

Developing Awareness of Facial Expressions

Being able to recognise and interpret another person's facial expressions and to use our own expressions to share thoughts and feelings is an important part of both social and emotional communication. For many Neurodivergent children, developing this skill can be particularly challenging. This information sheet provides guidance on how we can support children in developing their ability to recognise, interpret, and use facial expressions effectively.



Ages 0–2: Building Early Awareness

Mirror Play

- Sit with your child in front of a mirror and make different facial expressions (happy, sad, surprised, tired).
- Name the emotion and encourage them to copy you.
- Example: "Look, I'm happy! Can you show me your happy face?"

Emotion Songs and Rhymes

- Use songs like If you're happy and you know it or make up your own ("If you're sad and you know it, make a frown!").
- Exaggerate expressions to make them more visible and fun.

Picture Books

- Read books with clear, expressive illustrations. Pause and talk about the characters' faces: "He's frowning. What do you think he's feeling?"





Ages 3–4: Identifying and Naming Emotions

Emotion Matching Games

- Use cards or photos showing different facial expressions.
- Ask children to match faces that show the same emotion or to find the “happy” or “angry” face.



Guess the Feeling

- Make an expression and ask, “How do you think I feel?”
- Swap roles so the child gets to act out an emotion while you guess.

Story time Feelings

- During story time, pause and ask: “How do you think she feels right now?”
- Talk about what made the character feel that way.



Ages 5–6: Understanding Context and Perspective

Emotion Charades

- Act out emotions without words- happy, excited, scared, embarrassed and let others guess.
- Discuss what clues helped them figure it out (eyes, mouth, body posture).



“Feelings Detective” Game

- When watching a short video or looking at photos, encourage children to be detectives and spot facial clues that show how someone feels. E.g. “Her eyebrows are up- what might that mean?”

Role Play Everyday Situations

- Use play scenarios (e.g., sharing toys, losing a turn) to explore what emotions might arise.
- Encourage expressing and responding to those feelings appropriately.