

# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



**FAMILY**  
CHILDREN

## We Share Our Feelings Constructively! Open Emotional Expression

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. Emotions such as happiness, sadness, and anger can look very different when displayed by different children. During stressful times it is especially important for adults and children to be aware of their emotions. Understanding feelings and being comfortable expressing and talking about them helps to foster resilience in family members, including young children. Although feelings can be difficult to both understand and control, they are vitally important to the emotional growth and healing of young children. This week's activities focus on teaching children about different emotions. Children can better communicate their feelings when armed with a better awareness of the emotions they may feel.

### Feelings Book

- Create 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, print the pictures and create a book by labeling each emotion and taping or stapling the pages together. You may also wish to hang the pictures around the house and point them out during the day.
- 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 depict different emotions. Once the book is complete, "read" the book together as you act out each emotion.
- Invite your child to join you in listening to [The Feelings Book](#) by Todd Parr.

### Simon Says "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?"

[Learn more about the above activities and other feelings activities for your child.](#)

### 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.](#)

### Additional Resources from FOCUS Program

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



# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



FAMILY  
YOUTH

## We Share Our Feelings Constructively! Open Emotional Expression

If we think back to our teenage years, we probably prefer not to repeat them. It's difficult to manage the physical, emotional, and life changes that happen ALL AT ONCE! In the teen years, On top of this, life has thrown COVID-19 into the mix, generating strong emotions for teens and tweens. Fortunately, teens and tweens can learn skills to help manage their emotions, like developing their ability to identify and express their feelings without being hurtful to themselves or others. Caregivers can support teenagers and help them learn to manage their emotions by paying attention, displaying acceptance and [empathy](#), providing gentle firmness, and using non-judgmental language while being willing to negotiate.

**Using I statements when communicating feelings.** Emotional skills require a variety of communication skills such as using "I" statements. This allows people to convey feelings and needs without blame while helping others understand the speaker's perspective. Here is an example of an "I" statements:

- I feel [name feelings] when [explain behavior] because [explain why]. Could we [explain or ask for solutions]?
- I feel frustrated and disappointed when the dishwasher is not emptied because I do not have everything that I need to prepare dinner. What would help you remember to empty the dishwasher as soon as you wake up?

**Empathy** is the ability to recognize and relate to other people's emotions and thoughts. Empathic thinking is often characterized as the willingness and ability to place oneself in another person's situation ("shoes"), to feel another person's feelings, or to recognize that another person might experience feelings in the same way as oneself.

**Help your teenager practice empathy.** To help them understand another person's perspective have your teenager pick someone in your house and ask them to "*metaphorically*" exchange shoes with this person. Then ask them:

- Why did you select this person's shoes?
- Would someone else's shoes have been easier or more difficult to wear?
- Do their shoes feel different this year as compared to a year ago?
- Do their shoes feel different now compared to how they would have felt before COVID-19?
- What feelings or emotions would this person like to share?
- Why are they experiencing these feelings? these emotions?
- Have they discovered that they understand something new about the person by "wearing" their shoes?

Remember you can always lighten the mood by introducing some humor. Consider doing the "[Walk in Their Shoes](#)" TikTok challenge. Swap shoes with a family member. Do a race or walk around the neighborhood or your yard (but remember to follow social distancing guidelines — stay six feet apart).

Take a video and post to the **Families Tackling Tough Times Together** Facebook group!



# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



**FAMILY**  
YOUNG ADULTS

## We Share Our Feelings Constructively! Open Emotional Expression

There are any number of reasons you might have been holding in your emotions for the past few months — keeping the peace, trying to be positive, flat out denial. But research has demonstrated time and again that there are a host of negative repercussions to repressing our emotions and a range of positive implications to expressing our emotions (Chervonsky & Hunt, 2017; Kato et al., 2012; Mund & Mitte, 2012). Based on that research, researchers and practitioners alike have recommended “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? Here are a few suggestions to help:

1. **Initiate a conversation about your feelings with others.** Sometimes we focus so much on our actions that we overlook our feelings, so set aside time to intentionally talk about your feelings.
2. **Use “I” statements.** When you’re talking to others about your feeling, use “I” statements such as “I feel...” Using these types of statements makes it easier for others to hear you.
3. **Label your emotions.** Research (Kircanski, Lieberman, & Craske, 2012) has shown that explicitly labeling your emotions, particularly fears or anxieties, can be useful for reducing the physiological response that those stressors can cause us.
4. **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 how others are feeling as well.

### Video Resources

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

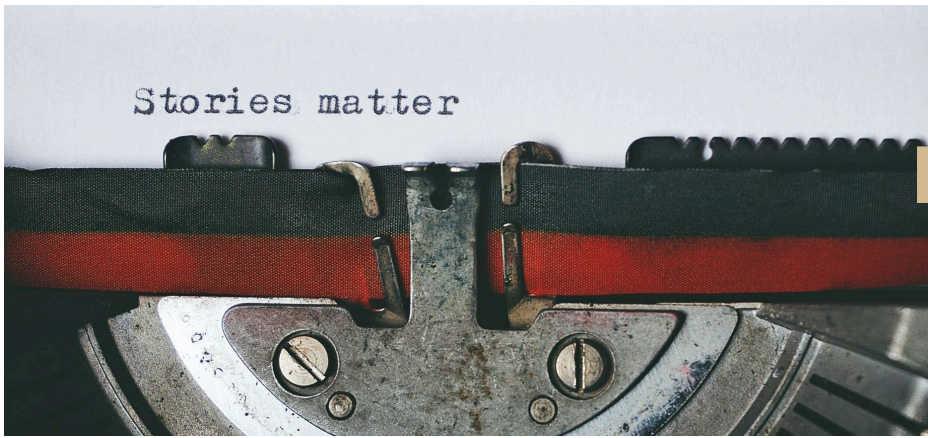
### Internal Actions

Focus on your positive emotions as well as the negative ones. Sometimes it’s easier to pay attention to our negative feelings and gloss over our positive ones, but those 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 (e.g., on TikTok), memes, or videos that capture the humor of things that are going on.





# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



**FAMILY**  
OLDER ADULTS

## We Share Our Feelings Constructively! Open Emotional Expression

Many people are currently having difficulty expressing their emotions in light of 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 as it always has been.

Sharing social supports continues to be important, even during this period of isolation. Sharing positive interactions is essential when everyday life is saturated with adversity. Positive interactions may include expressions of love, pride, appreciation, and gratitude. Sharing of emotions can also take different forms. One way to share emotions is through storytelling.

### Storytelling

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

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

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

When telling stories, consider sharing memories from your childhood or past. You may wish to focus these stories on how you overcame grief or loss, or you may wish to share accomplishments you are proud of. Sharing these messages can help you to focus on how you dealt with different emotions in the past. But, stories don't just need to be about the past. Sharing current stories can also help frame positive thoughts and emotions. When sharing stories orally, you may wish to consider prompts such as "What was challenging?" or "How did you overcome it?" In addition to telling verbal stories, there are several other ways to share your emotions through storytelling.

- **Writing blogs.** Create an online blog page and encourage family members to share their feelings and concerns. Some free blogging sites include [WordPress](#), [Wix](#), [Weebly](#) and [Blogger](#).
- **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 learning more about how to use poems and songs to communicate your emotions during the pandemic, read articles by [The National Writing Project](#) or [Psychology Today](#).
- **Using art.** Storytelling through art can be done in a variety of ways. Photographs, paintings, drawings, sculpture, and beadwork are all wonderful ways to tell stories through art. [The PBS Metrofocus Storytelling Through Art video gives an example of how different kinds of art can tell a story.](#)



# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



**SELF**

## **We Share Our Feelings Constructively! Open Emotional Expression**

Many couples are spending more time in their homes — working from home, navigating the balance between personal space and togetherness, and trying to make sure they are maintaining physical and financial health. While more time together can be great, it can also come with challenges. For example, conflict that existed before the pandemic might now seem amplified. Couples may also have new emotions related to their current situation. While couples

deal with the uncertainty of these times, it is important to remember the significance of sharing emotions constructively.

Below are some ways to consider each other's emotions when communicating. While sharing emotions is important in effective communication, especially during stressful times, acknowledging emotions is equally as important.

### **Consider Emotions When Communicating**

- Remember that the way a conversation starts can often predict how it will end. Be mindful of each other's emotions before, during, and after a conversation.
- Try not to let negative emotions build up before talking with your partner. Discuss things before they get to this point.
- Try to use “I” statements instead of “you” statements. For example, “I feel appreciated when you listen to what I have to say.”
- The goal of resolving negative conflict should be a joint resolution, not one person winning and the other admitting defeat. This can lead to more negative emotions.

### **Acknowledgement of Emotions**

- Partners should acknowledge when they are feeling upset, bored, frustrated, or sad. It is also important to acknowledge that this is a time of uncertainty in which no one is expected to have all the answers. There are no right or wrong emotions.
- Try hard not to judge yourself and/or your partner's emotions too harshly. Remember that both you and your partner may be more sensitive right now and try to operate from a place of good intent.

### **Additional Resources**

Purdue Extension in the College of Health and Human Sciences fact sheets about couple relationships that list strategies and activities for enhancing a relationship.

- [Increasing the Positives in Your Relationship](#)
- [The Art of Complaining: Getting Your Concerns Across Without Criticizing](#)

## **Calming Jar Activity**

During the pandemic, we may experience a variety of feelings that range from sadness to joy. This mix of emotions can sometimes feel overwhelming. A calming jar is a great way to visualize and validate the many emotions we may experience.

### *Materials*

1. Medium-sized jar or plastic bottle with a tight-fitting lid
2. Hot water
3. Glitter glue or regular glitter and food coloring (optional) – you may also choose other items you have in your home
4. Stirring utensil

### *Directions*

Fill the jar or bottle three quarters full with hot water. Squeeze in glitter glue or other glitter. The more glue, the slower the liquid will move. Too much glue will cause the liquid to move very little. Add food coloring if you wish. Stir the liquid until mixed. Once desired amount of glue/glitter are placed in the jar or bottle, fill with water until almost full. Wait for the liquid to cool. Once the liquid is cool, glue on the lid.

Think of the jar or bottle as your mind and the glitter as thoughts and worries. When you are calm, the glitter is at the bottom. When you are overwhelmed, the glitter swirls around. If you become overwhelmed, shake the jar or bottle vigorously. While breathing in and out slowly, watch the glitter slow down and settle on the bottom of the jar or bottle. This can be very calming.



# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



## We Share Our Feelings Constructively! Open Emotional Expression

Grief and loss are all around us during this pandemic. Loss of life, events, freedoms, and being around loved ones. It is important to allow yourself and your family to grieve these losses. We can also use these losses as a way to share feelings with others. As we grieve, it's natural for many people to want to connect with others. These connections are an important part of the grief process and help us to feel closeness with one another in the midst of loss. Memories of things that once were bring a positive break to the emotions associated with loss. As a community, it is valuable to find creative ways to connect when we cannot connect in person. [Communal grief](#) can be especially impactful during this time. Communal grief allows us to experience grief with others and share reactions to loss with friends, family, neighbors, and even strangers. [Read more about declaration of values for communal grief.](#)

These activities focus on strategies to grieve together for those in a community. During times of crisis it can be therapeutic for people to feel as though they are connected to others who are experiencing similar losses. Resilience is fostered in a community when its members understand that they are not alone, but part of a connected whole.

### Project Reach Out!

- Consider developing a phone tree for those who need someone to talk to. Phone trees help people to share information, resources, or provide a much-needed outlet for sharing emotions. Make a list of those you wish to reach out to in your community (church members, neighborhood friends, co-workers, etc.). Recruit a group of people who are willing to make regular phone calls to those on the list. Encourage group members to add to the list as they think of those they'd like to include. Arrange for each group member to make weekly phone calls to a selected number of people on the list. These calls can be simple "wellness calls" or can consist of leaving a brief, uplifting message. Youth may wish to join the phone tree by reaching out to those who prefer a weekly check-in text. Encourage group members to be aware that those they call may be feeling a variety of different emotions. It is important to consider the emotions of each person called and to offer support, as possible.

### Photo Sharing

- Photos can be a great way to share our feelings and help make meaning of the challenges we are facing. Consider organizing or joining a Facebook group such as [View from My Window](#). Invite community members to join and post weekly photos of the view from their own window. Encourage a photo caption that communicates how the view makes them feel. For example, "This is the view from my window today. It brings me happiness to see flowers growing in my garden" or "This is the view from my window today. When I see people taking walks and talking to one another it makes me anxious about getting out and staying safe." Reassuring comments from others should be encouraged to support those who may be feeling down.

### Additional Resources

- [Role of Community Support in Grief Management](#)
- [The Grief Library](#) features a list of resources to help guide you and others during the grieving process.