



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS ON DEALING WITH BIG FEELINGS

WHAT EXACTLY ARE “BIG” FEELINGS?

“Big” feelings refer to children’s inner and outer sensations and expressions of any challenging emotion whether it be joy, fear, sadness, frustration—or anger—particularly when these expressions can feel difficult to manage or even overwhelming to them or to their parents.

WHY ARE MY CHILD(REN)’S BIG FEELINGS IMPORTANT?

Children learn about their feelings through interactions with their caregivers from their earliest ages. Yet, feelings can challenge a child who might act on impulse and hurt another instead and requires support and practice in managing challenging emotions. To help your child learn the skills they need to thrive, it is important to talk about feelings and the importance of listening to and communicating what’s in your heart.

WHAT IF I HAVE *MY OWN* BIG FEELINGS WHEN WITH MY CHILDREN?

As parents, we need to honor our big feelings before we can respond to those of our children. Taking responsibility for our emotional experiences helps us manage our actions that follow. We have a unique opportunity to grow our own emotional intelligence as our children pose challenges. We can count on the fact that when we take time out to calm down and manage our big feelings instead of acting on impulse or reflex that we are both managing ourselves in healthy ways and teaching our children self-management skills by modeling healthy responses to emotion.

WHAT IF I RESPONDED TO BIG FEELINGS IN AN UNHEALTHY WAY?

That’s okay! We are all human, and sometimes our big feelings spill out before we have had time to process them. If and when this happens for you, attempt to:

- Be transparent – Name the feelings you experienced or felt.
- Be accountable – Apologize to anyone who has been emotionally or physically harmed, including your children.
- Be reflective – Identify how your feelings were displayed in an unhealthy way.
- Be restorative – Share how you could have responded. Then take steps to show care and repair harm.

BUT HOW DO I HELP MY CHILDREN SHOW BIG FEELINGS HEALTHILY?

National PTA has developed a brief tips sheet to support you with addressing “big” feelings with your child. Responding to big feelings in healthy ways is a challenge for most (if not all!) parents. Continue reading to explore how you can put these tips into action.

