

Emotions and Self-Regulation

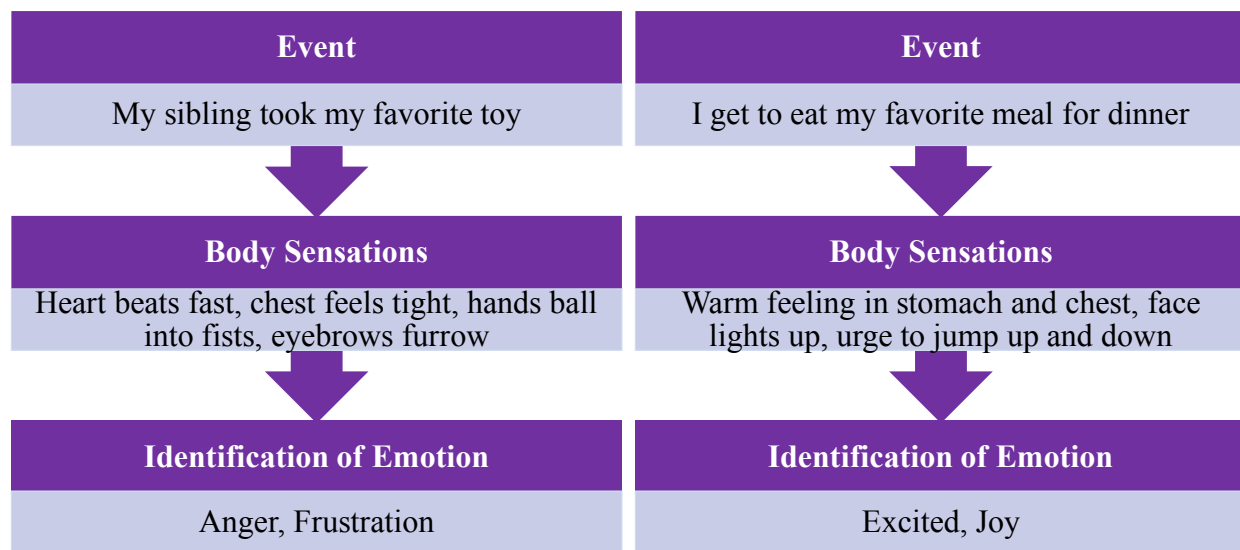
We've had stay-at-home orders for over a month now and tensions at home may be getting higher. As we're adapting to our new normal and grappling with uncertainty about the future, it's likely that emotions may be running amok. Now's a great time to teach kids about emotions and strengthen their self-regulation skills.

Key points to discuss with your kids:

- Emotions are body-based
- Emotions are not a choice and they are not positive or negative
- Behaviors are a choice and they can be positive or negative

Emotions are body-based

We can identify our emotions based on physiological changes, or felt sensations, in our bodies. Below are two depictions of the link between body sensations and identifying emotions.



You might be wondering:

- Why is it important to be aware of bodily sensations?
- Don't people just know what emotion they are feeling?

So, here's why it is important:

- ✓ Awareness of bodily sensations increases our ability to regulate ourselves when feeling strong emotions.
- ✓ Children learn a lot through observation, which can lead children to link emotions with behaviors or actions rather than with bodily sensations. For example, kids might believe anger and yelling to be one and the same. But imagine if instead of yelling about a

situation that angers them, kids were able to reflect on their body sensations, identify the emotion, and communicate about the emotion in a regulated way.

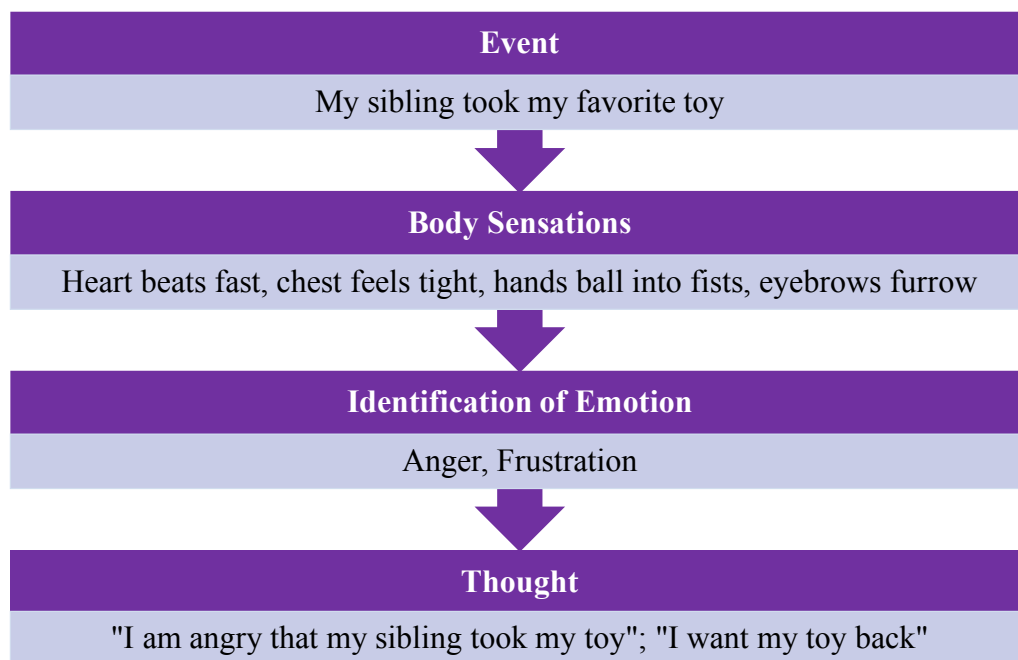
How do we help kids understand that bodily sensations are indicators of emotions?

- ❖ As mentioned above, kids learn a lot through observation, so modeling this awareness for them is a great place to start. Share with your children what you feel in your body when experiencing an emotion, and this will help them better understand their own indicators.
- ❖ Use the attached worksheet that prompts kids to draw or color in what they feel in their body during the different emotions. (If you do not have a printer, you can draw a simple outline of a body and write the emotion at the top of the page.) Don't forget to talk about it with them after – if you start to learn your child's indicators, you can better help them to identify their emotions during times of dysregulation.

Emotions are not a choice and they are not positive or negative

It is important to explain to children that we do not get to choose which emotions we feel and which we do not feel. Emotions are instinctual and everyone feels the whole range of emotions. Be sure to also explain that feeling an emotion – no matter which emotion – is not a positive or negative thing.

Emotions help us to know how we feel about a situation, person, event, etc. and what we think about it. Emotions can motivate us to act in certain ways. By understanding the body sensations that indicate the emotion, we can increase the time between feeling the emotion and acting. An increase in this time allows us to think through our options and to choose the behavior or action that's best. This is what we mean by building emotion regulation or self-regulation skills.

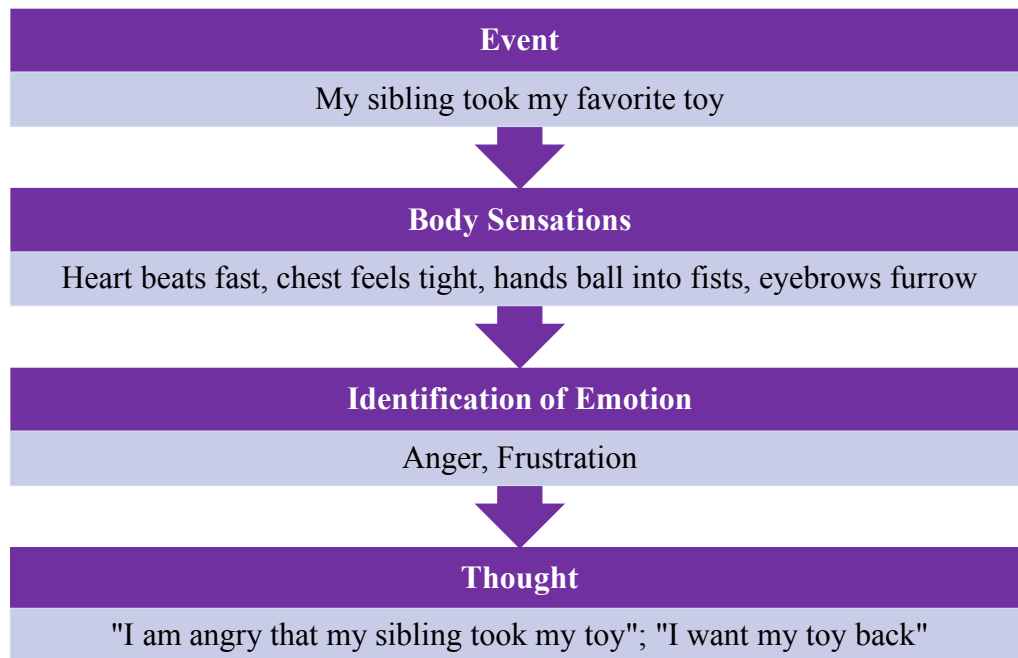


Behaviors are a choice and they can be positive or negative

Unlike emotions, how we act and behave is our choice. Although it may not always seem like it, especially when we are feeling a particularly strong emotion, our actions are done by choice, and those actions can be positive or negative. Since strong emotions can sometimes motivate us to choose behaviors that bring about negative or unwanted consequences, it is important to slow down our reaction time so that we can think through how we want to behave.

Now's a great time to teach or review the concept of consequences with your children. It is important to highlight that thinking through possible consequences before acting can help you choose the best action.

Use the second worksheet attached to help explain the links between body sensations, identifying emotions, thinking through consequences, and choosing an action. If you do not have a printer, simply draw out the worksheet on a blank piece of paper!



Possible Behavior:

Hit my sibling and snatch the toy back

Possible Consequence:

My sibling starts crying and I get in trouble

Possible Behavior:

Calmly tell parent what happened

Possible Consequence:

Parent helps me talk with sibling and get my toy back

Mindfulness

Mindfulness exercises help strengthen body awareness and self-regulation skills, allowing us to slow down our reaction time so we can better think through how we want to behave. Below are a few mindfulness exercises. Check out our website for more mindfulness strategies and parent resources at <https://ywcagreenwich.org/>.

- **5 Things of 1 Color**

Ask your child to point to and name 5 things of 1 color that they can see. The great thing about this technique is that you can continue through the rainbow of colors as needed.

Example: “Red pen, red backpack, red cup, red lines on the picture, red on your shirt.”

- **5 Senses**

Ask your child to name 5 things they can currently see, 4 things they can currently feel (are touching), 3 things they can hear, 2 things they can taste, and 1 thing they can smell. It should get harder to identify as they get to the senses of taste and smell, which should also aid in more acutely attuning to the present.

Example: “I can see a desk, a chair, a painting, a window and a bowl. I can feel the chair underneath me, the floor under my foot, the desk under my elbows and my hair on my shoulders. I can hear the rain outside, the click of the keyboard and the creak of the floorboards. I can taste the water and tea that I am drinking. I can smell the tea.”

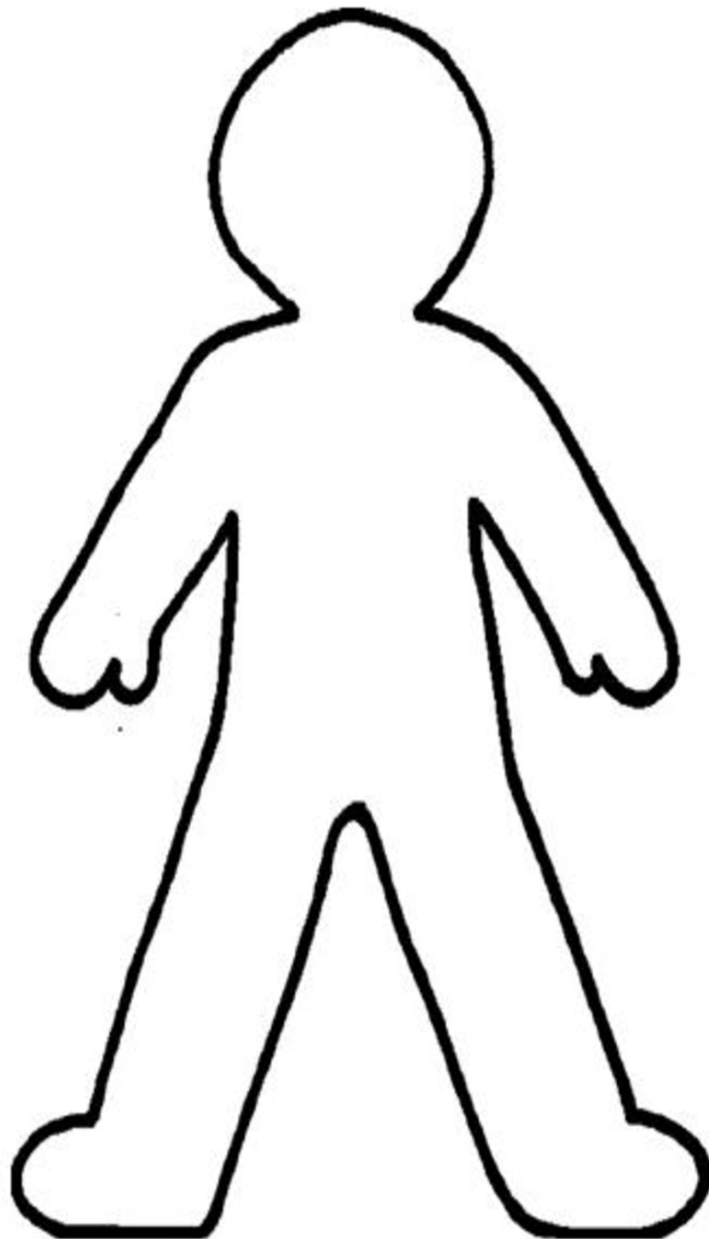
- **Describe the Room**

Ask your child to describe the room in which they are located in great detail, including colors, textures, sounds, and smells.

Example: “I am sitting in my kitchen. There is a black refrigerator with many colorful magnets. There is a black stove and oven. There is a silver toaster and I can smell the bread that was just toasted. There is a large window and a small window and I can hear the birds outside.”

Color or draw in/around the body to show what your body feels when you feel a certain emotion.

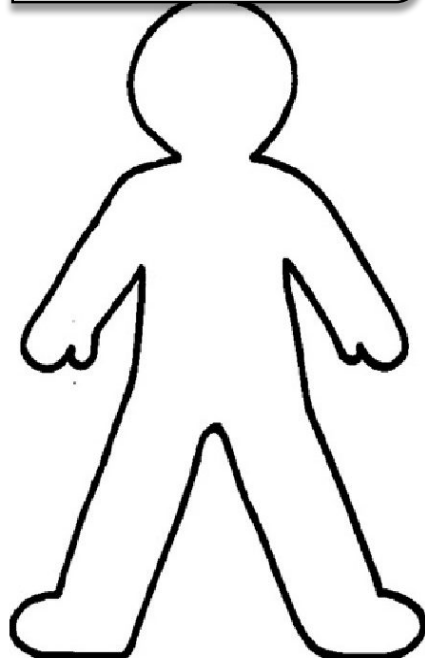
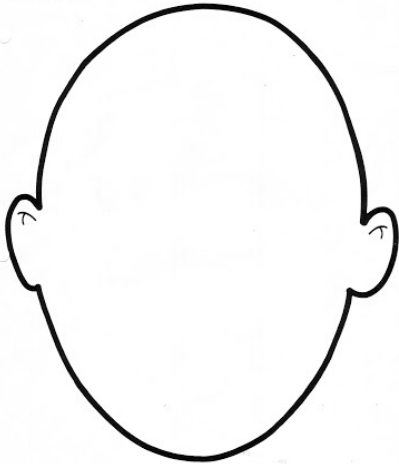
Emotion: _____



Emotion Map for _____

When you feel _____,
what kind of face do you make?

And what do you feel in
your body?



What thoughts do you have when you feel _____?

What are possible behaviors/actions and possible consequences/outcomes?

