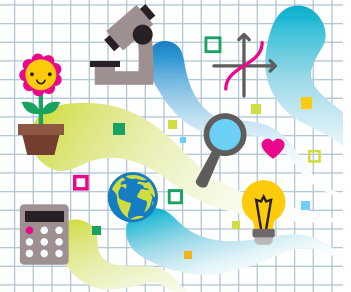




# HEADS IN, HEARTS IN

## Feelings Fort Instructions for Set-Up



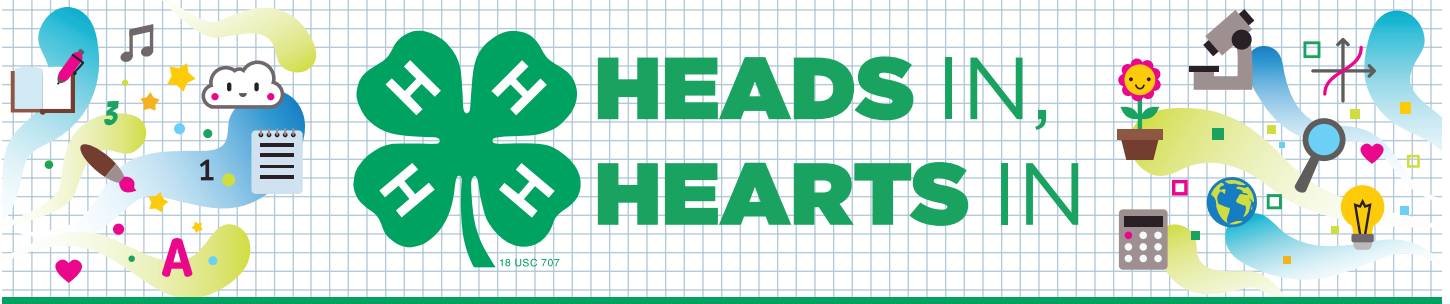
### Supplies

- “Guide for Families” handout
- Clear plastic standup display (optional)
- Scissors
- “Calm Cards” handout
- Chairs, couches or other pieces of furniture to help make a fort
- Pillows, blankets, sheets, towels
- Books or other quiet toys
- Crayons and paper
- Stuffed animals or other comfort items
- Calming jar
- “Emotion Cards” handout
- Display table

### Activity Preparation

- ▶ Purchase or locate items on supply list.
- ▶ Print one copy of the “Guide for Families” handout. Laminate or place in a clear plastic standup display to allow participants to see it more readily.
- ▶ Print and cut out the cards in the “Emotion Cards” and “Calm Cards” handouts.
- ▶ Find a spot appropriate for making a quiet, calm corner.





# Feelings Fort

## Guide for Families

### Learning Objectives

#### What you need to know:

Social emotional health is a critical component of healthy development for young children. Social emotional development includes the ability to identify and label or name emotions, and find appropriate ways to express or manage those emotions. For young children, strong emotions can be overwhelming. Since they do not have the skills to handle them, they might act out, get clingy or withdraw. You can help them manage their emotions by giving them permission to feel the way they do, helping to identify how they feel, supporting them and teaching them emotion regulation strategies. You can teach them multiple ways to feel calm and then let them decide which technique they want to try.

#### What you will do and learn:

In this activity, you will make a feelings fort, a quiet space where a child can calm down when they feel overwhelmed or feel a strong emotion. The child will learn that it is okay to have big feelings and that you will help them feel calm when they experience those big feelings. The child will also learn strategies to help themselves feel calm. They can take some time to get comfortable with blankets and pillows, do a quiet activity such as reading books, use a calming jar or practice other techniques to manage their feelings.

### Instructions

1. Tell the child that you will make a feelings fort. A feelings fort is a calm, quiet place where they can calm down when they are feeling overwhelmed. Tell them that all emotions are okay, and it is normal for them to feel many different feelings.
2. Use chairs, couches or other pieces of furniture to build the feelings fort, making sure that it is sturdy enough so it will not fall down on the child.
3. Fill the fort with things that will help the child feel calm including pillows, blankets, sheets, towels, books and other quiet toys, crayons and paper, stuffed animals and other comfort items, and a calming jar.
4. When the child feels overwhelmed or experiences a strong emotion, encourage them to go to their feelings fort to calm down. Tell them that the feelings fort is a safe space for them to feel their big feelings and do some activities that will help them feel calmer. You can use the “Emotion Cards” to talk about the emotions the child is feeling.
5. Use the “Calm Cards” to help the child find strategies to manage their strong feelings. You can either read the cards yourself and become familiar with them so that you have the idea in your mind when it’s time or you can pick a card and read aloud to the child.
6. When the child is feeling calmer, talk about the big emotions they were feeling. Say, “You were feeling so angry. You stomped your feet and yelled. It is okay to feel angry. When you feel angry, you can go to your feelings fort until you are feeling calm.”
7. Encourage the child to go to their feelings fort whenever they need to calm down.

# Feelings Fort

## Emotion Cards Handout

**Angry**



**Sad**



**Happy**



**Worried**



**Surprised**



**Afraid**



Photos © iStock.com

The "Emotion Cards" handout originally appeared in the *Heads In, Hearts In* activity "Feelings Masks" by Michigan State University Extension, 4-H Youth Development, 2017.

# Feelings Fort

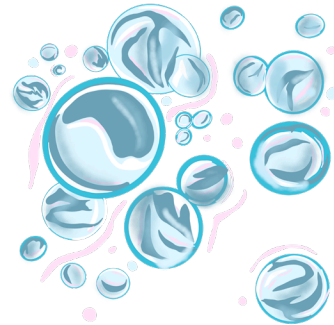
## Calm Cards Handout

### Card 1: Dragon Breath



**Description:** Breathe like a dragon! Take a deep breath in through your nose. When you exhale, open your mouth and sigh like you are fogging up a mirror or like you are a dragon breathing fire. When you exhale, see how loud you can breathe your dragon breath. Take two more slow, dragon breaths.

### Card 2: Bubble Breathing



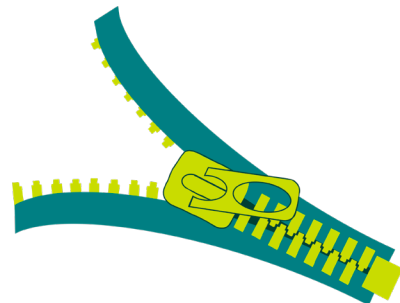
**Description:** Pretend like you are blowing bubbles! Take a deep breath in through your nose. When you breathe out, purse your lips and gently push the air out of your lungs. Take two more deep, slow bubble breaths.

### Card 3: Octopus Arms Stretching



**Description:** Stretch like an octopus! Lift your left arm up in the air as high as you can, reaching tall. Then, lift your right arm up. Stretch your left arm straight in front of you, reaching forward. Then, lift your right arm forward. Cross your left arm in front of your body, reaching across. Then, cross your right arm in front of you. Stretch your left arm toward your toes, reaching down. Then, stretch your right arm down.

### Card 4: Zipper Stretching



**Description:** Standing up, bend forward over your legs reaching toward the floor. As you take a deep breath in, “zip” your body up stretching your arms high above your head. As you breathe out, “zip” your body back down, slowly folding forward over your legs. Repeat two zipper stretches while breathing deeply.

# Feelings Fort

## Calm Cards Handout, continued

### Card 5: Volcano Breathing



**Description:** Volcanos erupt spewing lava everywhere! Breathe like a volcano! As you breathe in, crouch down pulling your body into a tight ball.

Next, breathe out loudly with your mouth open loudly, standing up and spreading your arms into the air like a volcano spewing lava.