

Emotions Playdough Activity

Infants (Birth–12 months)

1) Face Match

Materials: taste-safe playdough, baby-safe mirror

Directions:

1. Sit baby facing the mirror.
2. You make one simple playdough “face” (2 dots + a smile line).
3. Say: “Happy!” and smile in the mirror.
4. Pause and watch baby’s reaction; copy baby sounds/faces.

2) “Feelings Hands”

Materials: taste-safe dough

Directions:

1. Give the baby a small ball of dough to pat/squeeze (supervised).
2. Narrate: “Soft... squish... calm.”
3. When the baby gets fussy, model calm breathing: “In... out...” while squeezing dough slowly.

Goal: early regulation language (calm/soft/gentle).

3) Happy/Sad Song Dough Tap

Materials: dough, your voice

Directions:



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1. Sing a simple tune: “Happy, happy, tap-tap-tap” while tapping dough.
2. Switch: “Sad, sad, slow-slow-slow” while pressing slowly.
3. Keep it 1–2 minutes.

Young Toddlers (1–2 years)

1) Two-Choice Emotion Faces

Materials: dough, 2 emotion cards (happy/mad or happy/sad)

Directions:

1. Show two cards: “Happy or sad?”
2. The child picks one; you help them make the mouth shape (up/down).
3. Label: “You chose happy!”

2) “Fix the Face” (Teacher Makes It, Child Changes It)

Materials: dough

Directions:

1. Make a “sad” face.
2. Say: “Oh no—can you help?”
3. A child changes its mouth into a smile or adds “tears” into a ball.
4. Name both: “Sad... now happy.”

3) Emotion Stomp & Squish

Materials: dough balls on a tray

Directions:



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1. Say: "Mad—stomp squish!" (press firmly with palm)
2. Say: "Calm—gentle squish." (slow squeeze)
3. Repeat 3 emotions max.

Older Toddlers (2–3 years)

1) Emotion “Cookie Cutters”

Materials: dough, circle cutter, craft stick

Directions:

1. Children cut a circle “face.”
2. Use craft sticks to draw eyebrows/mouth.
3. Prompt: “Make a happy face. Now make surprised.”

2) Feelings Road Map

Materials: dough, small toy people/animals, picture cards (optional)

Directions:

1. Put a toy on the table and act out: “Toy can’t find mom.”
2. Ask: “How does it feel?” Offer choices: sad/scared.
3. The child builds the toy’s face with dough.

3) “Calm-Down Toolbox” Dough Cards

Materials: dough, simple picture cards (breathe, hug, drink water, ask for help)

Directions:



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1. Pick an emotion face (mad/sad).
2. Ask: "What can we do?"
3. The child picks a tool card and practices: squeeze dough + 3 breaths.

Preschool (3–5 years)

1) Emotions Sorting Tray

Materials: muffin tin, emotion labels (happy/sad/mad/scared), dough

Directions:

1. Put labels in the muffin tin.
2. Children create small faces and place them in the matching slot.
3. Review: "Tell me one time you felt ____." (optional)

2) Feelings Thermometer (Size = intensity)

Materials: dough, paper strip labeled small/medium/big, marker

Directions:

1. Explain: "Feelings can be small, medium, or big."
2. Children make a small mad face, then medium, then big (bigger eyebrows/mouth).
3. Ask: "What helps when feelings are BIG?"

3) "Problem → Feeling → Strategy" Mats

Materials: 3-column mat (draw it), dough

Directions:



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1. Give a simple problem: “A friend took a toy.”
2. The child makes an emotion face (mad).
3. The child chooses a strategy (ask for help, take turns, breathe) and makes a “calm face.”

4) Emotion Dice + Dough Face

Materials: printable emotion dice (or write on a cube), dough

Directions:

1. Roll the dice.
2. Make the emotion face.
3. Share a matching situation: “I feel excited when...”

Goal: playful practice + language.

School Age (6+)

1) “Mixed Emotions” Faces

Materials: dough, index cards

Directions:

1. Give a card: “excited + nervous” or “happy + worried.”
2. Students create a face showing both (one eyebrow up, half-smile, etc.).
3. Discuss: “When might you feel both?”

2) Comic Strip: Before / During / After

Materials: paper with 3 boxes, dough

Directions:



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1. Scenario: “Big test,” “new kid,” “argument.”
2. Box 1: before feeling face, Box 2: during, Box 3: after using a strategy.
3. Write 1 strategy under box 3.

3) “Emotion Sculptures” (Body language)

Materials: dough, toothpicks/craft sticks (optional, supervise), mini figures

Directions:

1. Students sculpt a whole-body pose (slumped, tense shoulders, jumping).
2. Label the emotion and body cues.
3. Add: “What helps your body relax?”

4) Perspective Switch

Materials: dough, two mini “faces”

Directions:

1. Present a conflict: “Someone cut in line.”
2. The student makes 2 faces: person who got cut (frustrated) + person who cut (in a hurry/forgot).
3. Discuss respectful solutions.

Bonus: Quick Add-On Activities

“Feelings Menu”

Make 4 emotion faces, then let kids point: “Pick how you feel right now.”

“Guess the Feeling”



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One child makes a face; others guess using the emotion cards.

“Calm Dough Recipe Moment”

Add lavender scent (if allowed) or glitter-free texture add-ins; talk about calm choices.



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