

Developing understanding of emotions and feelings

We need to ensure that the young person's understanding of feelings and emotions is accurate, we will need to be creative as to how we do this and ensure that all times our visual presentation matches the feelings we are trying to get across. It will be worth experimenting in front of a mirror pulling faces to represent the range of feelings and emotions we are wishing the young person to know. Initially we will focus on level 1 feelings these are:

Happy
Sad
Upset
Excited
Angry
Worried
Ill
Scared

We will need to find different ways to get across the same message to the young person in order to ensure that they really understands the feeling and what it means, they are often visual learners and so we need to find and make visual tools and use opportunities which present themselves to aid their learning.

The young person will need time to process our requests so make sure they have time to think through what is being asked for them and allow them time to respond. You may need to re-phrase your request.

Tabletop activities

Using the symbols for each feeling cut pictures out of magazines, download images from the internet. Spread the pictures out and get them to select all the pictures which show the feeling e.g. happy. Talk about why they may be happy and what they are doing, get the young person to pull a happy face, pull a happy face yourself too.

Lay a mixture of feelings pictures out alongside a group of feelings symbols, ask them to find all the pictures which show a selected feeling. You could make this a race against time and see how quickly they can do it! Have a go yourself and make mistakes by choosing the wrong pictures get them to tell where you have gone wrong. Use visual rewards of thumbs and thumbs down with appropriate sound effects.

Use a camera to take photos of the young person and yourself pulling the appropriate faces, get them to look in the mirror and see what their face looks like for each feeling. Try to explore what the face may look like, i.e. there's lines on my forehead that means my face is worried. The photos can then be printed out and they could make a collage of for example all the happy face or all the sad faces.

When watching television or films if a scene shows a good example of someone showing a feeling talk about it with them, encourage them to pull the appropriate face, also pull the face yourself too. Soap operas are particularly good for a wide range of emotions!

When people enter the room, ask them how they are, e.g. "have you had a good day?" "how are you feeling?" the person answering needs to ensure that the face they pull and their body language reflects the answer they are giving, it may need a bit of play acting but they will watch and learn.

If you feel that that the young person needs to tell you about something that has happened use the feelings symbols to help them to express what they are feeling or sit with them and write down what they tell you. Similarly, a feelings wheel could also be used.

Give the young person praise and make compliments about things to each other, it is important that they receive praise, give them opportunities to see how we respond to praise/compliments and how it is a good feeling to experience. This can feel very strange to do as sadly it's something we tend to forget to do!

Think of scenarios, write them down or find pictures of scenarios and ask them to say how each person in the picture may be feeling, use the symbols to give them a visual reinforcement of the possible feelings.

Decorate biscuits or cakes with faces, talk about the faces you have made and what the feeling is that is being shown on the face-then eat them!

Grab any opportunity that arrives during everyday life to reinforce feelings and emotions so that it is very real to them.

Have fun!!