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## DEALING WITH FEELINGS

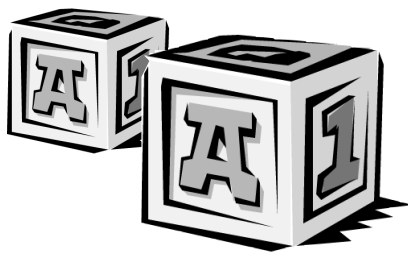


### Feelings and needs

Being a parent is an emotional business – children are emotional beings. However, many people find it hard to cope with their own or their children’s feelings, let alone those of other adults. Often when we are near someone who is very upset or angry, or perhaps even very excited or joyful, we can feel uncomfortable or awkward. Sometimes another person showing their feelings sets off emotions locked away inside ourselves – feelings, perhaps, that we were not allowed to show when we were little. Our discomfort now may be related to the discomfort we felt then, when we learned to hold our feelings in.

### Building blocks

- The value of feelings
- Accepting children’s feelings
- Avoid manipulating feelings
- Accepting our own feelings
- Doing things for ourselves
- The child within us
- Practical living needs
- Listening as support: open questions
- Self-feedback



## The value of feelings

Parents often give verbal, or non-verbal messages to their children that it's not 'OK' to feel – e.g. *Don't be angry, Don't be sad, Don't be afraid, Cheer up*. But keeping feelings locked away is not healthy. It is much better to be able to share them, and to help our children show their feelings, in ways that don't hurt others.

There has been a deep-seated belief in many cultures that relating to children's feelings in an accepting way can turn them into weak-minded 'wimps'. Yet children who are allowed to express their feelings are more likely to grow into sensitive, caring people.

The long-term effects of *denying* children's feelings are likely to be:

- ◆ low self-esteem
- ◆ learning to 'bottle up' feelings
- ◆ learning not to trust feelings
- ◆ perhaps eventually learning not to feel

Just as physical pain is a way of keeping a child safe (e.g. learning through the pain of being burnt not to touch something hot), emotional pain, fear, joy or anger all help to give children a sense of who they are, and be in touch with what is true for them. Many adults act against their own best interests because their feelings were denied from an early age.



A classic way of denying children's feelings of hurt, anger or upset is to tell them that they must be 'tired' or not feeling well. While of course there *are* times when this may be true, often there is some other reason why they are upset.

## Accepting children's feelings

One of the simplest, and most effective ways of accepting children's feelings is to acknowledge what they are feeling. That is, to let them know that you see, or hear what they are feeling. For example, if a child says I'm frightened, it is more helpful to say, *You're frightened?* than *Don't be silly, there's nothing to be frightened of*. Or, if a child says, *I hate my baby brother*, to simply say *You're angry*, rather than *You must never say 'hate'*.

By acknowledging, we mean accepting children's reality, which doesn't necessarily mean sharing what they're feeling or condoning anti-social behaviour, or really believing there's a monster under the bed.