

Emotions and healthy minds



Do you understand what you're feeling and why you're feeling it? Do you need some tips on how to manage bad moods? Read on...

From the moment we arrive in the world, we express emotion, that is, how we feel. Babies and young children usually express emotion very openly but haven't yet developed the ability to name an emotion or say in words what they want or need.

Parents tune into their children's emotions and to help them express them so that they're soothed and happy.

As we grow up, we get better at understanding and expressing how we feel. We also start to understand and respond to the emotions of others. Sometimes this is called Emotional Intelligence.

If all goes to plan, we develop emotional awareness, which is knowing what we are feeling and why we are feeling it. Sometimes though, things don't go to plan and it becomes hard to understand and say how we feel.

Tips for looking after yourself in difficult times

If you or your family have gone through some difficult or stressful times, sometimes understanding, expressing and responding to emotions can be confusing and hard.

Emotions that are usually felt mildly can sometimes be felt and experienced very intensely. It's important in these times to remember that there are no good or bad emotions, but healthy and unhealthy ways of expressing them.

It is not healthy or safe, for example, to express anger so that people feel scared of you. It's also not healthy though to let anger fester inside of you and not express it. There are safe ways of expressing anger.

Things to do to keep your mind healthy

New scientific research (Doidge, 2007) now tells us that the brain and mind are truly "plastic". That is, they're changeable through experience and there are activities that we can practice that give us better opportunities to keep our minds healthy.

The mind and activities that happen in your mind can be described as patterns of energy and information that flow inside us (Seigel, 2014).

We do exercises and go to the gym to keep our bodies healthy, so it's important to also keep your mind healthy with mind exercises!

Exercising your mind

Create some regular moments in your day where you tune into yourself, for example, when you're on a train or bus on your own or doing the washing up. Spend 3 to 5 minutes noticing your thoughts and feelings and start some practicing some regular time of reflection.

So how do you do this?

- first of all, turn off your mobile!
- ask yourself what are you sensing in your body right now? How are your muscles feeling? Can you sense your heart beating? Tune into you breathing.
- close your eyes and see what images come up.
- focus on what you are feeling - your bodily sensations, your thoughts, memories, what are you noticing around you?
- focus on your thoughts - what thoughts are you thinking?

You don't have to put words to this activity, as just the time you take tuning into yourself helps you to become more aware of your feelings and emotions (adapted from Siegel, 2014).



Tips for dealing with a bad mood

- Tune in and check yourself. Practice the above mindfulness activity. Is there an emotion that is sitting behind your bad mood, like anger or sadness? Has there been a situation in your day that has upset you? Do you need to notice and acknowledge this for yourself?
- Name what you are feeling to yourself. There is now evidence that naming an emotion calms the mind and body down. This process has recently been called “Naming it to tame it” (Siegel, 2014).
- Accept that this is the feeling that you are having at the moment. You don’t have to struggle with it, control it or push it away. It’s not going to be a permanent state that you’re in. Don’t judge yourself for experiencing this feeling. Remember this is just the feeling that is visiting you at the moment.
- When you’ve noticed, named and accepted your mood, have a think about what you have to achieve in your day. Is this the best mood suited to these activities? If, for example, you have to study and you’re feeling grumpy and irritable, is it a good idea to allow this mood to stick around all day?
- Drinking a glass of water, stretching, jump up and down, getting some fresh air, do some exercise, moving around the room are all ways of shifting a mood.
- Encourage yourself with some self-talk. “Okay, I’ve done this before, I can do it again!”

Bad moods

Okay, so you’ve just noticed that a bad mood is visiting you. Perhaps someone like your mum or dad has kindly pointed this out to you!

Maybe you don’t mind so much if it sticks around, in which case, why not take you and your bad mood away to your room for a while and stew. If your bad mood is not suiting the activities that you have planned for your day however, it might be time to try and move it along.

Feelings, emotions and moods come and go every day. It’s important not to allow your feelings about your moods to get in the way of you moving through them.

Need more help?

If you’re concerned that big, strong intense emotions visit you frequently and tend to stick around all day, remember that you don’t have to deal with things on your own. The chances are that your parents or carers have noticed this too and are just as concerned as you are. Let them help you to get help.

You can start by talking to a trusted adult such as a parent, carer, family member, teacher or school counsellor and telling them how you’re feeling.

If any of the information we’ve talked about here has concerned you, or you’d like to chat to someone about what’s going on for you, help is available. Visit www.connectedspace.com.au/need-help-now or call Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800.



Feelings, emotions and moods come and go every day. It’s important not to allow your feelings about your moods to get in the way of you moving through them.