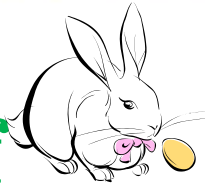


# Eggpress Yourself



## Helping Children to Understand Facial Expressions



### *AM I ANGRY OR AM I SAD?*

Children with special needs experience various social interaction challenges such as understanding body language and reading facial expressions. One of the pertinent skills in interaction is the ability to differentiate between expressions of feelings. The ability to read facial expression helps to guide our social interactions. Imagine that your friend has just lost her earrings, and is very upset, and you begin to laugh. Not being able to tell whether your friend is happy or sad will most likely result in you losing a friend.

Many well-meaning children with autism have made similar mistakes. They have tried desperately to have friends but they cannot read facial expressions. For a child with autism learning expression takes time, hard work and commitment. It takes practice, practice, and more practice.

The best model is one that incorporates peers with and without special needs into the learning process. It is also pertinent for the child to have the opportunity to practice in the real-life setting including at home and in school. Thus therapists, parents, and teachers must work together to make sure that lots of real-life practice is being performed throughout the day.

### Simple Ways to Teach Your Child about Feelings

- Teach them simple words or signs to express how they are feeling.
- Teach children how feelings are expressed in reference to the mouth, eyes, and eyebrows.
- Assist your child in cutting out pictures from old magazines and make a feelings collage. It is best to use pictures of real people.
- Have your child model feelings and then reward him for doing so.
- Have other children model feelings for your child. You can also make videos of other children expressing these feelings.
- Make picture cards, of “feeling faces” of your child, his friends, and family members.
- Present simple scenarios of people in a variety of situations and have your child draw pictures to show how the person may be feeling.
- Praise, or otherwise reinforce, your child when he participates in these activities.



***Contrary to what many of us believe, understanding facial expression is not a simple feat. It is a process that we learn by watching other's behaviors along with other environmental clues.***

**Contrary to what we believe, understanding facial expressions is not a simple feat**

*Written by Beverly Dabrio, MA, BCBA*