

We rely on picture books to entertain our children, and to help grow them into readers. With thoughtful selection and conversation, though, picture books can help you nurture in your child a better understanding of their own emotional states as well as an increased empathy toward the complicated feelings of others. Here are a handful of picture books that tackle a range of big feelings common to little readers.

As you read the text of these books, take time to talk about the illustrations, too, to help your child connect your descriptive words and visual cues in the artwork with emotions they might recognize and feel but not be able to articulate. While many of these books focus on a singular emotional experience, for emphasis—the feeling of being worried, say, or of being sad—please reiterate to your child that real-life emotions rarely stand in isolation. We can be worried *and* sad; we might be frightened *and* angry. The more you talk together about these picture book feelings together, the more emotionally literate little reader you'll raise.

“An Emotional Menagerie: Feelings from A to Z” by The School of Life, Alain Botton and Rachael Saunders (2021)

Rhyming poems for every letter of the alphabet each present an emotion in the form of an animal in that state, such as A for Anger, depicted by a raging lion. Many of the emotions will be familiar while others, such as Insecurity and Obsession, might stretch young readers' vocabularies and self-awareness.

“Evelyn Del Rey se muda” de Meg Medina y Sonia Sánchez (2020)

Two little girls enjoy one last day of enthusiastic play before Evelyn's family moves, the girls making the most of the present despite their sadness at impending separation. Also available in English as *Evelyn Del Rey is Moving Away*.

“Grumpy Monkey” by Suzanne Lang and Max Lang (2018)

In a horribly cranky mood despite an otherwise lovely day, Jim denies his feelings as friends try to cheer him up, when really the chimpanzee would rather be left alone with his grumpiness.

“It's Not All Rainbows (Kevin the Unicorn #1)” by Jessika von Innerebner (2019)

Even unicorns can have crummy days, and when things get so bad that Kevin can no longer hide his frustrations, his friends let him know he's not alone. A bright and playful story that reminds readers not everyday will be perfectly perfect, and it really is okay to *not* feel okay.

“Jabari Jumps (Jabari #1)” by Gaia Cornwall (2017)

The diving board proves more daunting than Jabari expected, and his worry is practically palpable as Jabari girds himself up for his first jump. His father's support is a source of great comfort, and ultimately Jabari has the perseverance and courage to bravely face down his fear.

“Looking for Smile” by Ellen Tarlow and Lauren Stringer (2020)

Bear and his smile are usually inseparable, but when he wakes one morning without his companion, Bear searches everywhere to find his smile again. A simplification of depression, but invaluable and affirming for families grappling with that emotional weight.

“Maybe Tomorrow?: A Story About Loss, Healing, and Friendship” by Charlotte Agell and Ana Ramírez González (2019)

Elba carries around a heavy black box of grief until Norris arrives and helps lighten her load. A tender look at loss and the weight of sadness, as much a guide for friendship as an opportunity for readers to relate to the ambiguous loss that's portrayed.

“My Heart” by Corinna Luyken (2019)

With dreamy illustrations and gently encouraging text, this picture book affirms the reader's emotional resilience and encourages young ones to live with compassion, self-care, and kindness. A lovely choice to guide a conversation about the fluidity of emotions.

“The Rabbit Listened” by Cori Doerrfeld (2018)

With gentle illustrations and minimal text, a child's frustration is finally comforted when a companion takes the time to just sit with the friend and listen empathetically.

“Sweep” by Louise Grieg (2019)

A little boy's bad mood grows and grows until it threatens to take over the whole town. Can Ed sweep away his anger before it overwhelms him?

Young children are often limited in their ability to express emotions. It's not that they don't *feel* big feelings, but more often that they lack the vocabulary or life experience to convey emotional nuance. Sharing stories like these will help your child recognize their own emotional states and be sensitive to those feelings in others. By sharing these stories, and others like them, you're helping kids read people, not just books!