



Parenting the Preschooler

Social Competence & Emotional Well-Being Fact Sheets

How does your child show you how they feel?

Ages & Stages

PRECHOOLER A child who is 3 to 5 years of age.

YOUNG CHILD A child who is 0 to 8 years of age.

Minding Our Language

Families come in all shapes, sizes, and styles. A “family” may include people who are related by blood, by marriage, and by choice. “Parents” may be biological, step-, foster, adoptive, legally appointed, or something else. When we use the words “family” and “parent” in these materials, we do so inclusively and with great respect for all adults who care for and work with young people.

All feelings are normal and okay – how we act on our feelings is what matters. Many children think certain feelings are bad or wrong because they have gotten in trouble for something they did when they were feeling a certain way, like mad or sad. They do not always understand that it is the behavior that was wrong, not how they felt. Sometimes young children may be scared by their feelings, too. Children are just beginning to understand their feelings and are learning ways to cope with them. A parent’s job is not to take away the bad or scary feelings children have, but to help them figure out the best way to handle those feelings.

Use some of the following tips to help teach your child to express their feelings:

- Help them understand that there can be a difference between how they feel and what they do.
- Show your child positive, effective ways of handling their good and bad feelings.
- Talk with your child about what you heard them say. If they say, for example, “I hate school. I am never going back,” try saying, “It sounds like you are upset about something that happened at school today.” Not only will they hear that you are listening to what they say, they will also be learning to label their feelings.
- Teach your child how to calm themselves down. Have them take three deep breaths, imagine a happy place, or walk away.
- Try not to fix everything for your child. They will learn more if you do not try to take away the problem or the scary feeling. Listen first, then try to help them through it.
- Accept their feelings. If they say they are angry, accept that they are feeling that way, whatever the reason. Ask how you can help them work through their anger.
- Help your child stay in control. Never allow them to express themselves in ways that may hurt them or others.
- Never criticize, shame, tease, or hurt your child for the way they are expressing themselves. Talk about any concerns you may have later, when they are calm.

Find Out More

MSU Extension provides the following resources for parents and caregivers of preschoolers and young children at no or low cost. Be sure to check out these and other MSU Extension resources available at www.extension.msu.edu.

Extension Extras (<https://bit.ly/2LC2vdX>) – These compilations of news articles, activities, parenting tips and advice are published online Monday through Friday. The resources are designed for parents and caregivers of young children who are home all day during the novel coronavirus pandemic. Each day has a theme: Mindful Mondays, Tips on Tuesday, Working Wednesdays, Thinking Thursday, and Fun Fridays.

Extension Extras Enrichment Kits (<https://bit.ly/35QAplQ>) – These kits feature five or six early childhood activities with learning goals focused in areas such as social and emotional health, literacy, and STEM; a supply list; suggested children's books; introduction letters explaining how to use the materials; and an evaluation. The kits are available as free downloads.

Early Childhood Videos (<https://bit.ly/3ioyEkS>) – These short videos offer parents and caregivers of young children information on parenting topics. Titles include "Perspective Taking," "Family Movies," "Goals of Misbehavior," "Using Thinking and Feeling Words," "The Waiting Game," and "When Siblings Fight."

Building Early Emotional Skills (BEES) in Young Children (<https://bit.ly/38XW4Kl>) – This page provides links to a variety of free online parenting courses, workshops, and events offered by MSU Extension for parents and caregivers of young children aged 0 to 3.

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