



Youth Development
Resource Center

GUIDES TO QUALITY PRACTICES

Acknowledging and Naming Emotions

This guide will introduce you to strategies, tools, and resources that will support you with acknowledging and naming emotions. Below you will find definitions and practices that will support you with active listening, respectfully reacting to emotions in others, and communicating effectively and honestly about emotions.

WHAT ARE EMOTIONS?

Emotions are a composite of the brain interpreting bodily sensations, current context, emotional history with related experiences, and the shared social experience around that context or event. Emotions have the power to shut our thinking brains off and elicit many different mental and physical responses. As such, developing the skills and awareness to acknowledge and name emotions provides the foundation for addressing and promoting healthy and respectful processing and management of emotions in ourselves and in others.

THE PRINCIPLES OF ACKNOWLEDGING AND NAMING EMOTIONS

- ▶ **Active Listening:** Active listening is the ability to focus completely on a speaker, understand their message, comprehend the information, and respond thoughtfully. When discussing emotions it is especially important to remain calm and use problem-solving methods.
- ▶ **Respectfully Reacting to Emotions in Others:** Recognize an emotional experience that is separate from your own thoughts or beliefs. React and respond with thoughtfulness and compassion.
- ▶ **Communicating Effectively & Honestly About Emotions:** Create an emotionally safe space, through values and practices, where real and honest sharing of emotions is always welcome.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONAL SUGGESTED INDICATORS

Use this checklist when designing your program.

ACTIVE LISTENING

- ☐ **Show that you're listening:** Provide cues that show you are listening such as eye contact, nods, and verbal prompts such as "And?," "Uh-huh," "Mmmm."
- ☐ **Identify & empathize:** Observe non-verbal cues and what is not being said to help identify feelings. Support youth in identifying and exploring their feelings rather than condescending or judging them.
- ☐ **Hold back & let youth speak:** Hold back on suggestions, ideas, or opinions. Don't be afraid of silence. Allow pauses and periods of silence, so that youth have time to think.
- ☐ **Remember context & details:** Remember details and communicate them back to youth in the form of questions or statements.

RESPECTFULLY REACTING TO EMOTIONS IN OTHERS

- ☐ **Support increased emotional vocabulary** (use emotion wheel/charts, etc.).
- ☐ Don't dismiss an emotional experience based off of your own understanding, **all emotions are valid.**
- ☐ **Understand emotions are expressed both in similar and individual ways** (some people cry when they're mad, others laugh when they're scared, etc).

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY & HONESTLY ABOUT EMOTIONS

- ☐ **Be transparent in your own emotional activation** and reinforce shared language around emotions.
- ☐ **Offer time and space to sit with emotions**—don't try to help problem solve right away. "Your anger at being betrayed like that is a big emotion to wrestle with. Let me know if or when you want to talk about what to do with it."
- ☐ **Give tools** and space for modulating and managing emotion:
 - ▶ Exercise
 - ▶ Mindfulness and breathing
 - ▶ Reframing
 - ▶ Time out/alone time
 - ▶ Emotional support

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Emotion wheels

- ▶ <http://feelingswheel.com/>

Cocoa Butter and Hair Grease Emotion Chart

- ▶ <https://www.annodright.com/shopcocoa>

Active Listening

- ▶ <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-active-listening-3024343>

Mindfulness

- ▶ <https://www.nytimes.com/guides/well/mindfulness-for-children>

SEL by Age

- ▶ <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/signs-symptoms/age-by-age-learning-skills/social-and-emotional-skills-what-to-expect-at-different-ages>
- ▶ <https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/ages-stages-empathy/>

Model for Describing Emotions

- ▶ <https://www.necmh.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/5-model-for-describing-emotions.pdf>