



Understanding Feelings (Empathy)

“Children SEE – Children DO”

RIRO Resilience Activity Module for Parents and Children (birth to 7 years)

INTRODUCTION

This module contains fun activities for parents and children that promote resilience by supporting the development of empathy and understanding. Each activity takes less than 20 minutes. The activities can be done “as is” or be accompanied by discussion about the importance of empathy. This module complements the *Participation & Helping Out*, *Being Calm* and *Positive Outlook* modules.

RESOURCES in this MODULE

- **GRAB & GO** – activities for facilitators working with individual parents and children (pp. 1-3)
- **Group activities** – plus homework, other resiliency resources and engagement strategies (pp. 4-7)
- **“Feeling Faces” chart**– resources for “Activity #3” (p. 8)
- **Parent Tip Sheet and Poster** – parent handout with ideas on building empathy and understanding

KEY CONCEPTS

- Being able to recognize and interpret emotions in ourselves and others is the basis for empathy and understanding – both are critical abilities that support resilience.
- Parents can help children learn to recognize and interpret emotions by offering practice opportunities.
- When parents model empathy and understanding in everyday life, children feel accepted, understood and learn to understand themselves and others.
- Children respond emotionally to their parents’ emotions and actions. They pick up on their parents’ interpretations of their own and others’ emotions and intentions.



MATERIALS NEEDED (depending on activity)

- Cotton balls
- Mirror
- Chart: “Feeling Faces”
- Parent Tip Sheet

PREPARATION/ONLINE RESOURCES about RESILIENCE

<http://www.reachinginreachingout.com> (RIRO professional resources)

<http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/resources-parents-caringrelationships.htm>

ACTIVITIES

While these are meant to be fun activities, parents may find it helpful if facilitators explain: 1) the role that recognizing and understanding emotions have in the development of resilience, and 2) how children learn about empathy and understanding by watching their parents’ feelings and actions in everyday life.

#1: “Feelings Face Painting” (This activity draws attention to the areas of the face used for emotional expression.)

Parent

- Demonstrate using a dry cotton ball to “paint” emotions (faces) on the facilitator’s face.
- Ask parent to take a cotton ball and draw an emotion on his/her own face.

- Ask parent to identify what his/her face feels when an emotion is drawn on it.
- Describe what facilitator sees on the parent's face (with or without using a mirror to show the parent).
- Discuss how children see and respond to their parents' feelings.
- Discuss how parents can learn to recognize their children's feelings.
- Suggest parent do a "cotton ball paint" activity with his/her child.

Parent and Child

- Ask parent and child to sit across from each other with a pretend jar of paint between them.
- Ask parent to use a cotton ball to "paint" an emotion on the child's face.
- Parent is asked to tell child what s/he is "painting" and to name the emotion, i.e., "I drew a smile." OR "I drew a frown on your face." OR "I painted a sad face."
- Then instruct parent to ask the child to "paint" the parent's face.
- Depending on child's age, the child may:
 - Just "scribble"
 - Copy the parent by "painting" the "emotion face" the parent has modeled for them. Parent can then describe the emotion and the face by saying, e.g., "I am smiling – you are painting on my happy face."
 - "Paint" an emotion and tell the parent what the emotion is.

#2: "Imitation Game" (This activity helps develop awareness of one's own emotional expression and promotes understanding of a child's response to copying a parent's emotional expression.)

Parent

Option #1:

- Using a mirror, ask parent to watch him/herself making faces for these emotions:

◆ sad	◆ mad	◆ nervous
◆ happy	◆ calm	◆ scared
◆ excited	◆ embarrassed	◆ confused

OR

Option #2: (for parents who may be uncomfortable in expressing emotions)

- Have parent look at faces with intense emotions for 20 seconds (use a magazine or facilitator can create a resource).
- Ask parent to identify any changes in his/her emotional state or body after looking at the face.
- Draw attention to any changes seen in the parent's face or body. Try to name the emotion (facilitator may pick from list above).

Parent and Child

- Ask parent to make a feeling face and then ask the child to copy it.
- Child copies face and parent asks child to guess what the face is feeling.
- If child is able, s/he can make faces and ask parent to copy and guess the feeling.
- Next, parent can make faces representing other emotions and repeat activity.

3: "Name that Feeling Face" (This activity offers practice in attending to and identifying feelings.)

Parent

- Ask parent to look through a book or magazine and name the feelings in the faces.

- Parent is asked to practice making these feeling faces.
- Have parent guess the feeling or choose feeling words from a list.
- Ask parent to look for faces that show the same emotion.

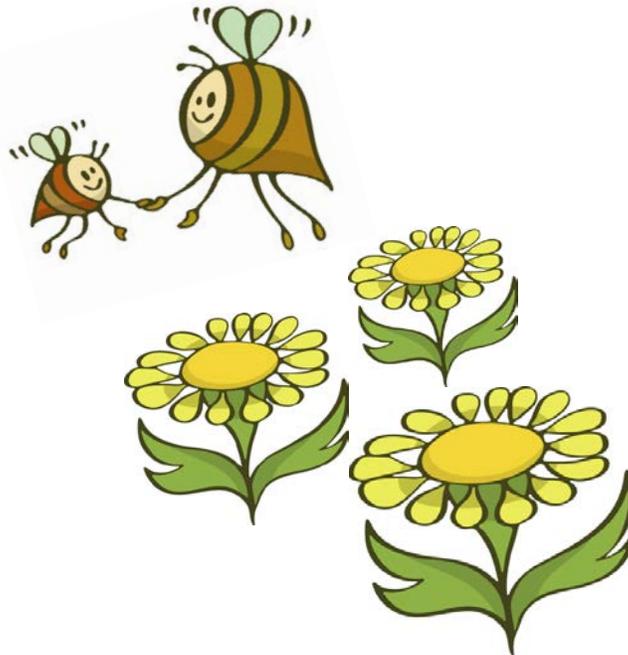
Parent and Child

- Ask parent to look through a book or magazine and name the feelings in the faces for the child.
- Have parent and child imitate the faces while looking at each other (being silly helps).
- Option 1: Ask parent and child to look for faces that show the same emotion.
- Option 2: Ask parent to use the “Feeling Faces” chart (p. 8) for this activity instead of a magazine.

Note: The “Name that Feeling Face” activity is less personal and may be better accepted if parent is uncomfortable with emotions and/or touch.

#4: “Parent and Infant Activities”

- Ask parent to:
 - make exaggerated faces for his/her infant to see and copy.
 - let the baby touch the parent’s face as s/he makes different faces.
 - make frequent eye contact with the baby.



GROUP ACTIVITIES

NOTE: These activities are designed for professionals and paraprofessionals who have completed RIRO Resiliency Skills Training Program and who have group facilitation experience.

Parent group (no children)

Option #1:

- Facilitator demonstrates using a cotton ball to “paint” feelings faces on his/her own face.
- Parent takes a cotton ball and draws a feeling on his/her own face.
- Parent identifies what his/her face feels when an emotion is drawn on it.
- Facilitator can demonstrate facial feelings and body language and have parents guess the feeling. (This is a good opportunity to role model flexible thinking and handling “mistakes”, i.e., wrong guesses are OK.)
- Discuss how children see and respond to parents’ feelings.
- Discuss that parents can learn to recognize their children’s feelings.
- Suggest doing “cotton ball paint” activity with their children.

OR

Option #2:

- Check in with all parents to see how they are feeling that day and if they are comfortable sharing. Then have parents guess what their children are feeling that day.
- Discuss empathy as a resiliency characteristic, giving parents positive “descriptive feedback” on the observations they have contributed. Emphasize role modeling.
- *Show RIRO training clip of “Elaine” (turn off sound) who is having a tantrum and have parents suggest what the child might be feeling (*NOTE: video available only to RIRO trainers and presenters).
- Brainstorm ways that they could let the child know that they understand her feelings.
- Watch the clip again with sound on and discuss how the teacher showed understanding and empathy.
- Present activities to do with the child above or their own children from Activities #1 to 4 or from “Take Home” section.

Parent-child group

- Have parent-child pairings do “Feeling Face Painting” (Activity #1)
- Facilitator discusses with parents the importance of understanding while each child draws a face representing a feeling.
- Children show parents the face they drew and say the emotion, if they can. (OR) Parents can guess the emotions. (This is a good opportunity to show how to react when guesses are incorrect).
- If comfortable, parents can help the children explain to group about the faces they drew.
- Group can do a group picture of all feelings or end by everyone drawing happy faces and saying one thing that makes them happy, or a picture of “when I was happy.”
- Give cotton balls to take home.

Facilitators’ suggestions

- Parent-child group does not work well with children under 2 years.
- These activities tend to be short, so plan other activities or use as a module within another group activity.

TAKE HOME OPTIONS (for individual parents or groups)

- **What could other people be feeling?** Help child develop empathy and vocabulary for facial expressions by directing his/her attention to others' expressions and commenting about what they may be feeling or thinking.
- **Notice when your child is displaying a feeling** and guess what the feeling might be.
- **Pay attention to faces in magazines and books.** Encourage your child to identify what people or characters might be feeling.
- **Provide your child with feeling words** to increase his/her vocabulary.
- **Mirror, mirror!** Direct parent to look in a mirror when feeling an intense emotion so the parent can see how s/he may look to others and to get know his/her own facial expressions better. Practice making faces in mirror.
- **Make eye contact** with your child when you are talking. Let your child see your face.
- **Faces on Fridge** – ask parent to post “Feeling Faces” chart on the fridge, or other highly visible spot, to help parent and child identify feelings.
- **Use transition times** during the day to have a “feelings check in” with the child.

THINGS PARENTS CAN SAY TO THEIR CHILDREN (to support understanding feelings)

- “I feel...”
- “When _____ happens, I feel _____.”
- “What do you think?”
- “When I look at your face, I think you might feel _____. Is that right?”

SUGGESTED OPENINGS/ APPROACHES with PARENTS and CHILDREN

Role modeling...

Role model with parent: (examples)

- “You look tired today – what’s going on?”
- “I know it might be an imposition to meet me at a certain time each week. I really appreciate your understanding of my schedule.”

Role model with parent and child: (examples)

- “Oh, look at (child’s name)’s face! He is probably happy you are picking him up.”
- (Child’s name), how are you today? How are you feeling now?” Let’s ask your (parent) how s/he feels.”

Questions you could ask...

- “I am wondering how your child understands other people’s feelings. How does s/he respond to others getting upset? Being happy? Understanding others is an important skill for children to learn.”
- “How do you tell what your child is feeling?”

Things you could say...

- “Having the skill to recognize their own and other people’s feelings helps children to stay calm and learn important skills for playing with others. They feel more confident and less anxious around people. Let’s talk about things that can help build this skill in your child.”
- “Sometimes people feel the same about an experience. And sometimes people feel different about the same experience. One thing you can do to build resilience in your child is show them how to recognize how others might feel.”

Things you could point out...

About the child:

- when s/he is showing emotion
- what s/he might be thinking
- when the child shows creativity in recreating a feeling face or drawing

About the parent:

- how s/he recognizes the child's emotions
- how s/he responds to the child's distress or happiness
- his/her creativity in recreating a feeling face or drawing
- how s/he makes eye contact

About the community:

- community news or situations – what people are feeling
- what the parent is thinking and feeling about an event

About empathy:

- Understanding children's emotions does not mean “giving in” to bad behavior or necessarily changing expectations about what is acceptable behavior.

OTHER RESOURCES

Books

- RIRO's “Children's Booklists” to support resilience:
<http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/resources-booksKids.htm>
- RIRO's parent website page on “Caring Relationships” (understanding and empathy):
<http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/resources-parents-caringrelationships.htm>
- Selected children's storybooks about understanding and empathy:

Freymann, S., **How Are You Peeling? Foods with Moods** (1999)

Real fruits and vegetables are creatively used to show a range of feelings expressions.
(Recommended for children 3 years +)

Gordon, M., **Faces of Tomorrow** (2009)

Close-up portraits of babies from many different cultures, create a mosaic of peace, and possibility for the future. Each beautiful face is accompanied by a single word translated into French, Spanish, Punjabi and Chinese. (Suitable for infants; www.rootsofempathy.org)

Gordon, M., **Daniel's Day** (2010)

Daniel's day starts off badly...he's wet his bed again. Worse yet, he can't find his cape! His family and his good friend Nicholas all show they understand and care about him though. And good news! He finds his cape! (Recommended for children ages 3-7; www.rootsofempathy.org)

Modesitt, J., **Sometimes I Feel Like a Mouse** (1992)

Animals represent a variety of feelings. (Recommended for children 18 months +)

Narahashi, K., **Two Girls Can** (2000)

How delightful it is to have a special friend with whom to laugh, play, fight and make up, discover new things, and meet new people. (Recommended for children 3 years +)

Oxenbury, H., **Tom and Pippo in the Garden** (1989)

Tom takes good care of his stuffed animal friend. (Recommended for children 18 months +)

Swartz, E., **Abby's Birds** (2006)

Abby makes friends with her elderly neighbor, Mrs. Naka, and the two spend hours together watching birds. When Mrs. Naka breaks her hip in a fall, Abby makes origami birds and hangs them on the back yard tree to raise her friend's spirits. (Recommended for children 5 years +)

Tankard, J., **Boo Hoo Bird** (2009)

Bird's friends help him feel better after he gets bonked on the head in a game of catch.
(Recommended for children 18 months +)

Wishinsky, F., **You're Mean, Lilly Jean** (2009)

Sandy defends her little sister when a new neighbourhood friend bosses her around and plays unfairly. (Recommended for children 5 years +)

Zolotow, C., **Do You Know What I'll Do?** (2000)

A young girl tells her smaller brother how she is always thinking about him. (Recommended for children 2 years +)

Feeling Faces & Feeling Words

Happy



Proud



Confused



Scared



Worried



Embarrassed



Sad



Mad



Upset





Understanding Feelings

When parents show they understand feelings, children learn how to be understanding, too. Understanding helps us build strong relationships and handle life's challenges.

SHARE "understanding" with your child...



- **Comfort your child when he or she is upset**
 - *"I understand. It really hurt when you fell."*
 - *"It must have made you mad when he took your toy."*
- **Name feelings**

<i>"I am"</i>	(or)	<i>"You look..."</i>	(or)	<i>"You might feel...."</i>
• sad		• proud		• mad/ upset
• happy		• embarrassed		• scared
• excited		• worried		• confused
- **Connect feelings to what you see**
 - *"I think Ralph might be mad. He is breathing fast and holding his fists."*
 - *"Look at that smile – you are so happy!"*
- **Comment on how people react to situations or words**
 - *"When you share with him, he looks happy."*
 - *"When Sally called Ezia a name, it hurt his feelings. See, he's crying."*
- **Play games**
 - Draw different feelings on your child's face with your finger or a cotton ball. Ask your child to guess the feelings.
 - Ask your child to draw a feeling on your face (e.g., happy, mad, sad). Then you try to guess the feeling. Or you can draw faces on each other at the same time.

ASK your child about feelings...

- *"What are you feeling right now?"*
- *"She looks sad. I wonder what made her feel sad?"*



PAUSE and THINK about others' feelings throughout the day...

- When meeting new people
- When you see your child's mood change
- At bedtime
- When reading about characters in books

AND babies and toddlers, too!

- Hold your baby so he or she can see your face.
- Make faces for your baby to copy. Let your baby see you copy his or her face.

More FREE online resources to build your child's resilience
www.reachinginreachingout.com/parents (videos, books, parent stories, articles, newsletter and more)



Offer comfort & discuss feelings