

# Acknowledging Feelings

## Steps to help you communicate understanding to your child to help her navigate negative feelings.

The key to helping your child feel understood is to acknowledge his feelings. Follow these steps to get more in tune with your child:

- **Label the feeling:** For younger children, the simpler label you offer the better. Use words like mad, happy, sad and scared. For older children, more specific words help them to pinpoint the exact emotion: disappointed, worried and embarrassed.
- **State the reason for the feeling.** Make your best guess as to why your child feels as he does. For example, say, "It looks like you're mad because Mom said you can't have dessert today."
- **Don't judge your child.** Your child needs to know that it is okay to express emotion. However, at times you may need to teach your child how to express his feelings in ways that are healthy and not hurtful to others.

## Do's and Don'ts

### **Do's:**

1. **Support your child.** Give physical support (hugs, kisses) and verbal support by acknowledging your child's feelings.
2. **Help your child understand why she is upset.** Help her to connect feelings with experiences. Ask open-ended questions about what caused the anger, sadness, fear, etc.
3. **Give your child space.** She may need to be taken out of the upsetting situation briefly to find a way to calm down.
4. **Encourage your child to use words to express her feelings.** These should be words used to describe what your child feels rather than words used to hurt others.
5. **Teach your child empathy.** When your child is angry or sad, remind her that others often feel the same way. Help her think of ways she might help someone if they were feeling the same emotion. She will develop empathy for others and may find ways to help herself in the process.

### **Don'ts:**

1. **Don't try to fix it all.** Allow your child to find ways to problem-solve and calm herself. She may need time to figure out the best way to do so.
2. **Don't bribe your child to get her to stop feeling upset.** You don't want to short-circuit your child's experience. She needs to learn how to manage her feelings over the long term.

3. **Don't distract your child from her feelings.** By acting as if nothing has happened or avoiding negative feelings, we prevent children from learning how to deal with them properly.
4. **Don't punish your child.** Scolding a child for experiencing negative feelings will not only make her feel worse but it will discourage her from having those feelings — or being open about them. Instead of discouraging the experience of these emotions, it is crucial to encourage the proper expression of them.
5. **Don't allow your child to hurt others with their negative feelings.** Children can say insulting things and, at times, physically hurt others when upset. Teach your child that it is never okay to harm others.

### **Reference**

[http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/your child's emotions/emotional development/acknowledging feelings.aspx](http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/your_childs_emotions/emotional_development/acknowledging_feelings.aspx)