

Why emotions matter

Children's responses to the different feelings they experience every day have a major impact on their choices, their behaviour, and on how well they cope and enjoy life. Emotional development involves learning what feelings and emotions are, understanding how and why they happen, recognising one's own feelings and those of others, and developing effective ways of managing them. As children grow and are exposed to different situations their emotional lives also become more complex. Developing skills for managing a range of emotions is therefore very important for their emotional wellbeing.

Very young children's emotions are mainly made up of physical reactions (eg heart racing, butterflies in stomach) and behaviours. As they grow, children develop the ability to recognise feelings. Their emotions are also increasingly influenced by their thinking. They become more aware of their own feelings and better able to recognise and understand others.

The experience of emotion includes several components:

- Physical responses (eg heart rate, breathing, hormone levels)
- Feelings that children recognise and learn to name
- Thoughts and judgements associated with feelings
- Action signals (eg a desire to approach, escape or fight)

Many things influence the ways that children express emotions:

- Values and beliefs about appropriate and inappropriate ways of expressing emotions that children learn from parents, carers and school staff
- How effectively children's emotional needs are usually met
- Children's temperaments
- Emotional behaviours that children have learned through observation or experience
- The extent to which families and children are under various kinds of stress

Information sourced from <https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/mental-health-matters/social-and-emotional-learning/emotional-development>

