



Growing Towards Justice

A CURRICULUM FOR
KINDNESS AND
INCLUSIVITY

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September: Understanding Feelings

This month is all about feelings. You and your child will practice identifying different feelings they experience, and begin to consider other people's feelings. You will try out different ways to manage big feelings through mindfulness, yoga, body movements, and words, to see what works best for your child. Your child will start to develop strategies to get their underlying needs met without resorting to impulsive aggression.

Why is self-awareness of emotions an important part of growing compassionate and inclusive kids?

By beginning to understand what triggers our feelings, our children develop the skills to recognize how they feel in the moment, and take responsibility for how they respond to that feeling. So much of the time, we are reacting, and those reactions are based on our underlying unmet needs. If we are not able to develop a sense of what will trigger our anger or frustration, and we are not able to name, claim, and calm that emotion, it's likely that we will act out with unkindness or blame towards others. Rather than having feelings of kindness towards others, we end up acting out on our most selfish urges, which often makes us feel shameful or bad about ourselves – unhelpful all around!

When we aren't really sure what's at the root of how we feel, and when we are out of touch with our own emotions, it's very difficult to empathise with others and understand what unmet needs are fuelling their actions. A cycle of react and react again occurs, and no one is connecting on a compassionate, empathetic, human level. Further, when we aren't able to trace the roots of our feelings, we can end up carrying a lot of shame about 'negative' feelings like anger or frustration. No feelings are bad! There are more positive and more negative ways of expressing our feelings and getting those underlying needs met, but no feelings are bad in and of themselves.

Starting at a young age, we can help our children learn to put a name to what they are feeling, and trace where the feeling is coming from, so that they can develop ways to express the feeling in a positive way and move on. The resources this month are designed to help you and your child identify a range of emotions, practice different ways to regain a calm equilibrium, and begin to imagine how others feel. A basic understanding of feelings and how we can manage our reactions to our feelings is the groundwork for the rest of the material in this curriculum.

TOPIC: IDENTIFYING AND EXPLORING EMOTIONS IN PICTURES

Resources needed:

All Kinds of Feelings by Emma Brownjohn

[Cards with pictures of faces showing emotions](#)

If you'd rather not purchase this set, you can make cards yourself with photographs that you print out, or you can use a free set available to download online. There are two free sets linked in the resources section at the end of this guide.

Emotions cards help children to give names to different feelings, and to learn how to decode other people's expressions to have a greater understanding of how they are feeling. This will give them an opportunity to shape their response to someone based on that person's emotions.

Activity 1: Naming emotions

Introduce a few cards at a time, talking about what you see. How can you tell what the child is feeling by the expression on their face? When did your child last feel this feeling? Where did they feel the feeling in their bodies, and what did it feel like? Match the emotion card to the book – even though the pictures are different, can you tell the emotions are the same?

Activity 2: Storytelling with emotions cards.

Choose a few cards and tell a story based on these pictures, or if your child is old enough, ask them to help you tell a story. As an example: choose cards representing jealous, surprised, angry, embarrassed, and happy. A possible story for a child around 4-5 years old could be something like this:

“Sidney was playing on the swing when another child came along. What's a name we can call this child? [let your child answer] Max, ok. Max wants to use the swing and he feels very jealous that Sidney is on the swing. Max feels so jealous and doesn't know how to make himself feel better unless he's on the swing RIGHT NOW, so he comes up and pushes Sidney off the swing. Oh no! Sidney is very surprised because she did not expect to be pushed off the swing, and she feels very angry that she has been pushed onto the ground.

Sidney is so angry and she puts her feelings into her voice and shouts for help. “Help I'm ANGRY” she yells, and her daddy looks up and sees that Sidney needs help with her feelings. He runs over and talks to the children about what he sees. He sees that Max felt very jealous, and that when he pushed Sidney off the swing, she felt surprised and angry. How does Max feel now? Embarrassed that he pushed Sidney, but he had forgotten how to help himself feel calm right then. Sidney's dad makes a suggestion. “I see two children who want one swing right here. Sidney, you are very angry – you wanted to keep swinging! Max, you had a hard time waiting your turn. How about we both take a run around to clear our feelings and then go on the slide? Who can catch me?”

Now Max, Sidney, and Sidney's daddy feel happy because they are having a run around, and they are moving their bodies and letting their feelings settle back down.”

Activity 3: Feelings Board

Some children have a difficult time talking about their feelings. We can use the emotions cards to help them share how they are feeling if they are too upset or too uncomfortable to express it to us in words, or if they are too young to clearly express themselves. You can make a feelings board out of a sturdy piece of cardboard or thin wood. Peg up a few challenging emotions like frustration, sadness, anger, or loneliness, and have your child point to the emotion on the board to communicate what they are feeling.

TOPIC: OBSERVATION OF EMOTIONAL TRIGGERS

How does your child respond in different situations? What pushes them 'over the edge' emotionally? At what point can you help them to regain their equilibrium or express their emotions in a way that doesn't hurt anyone?

By keeping a record of our child's emotions throughout a day or a week, we can begin to observe patterns and triggers. Once we can identify that frustration leads to hitting, for example, we can help our child to name their frustration, and practice ways to feel and release the frustration in the most positive way possible.

Activity 1:

For the next two or three days, jot down your child's changing emotions and anything you can identify that triggered their emotional response. Remember that we are not trying to change our child's emotions or limit their emotional expressions – we are hoping to help them learn how to identify their emotional triggers and release their emotions in a way that leaves them and everyone around them feeling balanced and calm. Observe 'easy' emotions like happiness or contentment as well as 'challenging' ones like anger or frustration.

If you are able to, try to record your own changing emotions and their triggers over a similar time period. What do you notice about yourself? How are you and your child similar? Different? Are there times when your emotional response brings about an emotional reaction in your child?

Activity 2:

If your child is 4-6, help them to keep an emotions journal. They may want to draw, write, or ask you to scribe for them – whatever they are happiest with is perfect. At various points of the day, sit with them and help them to check in about how they have felt in the hours previous. Were they happy, sad, disappointed? How did those feelings come about, and how were they resolved? What could they have done differently to clear those emotions? What worked for them on previous days?

The goal with this activity is to help your child grow their ability to reflect on their feelings, and see how they might use some of the calming or regulating activities they are practicing throughout the month. Your child may begin to notice patterns – for instance, that she

always feels frustrated when her brother knocks over her block tower – and then may be able to come up with strategies to change this situation (for instance, she might decide to build with blocks in a different room).

While completing this activity, your child may want to consider how siblings or other children expressed their feelings, and why they may have felt as they did. This is a great way to begin to exercise their empathy muscles.

February: Families are Different

February is LGBTQ+ history month in the UK, and we're using this month to talk about all the ways that families are similar and different from one another. Who's in a family? Where do families live? Do families change over time? What's your family like?

Why is talking about different kinds of families an important part of growing compassionate and inclusive kids?

We want our children to understand that no matter how a person's family looks, all families deserve the same respect and legitimacy. Whether a family has one parent, two parents, or more, whether children live with a grandparent or a foster family, whether they were adopted or grew in their mum's body, or if a family has no children in it at all, so long as it is a place of love, it's a family. Normalizing a range of family types helps to 'decenter' the traditional nuclear family of father/mother/a few children and allows for our children to understand that one type of family structure isn't more 'normal' or 'better' than another. It also introduces the idea of same-sex relationships to children within a context of equality. Families with two dads or two moms are just as fine as families with one dad and one mom!

In this month we talk about extended family and friends, and about your own family culture. What makes your family different from other families? What makes you the same? The activities and discussion prompts include a wide range of things: two kinds of family tree, a map of where in the world your family lives or has lived, a family photo book, and conversation starters about different kinds of relationships.

There are two sections in this month that may not be relevant for your family: one about loss of a family member, and one about what happens if your family changes due to divorce or relationship breakdown. These can also be helpful if a child has a friend who has experienced familial loss or a parental relationship breakdown.

WHO'S IN A FAMILY?

Resources needed:

The Family Book by Todd Parr (for young children)

All Families are Special by Norma Simon (for older children)

The Great Big Book of Families by Mary Hoffman

Full, Full, Full of Love by Trish Cooke

Photo albums with pictures of your extended family

Roots of Love template (in resources section)

Family Tree template (in resources section)

Activity 1: Who's in a Family?

Read *The Family Book* or *All Families are Special* and talk about how your family is like the book. Do people in your family eat different foods? Live in different places? How do you know you are a family?

Some of the words in these books will be new to your child: step-parent, adoption, and foster family, for example. Use this as an opportunity to talk about how different families are created – you may want to be prepared to talk about how babies are made, using some of the resources listed in the end of the guide.

Use the Family Tree template and complete a family tree with your child. Talk with them about their extended family – do they have great-aunts, step-grandparents, birth families? Who was important in your life when you were a child? Share photographs if you have them. Alternative family tree templates are linked in the resources section at the end of the month's guide, if those are more useful for your family.

Collaborate with your child to make a list or drawings of the special days that your family celebrates, or the things that you do as a family that feel special, and write these around the outside of your tree.

Activity 2: Roots of Love

Read *The Great Big Book of Families*, and revisit some of the family words you learned from the other books. What kind of house does your family live in? How do you get around? What hobbies do people in your family have? What's something important that's happened in your family? Do you know people who do things differently?

Read *Full, Full, Full of Love* and talk about who the different people who come to the meal might be. Who would you want to invite to a big happy dinner, if you could invite all the people you love?

Create a Roots of Love tree with your child to recognize and celebrate all the people that contribute to your child's life. Ask your child to think about the people that love them and help them to grow. Your child can decorate the tree however they like. Help them to write their name in the middle of the tree, and help them to write the names of people they identify who love them and help them on the roots of the tree.

This kind of tree, unlike a traditional 'family tree', reminds us that it takes more people than an immediate family to raise a child – it takes a community. It also places less importance on lineage and more importance on a day to day feeling of love and connection. How does this tree look different than the family tree you created?