I'm Focusing on Feelings

The ability to name emotions and understand how different situations trigger them is an important skill that contributes to each child's developing sense of self-awareness.

Here is a process for expressing emotions in a positive way in any situation:

1. Acknowledge that you are feeling an emotion.
2. Understand the impact the emotion may be having on your body and your thoughts.
3. Name the emotion by finding a word or phrase that describes it. Examples could include: surprised, concerned, pained, elated, curious, proud.

The nature of emotions is that they are constantly changing, depending on a variety of situations.

Building Your Child's Social and Emotional Competence

Self-awareness is a social and emotional learning competency that helps children better understand their emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence their behaviors. Self-awareness skills include: identifying emotions, accurate self-perception, self-efficacy, recognizing strengths, and self-confidence. These activities can help children acknowledge and express emotions in healthy ways.

Display It!

As a family, think about the ways in which the display of emotion has changed throughout history. Think about how gender and culture affect expectations and displays of emotion. Create a simple report on the history of emotional expression to share with others. The report can be in the form of a poem or a simple drawing.

Observe It!

Ask your child to analyze displays of emotion in popular culture. Have them choose one or two television programs and take notes on emotional expression. Encourage them to look specifically at how emotion is displayed, in what context, and what purpose it serves on the episode of the program.

Many children are experiencing feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, and fear due to the onset of COVID-19. They need a chance to share their thoughts and feelings and ask questions. Make sure you are accurately informed and ready to educate your child knowing the information is evolving all the time. Get information from: The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html.

Learning to Calm Down and Reflect

It's completely normal during times like this to feel difficult emotions. Identifying and naming these feelings, as well as learning ways to respond calmly are useful self-management skills that will help children and adults have a better experience.

Here are some ways for naming, calming, and reflecting on emotions:

1. Notice the feeling in your body and acknowledge the feeling is natural for the situation.
2. Find a word that names your emotion as accurately as possible.
3. Calm your emotions by:
    - Taking 10 deep breaths, inhaling and exhaling slowly
    - Going for a walk to remove yourself from the situation
    - Writing down your feelings
    - Talking about your feelings to a trusted family member or friend
4. Reflect on what happened and how you can prepare for or prevent a similar situation in the future.

Everyone experiences a range of different emotions throughout the day.

Building Your Child's Social and Emotional Competence

Self-management is a social and emotional learning competency that helps children effectively regulate their emotions, control impulses, manage stress, and set and achieve goals. These activities help children build emotional awareness, reflection, and calming skills.

Take Inventory!

Take a "feeling" inventory over the next few days, observing how they feel throughout the day. Pay attention to the situations that caused their feelings and their reactions. Use the steps to calm and reflect on difficult emotions.

Draw a Poster!

Draw a poster with imagery they would associate with before, during, and after feelings using the steps to calm and reflect on difficult emotions. Then come up with a positive saying that can be adopted by the family as a motto.

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Introduction to Mindful Breathing

Mindful breathing is the foundation of mindfulness practices. This brief exercise will acquaint you and your child with this simple practice that you will be using with each mindfulness exercise going forward.

- Each exercise takes 10 minutes or less.
- Familiarize yourself with the exercise before using with your child.
- Use the script to guide the exercise. Adjust language as needed.
- All exercises begin with **Breath Awareness** followed by a **Mindfulness Activity** that teaches a practical mindfulness skill.
- Each exercise ends with **Reflecting Questions** to discuss with your child. Invite your child to stay in mindful silence until the Reflecting Questions.

Breath Awareness

I thought it would be interesting if we started doing some mindfulness exercises that could get us ready to have a good day. Have you heard the word mindfulness *before?* (pause)

I understand that mindfulness *means paying attention to what is happening right now in our bodies, minds, and all around us. When we do this, through deep breathing and focusing attention, we can focus and not be thinking about and doing other things. We might feel more peaceful and at ease when we are quiet and still, concentrating on what is happening right this moment. And it can help us feel less stressed out when life gets complicated. Let's try a simple mindfulness exercise and then we'll talk about it.*

Let's find a comfortable position and sit straight up, placing your hands on your thighs. You can close your eyes if you like or just gaze softly downward in front of you. (pause)

Notice how that feels. (pause)

Place your hands on your belly and notice what happens when you breathe in through your nose (pause) *and out through your mouth.* (pause)

Notice how your belly pushes out like a balloon when you breathe in and falls back toward your body when you breathe out. Feel the rhythm of your breathing as your belly rises when you breathe in and falls when you breathe out. (pause)

Let's breathe like this with the belly rising and falling for three big breaths. (pause)

Notice where you feel the breath most prominently. Is it in your nostrils? Chest? Belly? (pause)

Just notice as you continue to pay attention to the rhythm of your breathing for three more breaths. (pause)

If your eyes are closed, open them now. Thanks for doing this with me.

Reflecting

Take this opportunity to have a conversation about your shared experience using the following reflecting questions:

Reflecting Questions

What?	What did it feel like to sit in your mindful posture? What did you notice?
So What?	What did it feel like when your belly was rising? When it was falling?
Now What?	How do you feel now? Would you like to do this again?