

thegroacademy.com

# Feelings at Play

Play, pretend &  
explore emotions



@thegroacademy

# Welcome to Feelings at Play

This week, we're inviting children to explore their feelings through play, imagination, and shared experiences.

In *Feelings at Play*, children will pretend, act, create, and talk about emotions in ways that feel natural and meaningful. Through simple, hands-on activities, they'll begin to recognize feelings, express them through play, and connect them to everyday experiences.

These activities offer gentle opportunities for children to explore emotions through pretend play, storytelling, and interaction with others.

As you explore together, you can support your child by:

- Naming feelings as they come up during play
- Asking simple questions like "How does that feel?"
- Encouraging children to share and listen to each other's ideas

There's no right or wrong way to explore—just opportunities to play, imagine, and grow together.

We're so glad you're here 🧡

with playful hearts,  
the gro academy  
team

# Home Extension: Feelings in the Mirror

*Making and copying facial expressions in the mirror*

## **Objective:**

Children explore and recognize different emotions by observing and expressing facial expressions, building early awareness of feelings and language.

## **Materials:**

- Mirror
- Optional: simple emotion cards or pictures

## **Instructions:**

1. Sit with your child in front of a mirror.
2. Make a simple facial expression (happy, sad, surprised) and invite your child to copy it.
3. Encourage your child to make their own expression and name how they feel.
4. Take turns guessing and talking about each feeling together.
5. Connect feelings to simple experiences, like "When do you feel happy?"

## **Infant & Toddler Adaptation:**

Sit with your child in front of a mirror and make simple facial expressions. Allow them to watch, imitate, and react while you name feelings using clear, simple words like "happy" or "sad." Keep the interaction playful and responsive.

## **Developmental Connections:**

- **Cognitive:** Matching facial expressions • Identifying visual cues
- **Literacy & Language:** Naming emotions • Participating in simple conversations
- **Social & Emotional:** Recognizing emotions • Expressing feelings

# Feelings at Play

Children explore big feelings through pretend play, storytelling, and shared experiences. These activities support emotional expression, language development, and imagination in simple, engaging ways.

## Emotion Puppet Play

*Using puppets to act out and explore feelings*

### Objective:

Children use simple puppets to express emotions and act out feelings through pretend play and conversation.

### Materials:

- Simple puppets (store-bought or homemade)
- Optional: small props or fabric pieces

### Instructions:

1. Introduce a puppet and model a simple feeling, like happy or sad.
2. Invite children to use a puppet to show a feeling.
3. Encourage children to act out short, simple scenarios.
4. Talk about what the puppet is feeling and why.
5. Invite children to share or respond to each other's ideas.

### Infant & Toddler Adaptation:

Offer a simple puppet and model basic emotions through voice and movement. Allow children to explore holding and watching while you name feelings and respond to their reactions.

### Developmental Connections:

- **Approaches to Learning:** Engagement in pretend play • Flexible thinking
- **Literacy & Language:** Expressing ideas through play • Participating in conversation
- **Social & Emotional:** Expressing feelings • Recognizing emotions in others

# Emotion Story Builders

*Acting out simple stories using feelings and imagination*

## **Objective:**

Children create and act out simple stories using emotions, building early language, imagination, and emotional understanding.

## **Materials:**

- Puppets, stuffed animals, or small toys
- Optional: paper and crayons

## **Instructions:**

1. Invite children to choose a feeling to begin (happy, sad, excited, frustrated).
2. Encourage them to select a character using a puppet or toy.
3. Ask simple prompts like "What happened?" or "What do they do next?"
4. Support children in acting out their story using voice and movement.
5. Talk together about how the character feels and what they might do next.

## **Infant & Toddler Adaptation:**

Offer a simple puppet or toy and model short, simple actions with clear emotions. Use expressive voice and movement while naming feelings, and allow children to watch, imitate, or respond in their own way.

## **Developmental Connections:**

- **Cognitive:** Creating simple story sequences • Using imagination in play
- **Literacy & Language:** Expressing ideas through words and actions • Participating in back-and-forth conversation
- **Social & Emotional:** Identifying and expressing feelings • Recognizing emotions in others

# Feelings Art Faces

*Creating faces to show different emotions*

## **Objective:**

Children create simple faces to represent different emotions, building emotional awareness, fine motor skills, and expressive language.

## **Materials:**

- Paper plates or paper
- Crayons, markers, or colored pencils
- Optional: glue, yarn, or collage materials

## **Instructions:**

1. Invite children to choose a feeling (happy, sad, angry, surprised).
2. Encourage them to draw a face that shows that feeling.
3. Talk about what makes the face look that way (eyes, mouth, eyebrows).
4. Invite children to share their face and describe the feeling.
5. Compare different faces and talk about how feelings can look different.

## **Infant & Toddler Adaptation:**

Offer simple drawing tools and model making basic faces while naming emotions. Allow children to scribble and explore while you describe features like “big smile” or “sad eyes,” keeping the focus on exposure and language.

## **Developmental Connections:**

- **Cognitive:** Recognizing and representing visual features • Making connections between facial expressions and emotions
- **Health & Physical:** Using fine motor skills to draw and create • Coordinating hand movements
- **Literacy & Language:** Describing feelings and features • Participating in simple conversations
- **Social & Emotional:** Identifying emotions • Expressing feelings through creative work

# When I Feel This Way

*Connecting feelings to real-life experiences*

## **Objective:**

Children connect emotions to their own experiences, building language, memory, and emotional understanding.

## **Materials:**

- Emotion cards or simple feeling prompts
- Optional: photos, books, or familiar objects

## **Instructions:**

1. Show a feeling (happy, sad, excited, frustrated).
2. Ask children "When do you feel this way?"
3. Encourage children to share a simple experience.
4. Ask follow-up questions like "What happened?" or "What did you do?"
5. Invite children to listen and respond to each other's ideas.

## **Infant & Toddler Adaptation:**

Use simple feeling words during everyday moments and model short phrases like "You feel happy" or "That was frustrating." Allow children to respond through gestures, sounds, or simple words.

## **Developmental Connections:**

- **Cognitive:** Recalling simple experiences • Making connections between events and feelings
- **Literacy & Language:** Using words to describe experiences • Participating in back-and-forth conversation
- **Social & Emotional:** Identifying personal feelings • Recognizing feelings in others

# Feelings Sharing Circle

*Sharing and responding to feelings together*

## **Objective:**

Children share feelings and respond to others, building communication, empathy, and social connection.

## **Materials:**

- Emotion cards or simple prompts
- Optional: a soft object to pass (ball, stuffed item)

## **Instructions:**

1. Gather children in a small group or circle.
2. Introduce a feeling using a card or prompt.
3. Invite one child to share a time they felt that way.
4. Pass an object to the next child to take turns sharing or responding.
5. Encourage listening, simple responses, or connections like "Me too" or "I felt that way."


## **Infant & Toddler Adaptation:**

Sit together in a small group and model simple feeling words during play. Allow children to observe, respond with gestures or sounds, and participate at their own level.

## **Developmental Connections:**

- **Approaches to Learning:** Participating in group experiences • Engaging with others
- **Literacy & Language:** Listening and responding to others • Expressing simple ideas
- **Social & Emotional:** Sharing feelings • Developing empathy and awareness of others

# Facilitator Focus: Stories in the Garden

 **Theme** *Children explore emotions through pretend play, storytelling, and shared experiences, building understanding through expression, imagination, and connection.*



## **Overview**

This week's activities invite children to explore big feelings in ways that feel natural and meaningful. Through pretend play, art, conversation, and group interaction, children begin to recognize emotions, express them, and connect them to their own experiences.

The focus is on giving children opportunities to use imagination while building language and social-emotional skills. Activities are open-ended and flexible, allowing children to participate at their own level and respond in ways that feel comfortable.



## **Facilitator Tips**

- Model simple feeling words during play and conversation
- Follow children's ideas and expand on what they share
- Keep interactions supportive and open-ended
- Encourage listening and responding during group experiences
- Allow space for different ways of expressing feelings



## **Vocabulary to Emphasize**

happy • sad • excited • frustrated • surprised • calm • feelings • pretend • share • listen

### **Short Sentence Prompts (for modeling language):**

- "How is your character feeling?"
- "What happened to make them feel that way?"
- "What could they do next?"

## **Developmental Connections (WMELS Alignment)**

### **Approaches to Learning:**

- Children engage in pretend play, show flexibility in thinking, and participate in open-ended experiences that encourage exploration and creativity.

### **Cognition & General Knowledge:**

- Children make connections between feelings and experiences, recall simple events, and use imagination to create and act out ideas.

### **Health & Physical Development:**

- Children strengthen fine motor skills through drawing and manipulating materials, and use coordinated movements during pretend play.

### **Language & Literacy Development:**

- Children build vocabulary related to emotions, express ideas through words and play, and participate in back-and-forth conversations.

### **Social & Emotional Development:**

- Children recognize and express feelings, begin to understand others' emotions, and practice empathy through shared experiences and group interaction.



## **Reflection for Educators**

- How are children expressing their feelings during play?
- What language are children using to describe emotions?
- How are children responding to others during group activities?

