

How Do You Feel? How Do I Feel?

Suggestions For Books On Emotions That We Can Read With Our Children

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Feelings! What a challenge for our children to distinguish and label their feelings, let alone begin to understand and manage these emotions! And what a joy once those connections are established and a whole new world opens up.

I recently read a new book written for children not yet able to identify and describe feelings. Through short, sometimes silly poems and simple but captivating line drawings, it helps children "understand and accept what it means to be happy, mad, scared, sad and just plain alive".

For those on the "feelings" journey, the following are some available "feelings books":

FIRST STAGE BOOKS:

Because I Am Human: Buscaglia, Leo, Ph.D.; Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1972

This book has simple text yet captivating ideas and vivid language. Strong black-and- white photography complements good language modeling of first person positive "I can..." .

Happy and Sad, Grouchy and Glad: Allen, Constance Children's Television Workshop 1992

In this book, Sesame Street characters link everyday situations (e.g. losing ones pants or having a bad day) to basic feelings (e.g.embarrassment or grouchiness). The characters act out the storyline. The big attraction is how easily the terms could be rewritten in chart form (e.g. Tiger Growls = I feel scared), a method one can rely upon to teach new language concepts.

SECOND STAGE BOOKS:

Just Because I Am: A Child's Book of Affirmation: Murphy Payne, Lauren; Free Spirit Publishing, 1994.

This is an excellent transition book. The text has more substance, but the patterned style still gives language structures. For instance, "My body talks to me. It tells me when I'm hungry. It tells me when I'm sleepy. It tells me when I'm sick. I can trust my body... to tell me what I need." Every page is colourful and richly visual: symbols, signs and graphics abound. The children depicted are school age and doing "big kid" activities. The positive, empowering ending is very reassuring.

The Watcher: Silsbe, Brenda; Annick Press, 1995.

George feels different from other children. They all seem to be "players". Players climb and run, sing and swing, play with balls and slide down halls. But George is a watcher. George can tell his mother EVERYTHING he saw, EVERYTHING that happened, in order, detail by detail EVERY day after school. But George's reluctance to join in puzzles and worries his classmates and brothers, until one day, this very combination makes him hero of the school. Slowly, the other children begin to value him for who he really is. The book also helps connect feelings of loneliness or difference (internal) with how others feel and view the "different" child (external).

THIRD STAGE BOOKS

A Kid's Guide to the Brain: Funston, Sylvia/Ingram, Jay; Greey de Pencier Books, 1994.

A look at the inner workings of the brain, features such as "The Fright Stuff" (stage fright), "Place the Face" (how facial features help us not only recognize people but read emotions), "Mind's Eye" (the power of visual memory), "Instant Attraction" (understanding love and attraction) and "Fuzzy Feelings" (how animals express and experience feelings) are highly topical. Codes, riddles, puzzles and brain benders keep the physiological information visual and accessible.

Little Feelings: Spain Barton, Judy; Prometheus Books, 1998.

Little Feelings is a series of 26 poems with simple line drawings. Many are silly in just the right way; some are poignant, though a few miss their point. Some issues here are not dealt with in other books, like making dares, saying "I hate you!", curiosity, guilt and boredom, which turned out to be well worth addressing.

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