

Helping Children Understand Their Emotions

1

Notice Your Children's Feelings

Children and youth experience the whole range of emotions. They are excited, disappointed, hurt, lonely, hopeful, sad, afraid, confused, and jubilant. To be helpful, try to notice your children's moods and feelings. Don't try to talk them out of their feelings; initially just notice.

Emotions can be confusing, especially for teens and children, whose brains are still developing and whose experience with certain emotions is limited. Helping our children to understand their emotions can help them navigate the flurry of feelings that come on so unexpectedly in childhood and adolescence.

This month, take time to strengthen your children's emotional awareness.

2

Show Empathy and Understanding

When a child expresses strong feelings, we have an opportunity to show compassion. As we listen carefully and work to imagine what the experience is like for the child, we demonstrate that their feelings matter and we care about them. This helps children feel safe in a world that is sometimes confusing to them.

"I can see that you're sad. I'm sorry that you feel that way. I know this is hard."

"You must have felt angry!"

"If that had happened to me, I would have felt frustrated too."

By vocalizing our sincere compassion, our children will be reminded of our love and concern for them. They will see us as an ally in whom they can confide.



3

Practice Compassionate Listening

After we show understanding, children will likely be more willing to talk about what troubles them. We can listen with compassion and validate what they share. Perhaps they feel a sense of isolation and hopelessness greater than we realize. Perhaps they feel friendless or confused. These feelings can be difficult for them to understand and articulate.

Listen. Show patience. Don't be afraid of silence. Let them gather their thoughts. Communicate your willingness to hear them, however long that will take.

When our children feel understood, their love for us will grow. And, importantly, they will be more willing to share with us in moments of emotional crisis. That knowledge will then enable us as parents to help them find solutions to what is bothering them.

4

Get Help When Needed

Experts suggest that if a child is persistently sad, angry, or withdrawn for more than a month—or is suddenly calm and positive after a period of depression—they might need professional help. And there is no shame in that. LDS Family Services, if available in your area, can direct you toward counseling resources. Visit providentliving.ChurchofJesusChrist.org/lds-family-services for information. Or seek a referral from your family doctor. Your bishop may also help connect you with counseling resources. You are not alone! ■

TO LEARN MORE

For more help with children and feelings, consider "Feelings First-Aid Kit" from the September 2018 *Friend*. If your child experiences suicidal thoughts, promptly obtain professional help. You may also consult suicide.ChurchofJesusChrist.org, mentalhealth.ChurchofJesusChrist.org, or the resources below:

- "Understanding Suicide: Warning Signs and Prevention," *Ensign*, Oct. 2016, 34.
- "How to Create a Suicide-Prevention Safety Plan," *Ensign*, Sept. 2016, 63.
- "What's on Your Mind?" *Friend*, Sept. 2018, 34.
- "Dealing with Depression," *New Era*, Sept. 2016, 32.
- "Understanding Suicide," *New Era*, Sept. 2016, 36.