

# Emotion Sorting Activities

## Birth–Kindergarten

### Infants (Birth–12 months)

**Focus: Co-regulation + noticing expressions (not “sorting” yet)**

#### Setup

- Choose 2–3 large emotion photos: **happy, sad, calm**
- Place them at baby eye-level during diapering, tummy time, or feeding

#### Activity 1: “Face-to-Face Feelings”

1. Show a photo and mirror it with your face.
2. Pause to let the baby look.
3. Name it gently: “Happy!” “Calm.”

#### Teacher talk:

- “You see my smile, happy!”
- “I’m here. You are safe.”
- “Let’s breathe together.”

#### Activity 2: Comfort Routine Labeling

During everyday moments, narrate emotions:

- “You look upset. I’m helping you.”



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- “Now you look calm.”

✓ **Success looks like:** baby watches faces, calms with soothing voice, or vocalizes back.

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## Young Toddlers (12–24 months)

### Focus: Matching (2–3 emotions) + simple language

#### Setup

- 2 mats with faces: **happy** and **sad** (add **mad** later)
- Put cards in a basket

#### Activity: “Find Happy!”

1. Hold up a card: “Happy!”
2. Ask: “Where does happy go?”
3. Child places it on the matching mat.
4. Celebrate effort, not accuracy.

#### Teacher talk:

- “Happy is smiling!”
- “Sad is frowning.”
- “You did it, nice trying!”

✓ **Success looks like:** child matches with support, points, or repeats feeling word.

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## Toddlers (2–3 years)

**Focus: Sorting 3–5 emotions + connecting feelings to experiences**

### Setup

- 3–5 mats: **happy, sad, mad, scared, calm**
- Add a mirror and a stuffed animal “feeling friend”

### Activity: “Sort + Show Me”

1. Children draw a card and place it on the correct mat.
2. Everyone makes the face together.
3. Ask a simple question: “When do you feel mad?”

### Teacher talk:

- “Mad can mean we need help.”
- “What can we do when mad? Stomp feet? Take breaths? Ask for help?”

### Extension:

- Add a “**Help**” basket with coping pictures: breathe, hug a stuffy, ask teacher, take a break.

✓ **Success looks like:** child sorts most cards, uses 1–2 feeling words, begins to name coping choices.

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## Preschool (3–5 years)

**Focus: Sorting 6–10 emotions + empathy + coping strategy matching**



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## Setup

- Mats: **happy, sad, mad, scared, calm, excited, frustrated, worried, proud**
- Add scenario cards (sharing, losing a toy, loud noise, waiting turn)

## Activity: “Feelings Detective”

1. Child sorts the emotion card.
2. Ask: “What clues do you see?” (eyes, mouth, eyebrows, body)
3. Draw a scenario card: “How might they feel?”
4. Match a coping card: “What could help?”

## Teacher talk prompts:

- “What could you say to a friend who feels sad?”
- “What helps you when you feel worried?”
- “Frustrated means it’s hard. We can try again.”

## Group option:

- Make a classroom chart: **Feelings** → **Helpful Choices**.

✓ **Success looks like:** children explain reasoning, suggest support for peers, and choose coping tools independently.

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## Kindergarten (5–6 years)

**Focus: Emotion intensity, mixed feelings, problem-solving, and reflection**

## Setup



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- Add an “intensity scale” strip: **little** → **medium** → **big**
- Add “mixed feelings” cards (e.g., excited + nervous)

### Activity: “Sort, Scale, Solve”

1. Sort the emotion card.
2. Place it on an intensity scale (How big is the feeling?)
3. Choose a strategy:
  - calm body (breathing, movement break)
  - calm mind (positive self-talk)
  - problem solve (ask, negotiate, take turns)

### Teacher talk prompts:

- “What size is your feeling right now?”
- “What’s one safe choice you can make?”
- “How can we repair if we hurt someone’s feelings?”

### Extension:

- Add journaling: “Today I felt \_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_. Next time I can \_\_\_\_\_.”

✓ **Success looks like:** child identifies intensity, names triggers, and uses strategies with less adult support.

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## CLASSROOM EXTENSIONS (All ages)



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## Daily “How I Feel” Check-In

- Morning: choose a feeling card
- Midday: update if it changes
- Closing: “What helped you today?”

## Feelings Charades (Toddlers+)

Act it out, guess, then discuss: “What helps with that feeling?”

## Emotion Sorting Center (independent work)

Rotate cards weekly (school feelings, friendship feelings, family feelings)

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# Assessment

- **Infants:** notices facial expressions; calms with co-regulation
- **12–24 months:** matches 2–3 emotions; points or repeats feeling words
- **2–3 years:** sorts 3–5 emotions; names feelings in self/others
- **Preschool:** explains emotion clues; matches coping strategies
- **Kindergarten:** identifies intensity; problem-solves and reflects



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