

CORE SKILL: REGULATE

Recognize and Describe Emotions



What You Need to Know

Your infant relies on your sensitivity and care to help comfort them when they are experiencing emotions. One way to let your infant know that you recognize and understand what they are experiencing is by using words to label their emotions. When you identify and describe what your infant is feeling, you are helping them link their emotions with language – an important building block for being able to then manage these feelings. Pay attention and respond to the different signs that your infant gives (both in words and behavior) when feeling certain emotions. Doing this shows your infant that you can be a resource in helping them communicate their thoughts and feelings.

How You Can Support Your Infant’s Development of This Skill

- ◆ Introduce and read books that talk about feelings.
- ◆ Sing songs and rhymes that use emotion words. For example, “If You’re Happy and You Know It.”

Label Children’s Emotions

Pay attention to your infant’s facial expressions, gestures, body movements, and sounds to imitate and/or describe what they are feeling.

If your infant rubs their eyes, say, “You are feeling tired, aren’t you? It’s time to take a nap.”

While listening to a song, imitate your infant’s “dance” by moving as they do. Smile and say, “You love this song! Look at how you dance. You’re excited!”

While frowning and scrunching your brow, “Grr. I am frustrated that I can’t open this jar!”

Label Your Own and Others’ Emotions

Draw attention to and label your own or others’ emotions. Exaggerate expressions to make the emotion clear/obvious.

When your infant gazes or points toward an emotion picture in a book say, “They are crying, look at their tears (*and point to them*). They feel sad.”

Development of These Skills

Below are descriptions of how infants' emotion identification skills develop over time. Each infant develops in their own way and at their own pace, so it's okay if your infant isn't showing all the behaviors listed below just yet.

Between birth and 9 months, infants may:	Between 8 and 18 months, infants may:
Express a range of feelings, facial expressions, and gestures.	Express a range of more advanced emotions, like frustration, nervousness, and uncertainty.
Express their feelings in order to get a familiar adult to respond.	Express emotions in response to or in order to get attention from adults.
Pay attention when others express emotions.	Show interest in others' emotions, often by sharing the emotion.

What We Saw at School

It's important to pay attention to infants as they use these skills so that we can encourage their development. This week, we are intentionally looking to see your infant display this skill and are supporting them as they continue to develop in this area. Below you will find notes about what we observed.

This week, we saw your infant...

Your infant is working hard on...