



A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

The Emotional Language Guide *for Kids*

Twenty five feeling words children can use instead of "I don't know." Children rarely misbehave on purpose. Often they simply do not have the words yet.

25 words

Ages 4 to 12

Includes a page for your child

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

Why children reach for behaviour first

The 25 words, sorted into five families

How to introduce the list at home

Four things to say, and four to skip

A print-and-post page for your child

Plus a closing note from our team

Why the words matter so much

A child who cannot say what is happening inside will show you instead. The slammed door, the refusal, the tears over a small thing: that is the message, not the problem.

1

Behaviour is their first language

Feelings arrive long before the vocabulary to describe them. When a child has no word for overwhelmed, the feeling comes out through their body and their behaviour instead.

2

Naming a feeling turns the volume down

Putting a word to an emotion helps the thinking part of the brain come back online. Many children settle noticeably once someone helps them find the right word for it.

3

They need the words before the hard moment

No child can reach for vocabulary they have never practised. Read this list together on an ordinary calm day, so it is already there on a difficult one.

HOW TO INTRODUCE IT AT HOME

- Post the child's page somewhere visible, the fridge or a bedroom door.
- Offer two or three words to choose from instead of asking an open question.
- Accept the word they pick, even if you would have chosen a different one.
- Name your own feelings out loud during the day. This is how they learn it.

Twenty five words, five families

Start with the family that sounds closest, then let your child pick the exact word. Getting more specific is the whole point.

"I am upset"

frustrated

disappointed

overwhelmed

annoyed

confused

"I am sad"

hurt

lonely

discouraged

tired

missing someone

"I am worried"

nervous

scared

unsure

jittery

uncomfortable

"I am angry"

irritated

tense

fed up

bothered

left out

"I am okay, but"

restless

bored

embarrassed

shy

excited

PARENT TIP

Ask **"which of these fits how you feel right now?"** rather than "what's wrong?" A choice is far easier to answer than a blank page, and it opens the door gently.

Four things to say, four to skip

None of these are about being a perfect parent. They are about keeping the door open long enough for your child to walk through it.

Try saying

- ✓ **"Which of these fits how you feel right now?"**
A choice is much easier than an open question when a child is flooded.
- ✓ **"That makes sense to me."**
Validation first. Problem solving lands only after a child feels understood.
- ✓ **"Do you want help, or do you want me to listen?"**
Handing them a small piece of control lowers the resistance.
- ✓ **"I get frustrated sometimes too. Here is what helps me."**
Children learn emotional language mostly by watching yours.

Worth skipping

"You're fine."

Teaches a child to distrust their own signals.

"Calm down."

Asks for the outcome without offering the how.

"Why are you acting like this?"

Requests analysis a distressed child cannot give.

"At least it isn't..."

Comparison rarely arrives as comfort.

If you get it wrong, say so. **"I snapped earlier and I'm sorry. Can we try again?"** is one of the most useful sentences a child can hear, because it teaches them that connection survives mistakes.

How do I feel right now?

Point to a word. Or circle it. Then tell someone.

frustrated

worried

sad

lonely

angry

tired

embarrassed

left out

confused

excited

proud

calm

How big is the feeling?

a little

1

2

3

4

5

really big

What would help?

a hug

some quiet

a snack

to move my body

to talk about it

to be near you

You are never in trouble for having a feeling.

Your child can learn to say how they feel

Emotional language is a skill, not a personality trait. It is built one small conversation at a time, usually on ordinary days rather than dramatic ones. Every time you help your child find the right word, you are teaching them that feelings are manageable and that they are not alone with them.

When child therapy tends to help

- ✓ Big reactions are happening most days, at home or at school
- ✓ Your child has become quiet, withdrawn, or unusually clingy
- ✓ Sleep, appetite, friendships, or school have changed
- ✓ Your family is moving through separation, loss, or a big change

Kids Help Phone is free and available any time at 1.800.668.6868, or text CONNECT to 686868. In an emergency, call 911.

READY FOR THE NEXT STEP?

Child therapy is a safe, playful place to grow

Talk with one of our Registered Psychotherapists at no cost and no obligation. Many parents start with a conversation on their own, before involving their child at all.

Book your free 20-minute consultation

or call 905.553.9507

Takes 2 minutes. No credit card. No referral needed. Evenings and weekends available.

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