



How to Help Your Child Recognize & Understand Sadness

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Sadness is one of the easiest emotions for young children to understand, and one of the first emotions that they can learn to recognize in others. Everyone feels sad at one time or another for a variety of reasons. As parents, we want to empower our children to recognize when they are feeling sad and, if needed, take steps to help themselves feel better or ask someone else for help. When you help your child recognize the physical features that accompany feeling sad and understand the reasons why someone might feel sad, you are helping your child create the necessary building blocks for him to manage his own emotions and relationships. Sometimes simply acknowledging your child's sadness is all that is needed. For example, saying to your child "You are so sad that it is time to leave the park."



Backpack Connection Series

About this Series

The Backpack Connection Series was created by TACSEI to provide a way for teachers and parents/caregivers to work together to help young children develop social emotional skills and reduce challenging behavior. Teachers may choose to send a handout home in each child's backpack when a new strategy or skill is introduced to the class. Each Backpack Connection handout provides information that helps parents stay informed about what their child is learning at school and specific ideas on how to use the strategy or skill at home.

The Pyramid Model

The Pyramid Model is a framework that provides programs with guidance on how to promote social emotional competence in all children and design effective interventions that support young children who might have persistent challenging behavior. It also provides practices to ensure that children with social emotional delays receive intentional teaching. Programs that implement the Pyramid Model are eager to work together with families to meet every child's individualized learning and support needs. To learn more about the Pyramid Model, please visit ChallengingBehavior.org.

More Information

More information and resources on this and other topics are available on our website, ChallengingBehavior.org.



Try This at Home

- Notice and label when you, your child or others are sad. You might say:
 - » About yourself, "I'm feeling really sad that Grandma went home. Maybe I'll call her."
 - » About your child: "It looks like you are sad. You have tears in your eyes and your head is down."
 - » About others: "That little boy looks really sad. I wonder what might make him feel better?"
- Read books about being sad. Talk with your child about what the character is feeling and experiencing and come up with ideas that might help. You can find many books and corresponding activities to help your child learn about emotions at: <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/strategies.html#list>
- Share with your child times when you felt sad. What happened? What did you do? Did you stay sad forever? It is important for children to learn that emotions can (and do!) change.
- Use your child's play as a way to act out sad situations. For example, you could say, "Oh no, this train is super sad. All the other trains are playing together and he feels sad and lonely."



Practice at School

Whether a child is sad because a parent left, a toy broke or they fell down, there are many opportunities for him to learn what to do when someone feels sad. Teachers label the emotion for the child, (i.e. saying "You look sad") and then begin to let the child come up with a solution to help him feel better. This may be a hug, a story or a special object. As children become more capable, they themselves learn to offer comfort to their peers.



The Bottom Line

The way a child feels and behaves are closely related. Children who can manage their own emotions are better prepared to control their behavior. Children who can recognize their own feelings are better able to remain calm and use words, rather than challenging behavior, to communicate.



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This publication was produced by the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention (TACSEI) for Young Children funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), U.S. Department of Education (H3268070002) and updated by the National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations also funded by OSEP (H3268170003). The views expressed do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the Department of Education. July 2013/January, 2018.

