BIG" feelings, narrate what is happening to help children better understand their world.

Putting it to practice

Identify a feeling that children in your program are struggling to label or manage. What books, games, or activities could you use to help them?
