

Use tantrums as a teaching tool

One of your jobs as a parent or teacher is to help children understand and deal with their feelings.

The process of learning to deal with feelings is similar to learning to talk – it takes place gradually over months. Some tips follow:

1. Acknowledge children's feelings.

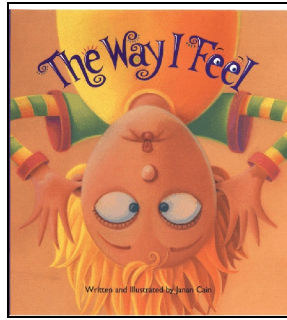
Many people have been trained to ignore or suppress their feelings. Girls are often taught that being mad is not nice or is unfeminine. Boys are taught not to cry because it's not manly.

You can validate feelings by listening to the child and reflecting the feelings you hear.

- Label your child's feelings: *"You're disappointed we can't go to the park today."*
- Share your feelings: *"I feel frustrated when I spill coffee on the floor."*
- Read books that discuss feelings, like the *Let's Talk About Feelings* series.
- Observe another's feelings: *"I'll bet he's proud of the tower he built."*

2. Help children notice that feelings change.

Children (and some grownups) often feel overwhelmed by feelings.



You can help children learn that feelings change by talking about how *your* feelings change and by reading books, like *All My Feelings at Home: Ellie's Day*, that show feelings changing.

However, avoid the temptation to tell your children that their feelings will change while they are mad. Few people are receptive to new learning when they are upset.

3. Distinguish between feelings and actions.

All feelings are okay. Actions may or may not be okay, depending on the situation.

For example, hitting a baseball is fine. Hitting a person is *not* fine. You can clarify the difference by saying, *"It's okay to be mad, and I cannot let you hit Eli."* You can also *model* the difference between feelings and action.

You might say, *"This morning someone cut me off on the road. I was so mad I wanted to crash into him. Instead I . . ."*

4. Offer children several ways to calm themselves down.

Children need a variety of ways to respond: auditory, physical, visual, creative, and self-nurturing.

You can introduce new responses by modeling, observing others, or reading books. Children need to practice different responses when they are calm. Then when a child is familiar with a new way to respond, you may ask her if she would like to try it when she is

upset. You can read more about teaching kids to calm themselves in *Dealing with Disappointment* by Elizabeth Crary.

With toddlers you can use *When You're MAD and You Know It* to introduce six ways to express their anger. Read the story, sing it, and act it out. Then, when your child is upset, you can sit with him and "blow air out."

With preschoolers or older children you can read the *Dealing With Feelings* series. Then say, *"You're real angry. Do you want to feel mad right now or do you want to calm down?"*

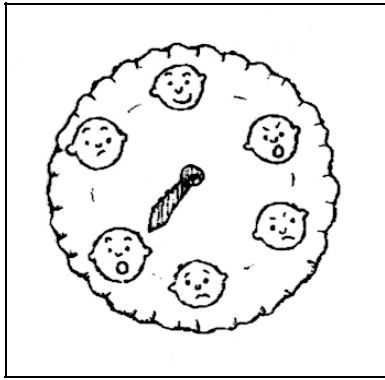
If your child wants to change her feelings, you could say, *"What could you do? Let's see, you could dance a mad dance, make a card to give to Rosa, talk about the feeling, or look at your favorite book."*

After you've generated ideas, let the child choose what works for her.

5. Teach tools to resolve situations that are hard for children.

If Josh wants the truck Eli has, teach him to ask, wait, or trade for it. If Sonja gets frustrated putting puzzles together, teach her how to take breaks or breathe deeply so she does not get upset. You can use the books *I Want It, I Can't Wait*, or *I Want to Play* to introduce options. Research has found that the more alternatives a child has, the better his or her social behavior.

A Feeling Activity from Dealing with Disappointment



Twist the Feeling Dial

Purpose: To help children notice that feelings change.

Make a feeling plate for each person.

Divide the paper plate into sections. Draw a simple feeling face in each section. Cut a strip of cardboard with a point on one end. Poke a fastener into the flat end of the strip and then into the center of the plate. Now you have a feeling plate.

Dial your feeling.

Point the strip to your feeling. Then ask your child to move the dial to his feeling. Tell him that when his feeling changes he can move the dial again.

Notice change.

When your feelings change, take your feeling plate to your child and say "Now I feel _____," and move the dial. Invite him to move his dial as his feelings change.

Resources available

from www.ParentingPress.com
(1-800-992-6657)

The Way I Feel Written and illustrated by Janan Cain. This award-winning book uses simple verses to describe emotions from boredom to frustration, pride to joy.

Dealing with Disappointment: Helping Kids Cope When Things Don't Go Their Way by Elizabeth Crary, covers what to do when kids melt down and how to teach kids skills they need to calm themselves.

Feelings for Little Children series: *When You're Happy* and *You Know It, When You're Shy . . .*, *When You're Mad . . .*, and *When You're Silly . . .* Each board book offers simple ways to express feelings. Suitable for very young children.

Dealing With Feelings Series: *I'm Mad, I'm Proud, I'm Frustrated, I'm Scared, I'm Furious, and I'm Excited* by Elizabeth Crary offer children ways to calm themselves.

Children's Problem Solving Series: *I Want It, I Can't Wait, I Want to Play, My Name Is Not Dummy, I'm Lost, and Mommy, Don't Go* by Elizabeth Crary offer various ways for kids to get what they want.

Let's Talk About Feelings Series: *What Is A Feeling?* by David Krueger, *All My Feelings at Home: Ellie's Day*, and *All My Feelings at Preschool: Nathan's Day*, both by S. Freidman and S. Conlin, help develop a feelings vocabulary.

Feeling Elf Cards and Feeling Elf Poster Whimsical elves grin, grimace, and gesture through 20 emotions, helping children identify and describe such feelings as worry, fear, happiness, and curiosity.

The 52-card deck and poster are both printed in English, Japanese, and Spanish.

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Tantrums as a Teaching Tool

5 Ways to Help Children Learn

Marie doesn't want Rosa to go home.

Josh wants the truck that Eli is playing with — right now!

David doesn't want his diaper changed, even though it stinks.



By Elizabeth Crary