FREE EDUCATOR RESOURCE · AGES 5–8

Helping Children Talk About Feelings

A classroom guide for naming, noticing, and sharing feelings

1. Purpose and Learning Objectives

Young children feel big emotions long before they have words for them. This guide offers a short sequence of activities that gives children shared language for feelings and regular, low-pressure chances to use it. It can be completed in one session of about 45 minutes or spread across several shorter sessions.

By the end of the activities, children will be able to:

- Name at least four common feelings: happy, sad, angry, and scared.
- Connect facial expressions and body cues to feeling words.
- Describe a time they felt a particular way, using a complete sentence.
- Identify at least one adult they can talk to when feelings are hard.

What You Need

- Chart paper or a whiteboard
- Printed copies of "My Feelings Have Names" from Ujamaa Kids Corner (optional, free)
- Crayons or markers
- A few minutes of quiet time for drawing

A note before you begin: this guide supports everyday classroom conversations about feelings. It is not a substitute for counseling or clinical support. If a child shares something that concerns you about their safety or wellbeing, follow your school's procedures and involve the appropriate staff.

At a Glance

Opening discussion	Whole class	About 10 minutes
Emotion identification activity	Whole class	About 15 minutes
Small-group discussion	Groups of 3–4	10–15 minutes
Family extension	At home	Ongoing

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2. Opening Classroom Discussion (10 minutes)

Gather children in a circle or on the carpet. Begin by modeling. Children are more willing to share when an adult goes first.

You might say:

> *"Everybody has feelings. This morning I felt a little nervous because I spilled my coffee and I was worried I would be late. Then I took a deep breath and I felt calmer. Feelings change during the day, and all feelings are okay to have."*

Discussion questions

- What are some feelings you know the names of? (Record answers on chart paper.)
- How can you tell if a friend is happy? What about if they are sad?
- Can you have two feelings at the same time? (For example, excited and nervous on the first day of school.)
- What do you do when you have a big feeling?

Accept every answer. The goal is participation and vocabulary, not correct responses. If a child shares something personal, thank them and keep the focus on the group.

3. Emotion Identification Activity (15 minutes)

Show children six faces: happy, sad, angry, scared, surprised, and calm. You can draw them on the board or use the free printable.

- Point to each face and ask, "How do you think this person feels? What clue tells you?" Highlight eyebrows, eyes, and mouths.
- Play "Show Me": call out a feeling word and invite children to show that feeling with their own face.
- Ask, "What might make someone feel this way?" Give children time to think before answering.
- Hand out the printable, or have children draw a face that shows how they feel today and label it with a feeling word (adults can scribe for early writers).



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4. Small-Group Discussion Prompts (10–15 minutes)

Divide children into groups of three or four. Give each group one or two prompts. An adult or older student can support each group, or you can rotate between groups.

- Tell about a time you felt really happy. What happened?
- What is something that makes you feel calm?
- What can you do if a friend looks sad?
- What could you say to someone who is angry?
- Who can you talk to when you have a big feeling at school? At home?
- What does your body feel like when you are scared? (Fast heartbeat, tight tummy, shaky hands?)

Invite each group to share one idea with the class. Add helpful strategies to a class chart titled "When I Have a Big Feeling, I Can..." Examples: take deep breaths, ask for a break, talk to a teacher, draw a picture, get a drink of water.

5. Family Extension Activity

Send home a short note inviting families to continue the conversation. A sample note you can copy or adapt:

Dear families,

This week our class has been learning to name and talk about feelings. Tonight, try this at dinner or bedtime: each person shares one feeling they had today and what caused it. Grown-ups, please go first. Children learn so much from hearing how adults handle their own feelings. You can also print the free "My Feelings Have Names" activity from Ujamaa Kids Corner to do together.

Families may also enjoy reading a story about feelings together and pausing to ask, "How do you think this character feels? How can you tell?"

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6. Adapting Participation for Different Learners

Children participate in different ways. These suggestions can help every child take part comfortably.

Children who are quiet or reluctant to share

- Offer a "pass" option and come back to them later.
- Let them point to a face instead of speaking.
- Pair them with a trusted peer for small-group work.

Children who are early or emerging readers and writers

- Read all words and prompts aloud.
- Accept drawings in place of writing.
- Scribe their words for them.

Multilingual learners

- Use pictures and facial expressions alongside words.
- Invite children to share feeling words in their home language.
- Pair new vocabulary with gestures.

Children who benefit from movement or sensory supports

- Use the "Show Me" game to build in movement.
- Offer a fidget or a drawing option during discussion.
- Keep sessions short and break them into parts.

Children for whom a topic may be sensitive

- Keep prompts general and never require personal stories.
- Notice signs of distress and offer a calm, private check-in.
- Follow your school's procedures if a child discloses a concern.

Books and resources from Ujamaa Publishing

Sometimes You Feel...: A Book of Emotions (ages 3–7) and its Companion Workbook pair well with these activities. For classroom sets, school or library orders, or bulk pricing, use the Schools & Libraries page on our website.

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