

While children can experience these different emotions, they don't always understand what is happening or know what to do when they feel this way. Parents can help children understand more about their feelings.

Feelings and Emotions



Of particular importance, but sometimes overlooked, is talking to your children about how they feel. By the age of three, children have a wide range of emotions available to them: they feel afraid, mad, sad, and glad. While children may not have exactly the same meanings for these feelings as adults do, children can learn to label and identify "good" and "bad" feelings. Don't underestimate their capacity for understanding emotions and feelings.

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Parents can help their children develop a language for expressing and dealing with feelings by giving the feelings names. While doing so, parents have a responsibility to manage their own feelings to help children deal with theirs. Sometimes our own childhood experiences creep into how we handle emotions with our children. For all of us, there are some feelings that give us trouble. For instance, difficulties with such feelings as anger and aggression may spill into our parenting. If we cannot tolerate angry feelings, we might try to prevent our children from displaying anger by saying "That's no reason to be angry!" when in fact a child may have good reason to be angry. Through the use of play, you can provide children with some emotional avenues for anger, fear, and anxiety.

A Self-Concept Emerges

Between their second and third birthdays most children become fairly competent language users. They readily

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One of the most important messages that parents can give their children is that their feelings are real and okay. It is easy to let children talk about their feelings when they're happy and proud. When they're feeling angry or sad, however, it's easier to pretend that they don't feel this way. Let them talk about their feelings and help them understand them. You'll be helping children figure out what's going on and how to deal with difficult emotions.

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use the personal pronouns "I," "me," and "mine," particularly to defend ownership of their toys and possessions. They have great difficulty letting anyone else play with something that is theirs.

Around this time, your toddler can refer to himself by his own name. Sometimes, when playing with dolls or superheroes, your toddler may reenact earlier events. Different roles may even be assigned to the dolls. If you sit down and play directly with your toddler, you can get a glimpse of the inner workings of his mind. This glimpse may be both delightful and unnerving, since you may observe firsthand how your child views your parenting style. Many parents have heard their sweet little girl harshly send her favorite doll to her room because she didn't "behave."

By three years of age, your child has a good sense of "me" and "you" and of "self" versus "non-self." With better cognitive capabilities and a wider repertoire of experiences, the three year old has internalized memories of the significant people in his life-his parents. As their sense of self grows, children's personalities become more representative of what they will be like as they grow older. Preferences and dislikes are readily displayed in how they react with the world: for example, some children already prefer very physical activities, while others choose quiet, sedentary play.

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