

ADVICE SHEET

Strategies to Support the Development of Emotion Words

Key facts:

- Some children find emotional vocabulary learning a challenge, especially those on the autistic spectrum.
- The underlying concepts and vocabulary are very abstract
- They are best taught by mapping the words onto the physical feelings in the real situation/moment
- Children with autism experience the same range of emotions as other children but find learning the vocabulary difficult. They may present with behavioural difficulties because they can't express what they feel verbally. They are showing their feeling through their behaviour.

Top tips-

1. Teach the words in real situations
2. Only learn one or two emotion concepts at a time
3. Make sure the child understands and can use the word in a variety of situations
4. Work with families to encourage parents to reinforce the learning of the same words at home.

Specific Strategies-

- When the child shows an emotion name it, for e.g. you're happy, I can tell you're frustrated. Some children benefit from visual support by showing them a symbol or a picture that represents the emotion (a cue card) at the same time.
- Initially don't use pictures as there is a danger that the child will rote learn the picture without being able to express their own feelings.
- Gradually introduce symbols or pictures to help identify feelings in real situations- pair the picture with the emotion as the child feels it. When they have completed an activity show a happy and sad face and ask the child what they thought of the activity and ask them to choose the cue card that matches their feeling
- Encourage them to interpret how others are feeling in a real situation by naming and showing the cue card which represents how the person feels
- When they can identify how another person feels in real situations then start to explore emotions through books. Use the cue cards to match the character's facial expression. The situation and character in the book must be meaningful to the child

A staged approach is important as understanding the language of emotions is a higher order skill. Many of your children (60%) will be at the level of naming things or describing things and answering Who? What? Where? Questions

