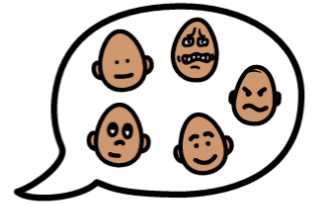


## Learning to Understand and Use 'Thinking and Feeling' Words

Children's first words are often about the people, objects, and actions in their everyday life. Later they learn words which are more complicated and abstract – like thinking and feeling words. Here are some examples:



- words for talking about **what we want** – *want, like, need*
- words for describing our **senses** – *hear, see, feel, smell, taste*
- words for describing how we **physically feel** – *hungry, tired, sick*
- words for talking about **emotions** – *like, hate, enjoy, afraid, surprised, feel, nice, happy*
- words for talking about our **thoughts, beliefs, and judgments** – *believe, think, know, guess, remember, understand, forget, good, bad, naughty*

## When do children typically learn about thoughts and feelings?

### Age 2:

- Young children's first 'thoughts and feelings' words revolve around their own wants and needs e.g. "I **want** a cookie", things they notice with their senses e.g. "I **see** a dog", and their physical feelings e.g. "I'm **hungry**".
- Gradually, they learn to talk about what's going on in other peoples' minds e.g. "He's **sad**".

### Age 3:

- Children will start to use more complicated words like "think", "know", and "guess"
- Children may use these words to keep the conversation going without truly understanding what the words mean e.g. "I don't **know**" or "I **think** so".

### Ages 4 – 5:

- Eventually, children start to understand subtle differences between these types of words. For example, they learn that the word "know" means that the speaker is certain about something, whereas the word "think" means that he or she is less sure.

## Why are 'thinking and feeling' words important?

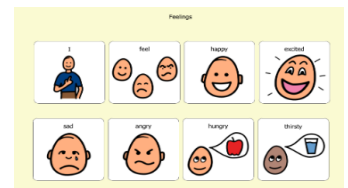
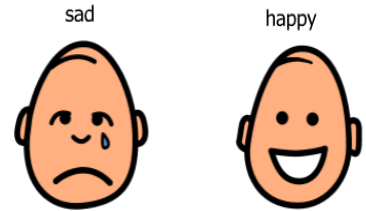
Being able to understand and use 'thinking and feeling' words and being able to recognise and label their own feelings can help children to:

- **Talk about their own thoughts and feelings:** this can then lead to them learning that other people might have different feelings to them.
- **Self-regulate:** learning ways to manage their emotions, attention and behaviour when they experience challenges.
- **Have conversations:** conversations can last longer and have a deeper meaning.
- **Understand stories:** they will better understand the language used to describe characters' actions and motivations in storybooks.
- **Learn the language used at school:** Words for thinking and feeling are part of the "academic vocabulary" used by teachers and found in textbooks.



## How can you help?

- **Teach children to label emotions using pictures and symbols:** use a variety of pictures and symbols of different emotions and talk about what you see. Try simple sorting activities e.g. sort happy vs sad pictures.
- **Talk about your child's thoughts and feelings in everyday situations:** Start with easier emotions e.g. happy/sad. Use simple language and label your child's emotions when they are happening e.g. I can see you're **tired**...mmm you **like** the biscuit, you're feeling **hot**, take your jumper off.
- **Talk about your own feelings:** label and talk about your own emotions e.g. if your child says, "I like chocolate" while eating ice cream, you can share your own perspective "Strawberry is my favourite." This will help your child start to understand that different people have different thoughts and feelings, and that we can use words to talk about these differences.
- **Use books to talk about thoughts and feelings:** Lots of storybooks give opportunities to talk about what people are thinking and feeling. Use the pictures to explain the characters' actions and words, and what they might be thinking or feeling. For example, you might say things like "She looks **mad** because she missed the bus", "He **thinks** the treasure is still in the treasure chest", or "I bet he **feels sick** after eating all of that pizza".
- **Use visuals:** Pointing to symbols or pictures can help your child understand the words that you are using. They can also be used as another way for your child to communicate their thoughts and feelings.



***If your child can already label some of their emotions, you could try:***



**Feelings thermometer** - An image of a thermometer can be a useful tool to encourage your child to 'measure their emotions'. A low temperature means your child is happy. As it gets higher, then your child is becoming more anxious and unhappy.

**Zones of regulation** – this is a framework to support emotional well-being. There are four zones:

- **Blue** is very Low energy, your body is running on low e.g. sad, sick, tired
- **Green** Low/medium energy where emotional well-being is good e.g. being happy or calm
- **Yellow** Higher energy level, starting to lose focus (caution) e.g. anxiety, frustration, excited
- **Red** Very high energy, big Intense emotions/out of control e.g. terror, rage, anger, overjoyed

The aim is to develop a 'toolkit' in which children can be supported to move between different zones depending on what situation they are in.