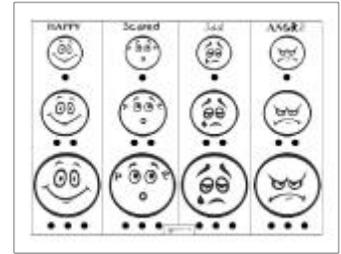


# Show Me How You Feel!

**Recommended Age Range:** Ages 3-6

**Treatment Modality:** Individual

**Goals:** When young children act out in response to upsetting events, they are often directed to “use their words” to express their emotions. To follow this directive, the child needs to be able to internally process their emotional reactions and then translate that understanding into words. This is beyond the ability of many young children. In this activity, a chart is used to help the young child better identify his or her own inner emotional state and then convey that information to others. This activity also helps young children recognize that the intensity of one’s emotional reaction to an event may vary, depending on other variables, and that one can take action to regulate the intensity of one’s emotions.



**Materials needed:** Copy of the *Mixed Emotions Junior* chart

**1. General Introduction:** To use the Mixed Emotions chart as a tool to help identify and express emotions, the young client first needs knowledge of four basic emotions: *happy, scared, sad, angry*. The use of bibliotherapy is one way to provide the child with a solid foundation in understanding these concepts. A variety of books can be used: both regular children’s literature and also books especially designed to help children identify emotions (\*see below for one suggestion.) Many therapists already have a collection of such books.

As you read the book with the child, have the child identify the emotions that the characters in the book feel by having the child point to the corresponding face on the *Mixed Emotions Junior* chart. Ask whether the character’s emotion is “little, medium, or big.” This introductory activity helps the child understand the connection between events and emotions and helps the child begin to develop a vocabulary for expressing emotions.

**2. Using the chart to help children process their own emotions:** After the use of the chart has been introduced, the therapist can then use the chart to help children identify their own emotional reaction to events in their lives.

**a) Talk about the event and have the child identify the primary emotion and its intensity:** For example the therapist might say, “Show me how you felt when your friend took away your toy.” If the child points to one of the mad faces, the therapist can ask the child to name that feeling and then identify whether the feeling was “small, medium or big.” The child can say “mad” or “angry” and point to the face that depicts the intensity of his emotional reaction.

**b) Identify other emotions:** The therapist might also ask if the child was feeling any of the other emotions at the time, thus helping the child recognize that people can have “mixed emotions.” For example, in addition to feeling anger, the child may also have experienced feelings of sadness and/or worry in response to his friend’s behavior. He may show that he felt “big” anger and also “a little sad.”

**c) Help the child to express some of the beliefs/thoughts associated with those emotions:** The therapist can help the child verbalize some of the thoughts associated with these emotions. One way to help the child express these thoughts is to ask “What were you thinking when you were feeling that big mad feeling?” “What were you saying to yourself in your head when you were feeling that little sad feeling?” For example the therapist might help the child to explain that he was feeling “big” anger because he wanted to play with the toy himself, and also a “little” sad because he thought his friend was being mean to him and/or did not like him.

**d) Help the child identify healthy coping mechanisms.** After the child has identified his emotions, and expressed some of the thoughts that underlie the emotions, the therapist can then say “Let’s talk about some things that kids can do to feel better when they have big angry feelings like that.” Together, they might identify some healthy strategies for coping with “big” angry feelings: asking a grown-up for help, using words to tell his friend how he feels and what he wants, taking a deep breath. Using the chart, the therapist can then help the child assess the probable result of each strategy: “If you tell your teacher what happened, and she says she will help, what will happen to your big angry feeling?” Perhaps the child will indicate that his feeling might change to a “medium” angry feeling. “If your teacher tells your friend to give the toy back to you, what will happen to your medium angry feeling?” By conversing with the child in this way, the chart can be used to demonstrate that when the coping methods are successful, the negative emotional reaction to the event may diminish (move from a “big” angry feeling to a “little” angry feeling) or even transform to a different feeling (from a sad feeling to a happy feeling as a result of his friend’s understanding and cooperation and as a result of his own success in using coping strategies.)

\* *Glad Monster, Sad Monster: A Book About Feelings* by Ed Emberley and Anne Miranda is an example of a book that gives a basic foundation for identifying feelings.