

# HELPING LITTLE KIDS WITH BIG FEELINGS



## Dear Parents and Caregivers,

It's not always easy to know what to say or do when toddlers have big feelings. This is especially true in public or during busy times at home, like getting ready in the morning. It is normal for young children to have strong feelings like anger or sadness. It is also normal for caregivers to feel unsure or stressed when this happens.

Every child is different, and it can be hard to know what they need all the time. Working through these tough moments together helps your child feel safe and supported. They will learn how to handle their emotions over time. The **Early Connections team** has ideas to help your family when big feelings take over.

## Why do children have big feelings?

Young children have big feelings for many reasons. Sometimes they feel mad, scared, disappointed, or frustrated. Other times, they might feel tired, hungry, or sick. Sometimes these feelings are too big to handle on their own.

When this happens, kids may cry, yell, or act out. These moments can be hard for you, too—but there are things you can do to help your child calm down and feel better.



## Things to keep in mind

These are some signs that your child may need more help to learn to handle their feelings:

- A child getting upset so often or for such a long time that they can't enjoy and explore their world
- A child doing things to harm themselves (headbanging)
- If it's hard for the adults to stay calm when the child is having big feelings

If that sounds like your child, talk with your child's doctor, childcare provider, or a mental health provider.



## What can parents do to help?

(You can use these ideas with toddlers and preschoolers)

### Before Big Feelings Happen – Prevention

- **Help with transitions.** Moving from one activity to another can be tough. Give your child a heads-up before it's time to stop an activity. For example, if you're playing with water toys outside and it's almost lunchtime, talk about what's coming next. You could say, "Let's splash the duck three more times, then we'll go inside for lunch." You could also set a timer or sing a cleanup song.
- **Give choices.** Let your child make small decisions to feel more in control. For example, "Do you want to wear the red shirt or the blue shirt?"
- **Use a calm voice.** When giving directions, try to talk in a calm tone—even if you're feeling stressed.
- **Teach about feelings.** Read books or watch short videos with your child to help them learn words for different feelings.

### In the Moment – During Big Feelings

- **Check in with yourself.** Ask yourself, "How am I feeling right now?" If you're upset, try taking a few deep breaths before you react.
- **Name their feelings.** Help your child learn what they're feeling. For example, "I can see you are angry because you don't want to leave the park. That's why you're crying and yelling."
- **Stay close and supportive.** Use your voice and body to show love and safety. You might give a hug, hold their hand, or sit nearby. Some kids need space, and that's okay too.
- **Teach how to show emotions.** Teach your child how to show feelings in a safe way. For example, "Your brother took your toy. That made you mad. Next time you can hold up your hand and say, 'No, brother.'"

### Where can I find online resources for more support?



#### Resources for Early Childhood Development

Zero to Three

[www.zerotothree.org/resources/?issue\\_area=infant-and-early-childhood-mental-health](http://www.zerotothree.org/resources/?issue_area=infant-and-early-childhood-mental-health)



#### Toddler Tantrums and Meltdowns

Zero to Three

[www.zerotothree.org/resource/toddler-tantrums/](http://www.zerotothree.org/resource/toddler-tantrums/)



#### Video to Help With Big Feelings

Sesame Street

Video: [bit.ly/3Gtvr4b](http://bit.ly/3Gtvr4b)

QR Code  
Here

Early Connections has another handout called, "Helping Young Children with Feelings Using Books." It has some fun ideas for making books with your child to help them talk about feelings and experiences.

## STEIN TIKUN OLAM EARLY CONNECTIONS PROGRAM CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL LOS ANGELES