



FAMILIES

TACKLING TOUGH TIMES

TOGETHER



FAMILY

CHILDREN

We Tell Each Other the Truth! Clear, Consistent Messages

Strong feelings can have an effect on all of us, even young children. When children experience emotions, they can be displayed in many different ways. During stressful times it is especially important for adults and children to be aware of their emotions and to communicate clearly how they are feeling. Understanding feelings and being comfortable talking about them helps to foster resilience in family members, including young children.

Communicating Feelings

Children can better communicate their feelings when you help them recognize or name the emotions they may feel. Oftentimes young children do not fully understand their feelings. They may express anger when their routine is changed or sadness when they can't have a new toy they want. We can provide tools to our children to effectively communicate their feelings and expressions.

Feelings Activities and Resources

- **Make a feelings book.** Consider creating a book of your child's emotions. Take pictures of your child as they experience different emotions throughout the day or week. If you have a printer available, consider printing the pictures to make a feelings book. If you do not have access to a printer you may wish to make a feelings book with construction paper, magazine pictures, and tape or glue. Encourage your child to choose pictures that show different emotions. Once the book is complete, "read" the book together as you act out each emotion. Consider inviting your child to join you in listening to [The Feelings Book](#) by Todd Parr.
- **Play a "feelings" game.** Play a "feelings" version of Simon Says. Substitute feeling phrases for the usual directions as you play. For example, say "Simon says make a happy face!" Between each direction, invite your child to say what makes them feel the emotion stated. For example, "What makes you feel happy?"
- **Play a feelings board game.** Create a simple board game to help your child learn more about feelings. Use a large piece of paper or poster board and markers to create the game board. List feelings-related questions on some game spaces. When your child lands on a "feelings" space, encourage them to create the face that matches the emotion. [View an example of a completed game board and how to play.](#)

Communicating feelings can be more difficult for some children. For example, children with autism may find it difficult to express emotions in a way that helps others to understand how they feel. To learn more about how to help children with autism better understand and share their emotions, the Indiana Resource Center for Autism offers support through resources for [behavior and emotions](#).

Resources from FOCUS Program

- [Focus on Feelings](#)
- [The Feeling Thermometer](#)
- [Family Skills](#)

To learn more about the science behind teaching children about emotions, you may wish to read the below research:

- [The Relationship Between Emotion Knowledge, Emotion Regulation and Adjustment in Preschoolers: A Mediation Model.](#)



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YOUTH

We Tell Each Other the Truth! Clear, Consistent Messages

While we are receiving a lot of information about COVID-19 from different sources that can be overwhelming, most teens use social media as their main source of information and news. It is important that teens learn how to determine if messages are true and accurate. Communicating clearly supports understanding and informed decision-making.

Communicating Clearly

In addition to making sure our teens have reliable resources for information, we need to make sure our teens understand how to communicate their thoughts and needs. When teens have the skills to better communicate, they are better able to deal with and share life's stresses.

Communicating Clearly Activities

- **Using “I” statements.** Good communication requires skills such as using “I” statements. This allows you and your teen to share feelings and needs without blame while helping each other to understand one another’s perspective. Below is an example of an “I” statement:

“I feel angry when I can’t go see my friends because I’m bored and I miss them. Could we plan a social distanced visit sometime soon?”

- **Help your teen to understand another’s perspective.** Invite your teen to ask someone in your family to “*metaphorically*” exchange shoes. Encourage them to think about how the other person may think and feel by asking the below questions:
 - Why did you select this person’s shoes?
 - Would someone else’s shoes have been easier or more difficult to wear?
 - Do you think their shoes feel different this year compared to the way they may have felt a year ago?
 - Do you think their shoes feel different now compared to how they may have felt before the pandemic?
 - What feelings or emotions do you think the owner of the shoes might like to share?
 - What is something you think you better understand about the owner of the shoes now that you have “worn them?”

You may wish to lighten the mood after the above activity by introducing some humor. Consider doing a social media challenge where family members swap shoes, while following social distancing guidelines!

To learn more about the science behind using “I” statements rather than “you” statements and the importance of teaching social empathy to adolescents, you may wish to read the below research:

- [Verbalized Anger and Accusatory “You” Messages as Cues for Anger and Antagonism Among Adolescents](#)
- [Social Empathy as a Framework for Adolescent Empowerment](#)



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YOUNG ADULTS

We Tell Each Other the Truth! Clear, Consistent Messages

There are any number of reasons we might have been holding in our emotions during the pandemic – wanting to keep the peace, trying to be positive, or maybe flat out denial. But research has shown time and again that there are many reasons we should not hold them in but rather how helpful it is that we share and name our emotions. Based on research, we recommend “unlatching the cage and letting those emotional birds fly free”! (Beck, 2015). But how do we do that effectively, especially in times such as these when our own and others’ emotions might be running especially high?

Sharing Emotions

- **Start a conversation about your feelings with others.** Sometimes you focus so much on your actions that you overlook your feelings, so set aside time to intentionally talk about your feelings.
- **Use “I” statements.** When you’re talking to others about your feelings, use “I” statements such as “I feel...” Using these types of statements makes it easier for others to hear you.
- **Label your emotions.** Research has shown that naming your emotions, particularly fears or anxieties, can be useful for reducing the physiological response that those stressors can cause you.
- **Be just as good a listener as you are a talker.** Feeling truly heard by another person can be so rewarding, so make sure you’re also making time and space to listen to how others are feeling as well.

Video Resources

- [The Gift and Power of Emotional Courage](#)
- [The Benefits of Expressing Your Emotions \(Constructively\)](#)

Internal Actions

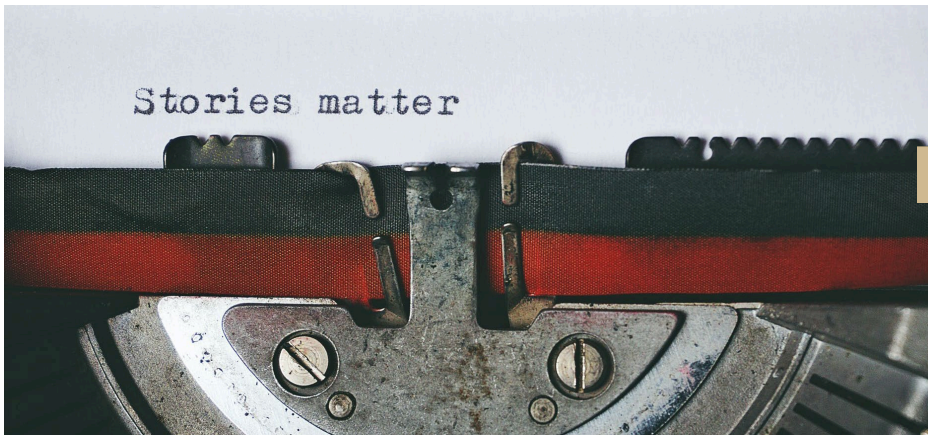
Focus on your positive emotions as well as your negative ones. Sometimes it’s easier to pay attention to your negative feelings and overlook your positive ones, but positive feelings are equally important!

External Actions

Send those positive vibes out into the world! Participate in and forward along some of the social media challenges, memes or videos that capture the humor of things that are going on.

To learn more about the science behind sharing and labeling emotions, you may wish to read the below research:

- [Feelings into words: contributions of language to exposure therapy](#)
- [The costs of repression: a meta-analysis on the relation between repressive coping and somatic diseases](#)



FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



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OLDER ADULTS

We Tell Each Other the Truth! Clear, Consistent Messages

It can be hard to share emotions while social distancing. When others are far from us, it can be difficult to truly open up and share how we feel. We may want to protect others from the worry of our emotions or hold in our emotions because they can be confusing. It is just as important to share our emotions now as it always has been. Social support networks continue to be important, especially while we spend more time apart. Sharing our emotions is important when everyday life has its own unique challenges. There are different ways to share emotions. One way is through storytelling.

Storytelling

There are many benefits of storytelling. Telling stories can help us to connect and engage with others through our emotions. There are several psychological reasons why stories are so powerful:

- Stories are a form of communication - they connect us to traditions, legends, myths and symbols
- Stories engage us through emotions as we collaborate and connect
- Stories help us to make meaning of life
- Stories can withstand intense emotions because there is resolution
- Stories create genuine emotions, the sense of being somewhere, and behavioral responses
- Stories engage our imagination

[Material adapted from The Psychological Power of Storytelling](#)

Storytelling Activities

When telling stories, consider sharing memories from your childhood or past. You may wish to focus on how you overcame grief or loss or on your accomplishments. Sharing these messages can help you to focus on how you dealt with different emotions in the past. Sharing current stories can also help frame positive thoughts and emotions.

- **Writing blogs.** Create an online blog page and encourage family members to share their feelings and concerns. You may wish to use a free blogging site such as [WordPress](#).
- **Writing a poem or song.** Writing a poem or song can be a helpful way to express emotions while telling a story. If you are interested in how to use poems and songs to communicate emotions, consider reading articles by [The National Writing Project](#) or [Psychology Today](#).
- **Consider using prompts.** When sharing stories out loud, you may wish to consider prompts such as “What was challenging?” or “How did you overcome it?”
- **Using art.** Photographs, paintings, drawings, sculpture, and beadwork are all wonderful ways to express emotions and tell stories through art. [The PBS Metrofocus Storytelling Through Art video gives an example of how different kinds of art can tell a story.](#)
- **Share stories virtually.** Consider virtually sharing happy memories and times you overcame challenges when talking to family members and friends. Discuss the emotions felt and how they may have changed over time.

To learn more about the science behind the benefits of storytelling as a way to share emotions, you may wish to read the below research:

- [The Role of Social Media for Collective Behavior Development in Response to Natural Disasters](#)
- [Effects of Storytelling on Emotional Development](#). While this research paper focuses on researching preschoolers' ability to regulate emotions through the use of storytelling, the paper also provides an overview of stories across generations and their importance among families and communities.



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We Tell Each Other the Truth! Clear, Consistent Messages

Many families are spending more time in their homes, working from home, learning remotely, and finding a balance between personal space and togetherness. While more time together can be great, it can also come with challenges. For example, conflict that existed before the pandemic might now seem worse. Families may also have new emotions related to their current situation and may not be feeling as unified the longer this pandemic continues. Families can work together to strengthen their bond and focus on what they do right and a simple way to accomplish that is to create a family mission statement.

Family Mission Statement

Each family has a set of values and beliefs that are important and meaningful to them. It is important that we identify questions with our family members that are important in helping us to craft our mission statement, and reflect on how our family lives, laughs, loves, learns, and relates.

Mission Statement Activity

Creating a family mission statement can help your family to understand the values that are most important and help you work together to imagine your best possible self. Have each person in your family answer each question on their own. Work together to create a clear vision of what you and your family are all about and the qualities that are most important to you. Post your mission statement in a noticeable place in your home so your whole family can be reminded of your family's mission and values.

- What are our family's values?
- What are our family's strengths?
- What is important to us?
- What do we really love to do together?
- What makes us want to come home (from school, from practice, from work, or an errand)?
- What is embarrassing about our family?
- What impact do we want to have on others?
- What is a way our family helps each other?
- What is one way our family is unique?
- If our home could be filled with one emotion, what would it be?
- If our home could be described with one adjective, what would it be? (examples: functional, busy, calm, rustic, odd)

To learn more about the science behind focusing on family strengths and creating a mission statement, you may wish to read the below research:

- [Strong Families Around the World](#)
- [How to Develop a Family Mission Statement. The 7 Habits Family Leadership Series](#)