



Managing feelings and behaviour

Children need to become competent at managing their own feelings and behaviours, and parents have a key role to play in supporting this. Strong emotional bonds between parent and child help children to regulate and manage emotions.



A child's ability to manage their feelings will help them:

- Relate to other children and adults
- Make friends
- Feel secure and valued
- Feel confident
- Feel good about themselves

Babies and children need support from others to help them to regulate their feelings. This support, given in a consistent way, helps them to understand basic emotions, begin to control their impulses, and learn how to manage and display their feelings appropriately.

It's important to remember that children can find it difficult to tell us how they feel. Instead, we can often see how they're feeling through their behaviour and other non-verbal cues. If a child is struggling to cope with their emotions then it is important to explore the reason – there's usually a cause hidden underneath; are they tired; hungry; or facing new situations or experiences?

Most children will go through phases where they struggle more with managing their behaviour and feelings, but with the support of caring adults they will come through these. Occasionally children may need more support and this is where a Behaviour Lead or Special Educational Needs Coordinator should help.



Here are a few ways parents can further support the management of feelings and behaviour:

- Give your child choices, such as, 'play with the toy nicely or it will need to go away'.
- Give your child time to think and make their choice. If they do not comply, follow through and put the toy away.
- Use books and stories that show a range of emotions such as happy, sad, angry; or stories where characters help each other or follow or break the rules.
- Provide quiet, cosy and safe places where children can go to calm down if needed.
- Be calm and consistent. This helps you stay in control of the situation and allows the child to feel safe knowing you are able to contain their behaviour.

Supporting under-2s

You can have a big influence on even the youngest babies. Communicate with them; make eye contact, use funny faces and respond to their emotions – laugh with them when they are happy or soothe them with quiet language and cuddles and rocking if they are upset.

Talk to babies and toddlers about what they are doing and how they are feeling. Don't be afraid to allow a child to express their feelings but be close by to support and vocalise what is going on: "I can see you are feeling really frustrated, sad, happy" etc.

Supporting 2-and 3-year-olds

For children who are experiencing emotional upset or feeling insecure, a structured but flexible routine is important. It is important for parents to have expectations of behaviour and to make these clear to children in a consistent way.

Tantrums and excessive displays of emotion are a normal part of development and, ideally, should be handled in a calm, consistent and sensitive way with a view to helping the child learn how to control their own feelings and emotions.

Acknowledge how your child is feeling and reassure them that it is ok that they feel frustrated/sad/angry in that moment. Excessive emotions can feel scary for a child and they need your support to learn how to manage them. Name feelings like "you sound angry" or "I wonder if you are frustrated" and use gentle words, gestures and touch to help children regulate their feelings.*

Take time to talk to children about feelings and emotions (including the happy ones!), supporting them to develop language to express themselves. Look at books about emotions, use mirrors to make sad/happy faces and praise them when they show concern for others. Show your own concern and respect for people and the environment. Start to support the idea of sharing and taking turns.

Supporting the over-3s

When it's age and stage appropriate, start to talk to children about rights, duties and responsibilities as well as acceptable and non-acceptable forms of behaviour. Allow your child to express and communicate their views, feelings and emotions; plus ensure they listen to others. This helps children to develop confidence and empathy for others. If challenging behaviour occurs, talk it through with them and what they might do differently next time.

Children can often feel overwhelmed and by breaking down complicated tasks into manageable parts, children can practise self-regulation. At playdates let children take the lead in negotiation of their own approaches to things and allow them to initially resolve situations.

Consistency is key! As parents we need to be positive role models when it comes to the management of behaviour. Remember that children learn how other people behave by watching the people around them so think about how you respond to difficult situations! If you feel frustrated then talk to them about and share your own feelings appropriately.