

Vermont Department of Mental Health

MENTAL HEALTH

AWARENESS MONTH

Week One

May 2020

How Do I Feel? — Building Emotional Literacy

Being able to name and describe our emotions is a key part of wellness. It is also an important first step on the path towards managing emotions so that we feel better. “Don’t worry, be happy!” is easier said than done. Yet at the same time, we know that a positive mood helps us make better decisions. We’re also more creative when we feel “up,” and we are better at solving problems. We get along better with others, as well.

That said, feeling anger, anxiety or sadness is normal. There is no reason to deny or feel ashamed of those emotions. At the same time, it helps if we can manage these emotions so they don’t push us around and run our lives. And in fact, there is a lot we can do to help ourselves feel better.

How well do you know your own emotions?

How do you act when you’re feeling them? Some people feel emotions in different parts of their body like their muscles or stomach ([click here to learn more](#)). For others, emotions come with a lot more words and thoughts. What is it like for you? Can you notice your emotions but not let them run your life?



Try the exercises below to find out.

1. Think about how you act when you’re angry, scared, happy, disgusted or surprised (you can write this out if you want). Now think about how others might see you when you have these feelings. If it feels okay, ask someone close to you if they agree with your description.
2. Find a quiet place to sit comfortably and focus on taking slow and steady breaths. As thoughts and feelings come into your mind, try to notice them without judgment and see if you can just let them float away like a cloud drifting in the sky. Come back to your breathing and notice the next thought or feeling that comes. Try this for five minutes.

Knowing your feelings is important. So is knowing what to do to help yourself feel better more of the time. Getting regular exercise is important. Keeping a routine to make sure you sleep eight hours a night is key. Try practicing [mindfulness](#), taking time to feel gratitude and finding ways to help others ([mindfulness for children and youth](#)). Using drugs or alcohol may feel helpful when we feel stressed or down, but often makes things worse in the long run. Some specific tips and exercises can be found at the [Vermont Center for Children, Youth, and Families](#). Many people can also benefit from [working with a mental health professional](#) to help build these important skills.



KID'S TABLE

Children don't know about emotions on their own. Just like other skills, they need help making sense of their feelings. Parents can be important teachers of these abilities. How we are with our children is key. Are we happy to see them? Do we take time just to be with them? Do we ask them what they're thinking about and listen closely as they tell us? And what about when we feel angry, sad, or anxious? What kind of example do we set for our children? If we manage our feelings and talk about them, it can help our children do it too. The sooner children can name an emotion, the better they will be able to manage how they respond to the feeling.

Play Name that Emotion with your children. Ask them to look at the faces below. Ask if they can name the emotion each face is showing. Ask how they can tell. Listen carefully and tell them what you heard them say. If your child has trouble naming an emotion, you could make the face and ask them to make it too. Ask again what the emotion is. If your child still can't name one of the emotions, you could describe how you feel when you make that face, to help your child name the emotion.

