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Big Book of Feelings

A book about helping
you and your child
with emotions

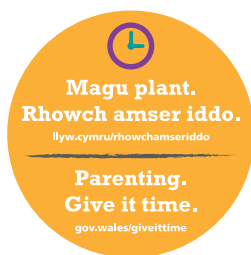


Parenting. Give it time was developed by the Welsh Government to provide positive parenting practical information, advice and support for parents and caregivers with responsibility for raising children up to the age of 18 years of age. It works with a range of organisations and professionals including psychologists, health visitors, academics, and parenting experts to provide the expert advice. This book has been written by two educational psychologists.

Dr Nicola Canale is a mum to two boys and is a Principal Practitioner Psychologist in Cwm Taf Morgannwg NHS who works with babies, young children and families. Nicola is a qualified teacher and has developed a special interest in the important relationship that parents and children share.

Dr Sarah Fitzgibbon is a mum to a young boy and is a Principal Educational Psychologist from Cardiff Parenting. Sarah is a qualified teacher who has enjoyed teaching in a nursery school and previously worked as a teaching assistant with young children with a range of needs. In her various experiences, Sarah has seen the significant role that parents and carers play in shaping the way their children think, feel, grow and develop.

The word parent/s in this book includes all who are in a caring role for a baby, infant or child.



Dear Parents,

Parenting is an exciting and rewarding time, but it can also be a stressful time for those of us who care for children.

Children of all ages (and also us as adults) can become overwhelmed by big emotions, for example, anxiety, frustration, anger or fear. This can lead to some behaviours that we may find difficult or stressful at times.

This book is about understanding those big emotions – seeing them; noticing them (in our own and our children’s bodies and in their behaviour); giving them names; knowing that all feelings are okay; and finding ways to stay calm and connected, when these big feelings arise.

You and your child will have your own things that make you feel happy, sad, angry or excited. You may also have your own unique ways of helping you feel better, such as music, songs, pets, touch, movement, toys etc.

We hope this book will help you to better understand, in more detail, both your own and your child’s emotions.

Parts 1 and 2 of this book are for you to read as a parent. They offer you some tried and tested methods to support your child’s development.

In part 3, there are activities that you and your child can look at and work through together.

We hope you find it helpful,

Nicola & Sarah.



Part 1: Why helping your child with their emotions is important

Being a parent

As a parent, you love, nurture, care and provide the safety and comfort that your child needs to thrive. The good news is that our children don't need us to be perfect, just "good enough" and to keep trying even when things don't go so well.

You will frequently experience little breaks (or 'ruptures') in your interaction and relationship with your child. Noticing and repairing these ruptures is the important part, to maintain the connection between parent and child.

This cycle of 'rupture and repair' will help increase your child's ability to cope with the ups and down of life as they develop and grow. This will help to build resilience in your child.



Supporting your child's social and emotional development

As a parent, you want to support your child's development and wellbeing. During the early years, your child is developing an important set of skills called self-regulation skills.

These skills include the ability to recognise and manage our emotions and behaviours that help us live a happy and healthy life.

When your child is very little, try your best to soothe them by staying calm, close and connected to them when they become overwhelmed with big emotions. This helps them to begin to develop these self-regulation skills.

As your child grows, helping them to understand, name and accept all types of emotions (whilst also setting boundaries around their behaviour) helps them to further develop these skills. To be able to do this, you as a parent need to be able to understand, name, accept and manage your own emotions.



“With your help, I can better understand my own emotions and learn that feeling overwhelmed is something I can cope with, and that it will come to an end. If you are there to help me through stressful situations, I am more likely to use healthy strategies, like seeking help from others, when I become stressed or overwhelmed in the future.”

The importance of being your child's role model

You play an important part in showing your child how to understand, express and cope with big emotions. As they get older, your child will also learn how to express and manage their emotions by watching and experiencing how you, other family members, and other people such as their friends, childcare workers and teachers, express and manage their own emotions. Your child will also watch and experience how you behave and respond to them, and to other people.

When things get stressful, try and keep yourself calm. This will encourage your child to do the same. Your child may not understand that a certain behaviour is unacceptable if that is what they see you do.

The way you interact with your child's other parent is also very important, regardless of whether you are parenting together or apart. Healthy communication between you and your child's other parent can reduce stress in the family. If you feel you need any further support with this, there is help and support available. For positive parenting tips and expert advice visit gov.wales/giveititime.



Different types of stress

Being a parent can be very stressful at times.

Stress can impact on the way we interact with and respond to others, including our children. It can also have an impact on our physical and mental health and wellbeing. There are also factors outside the home, that can be stressful, such as bullying, discrimination and worrying about money.

Stress is not always harmful and can actually be beneficial; it can motivate us to act when we need to and also helps us to take on new challenges. This type of 'healthy' stress is also known as 'positive' stress, and results in us developing a healthy response to stress and builds our resilience.

When we encounter more significantly stressful situations, such as the death of a loved one or an accident, we can experience something known as 'tolerable' stress. If we have supportive relationships around us, then the effects of this more significant type of stress is buffered and the brain and body can recover. Trauma is a particular kind of stress that comes from emotionally distressing situations and is a normal response to a disturbing event or series of events.

'Toxic' stress can occur when we experience strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity without adequate support. This kind of stress can be detrimental to our physical and mental health. Adverse experiences during childhood (known as ACEs) can cause this type of stress response, which can have a negative impact on a child's development, wellbeing and later health outcomes. Research indicates that positive relationships with caring adults, as early in life as possible, can prevent or reverse the negative effects of a toxic stress response.



How to handle stress

The better you are at being able to cope with stress, the better you are at being able to think; love; learn; be playful; understand other people's feelings; explore and reflect. Using words to describe your feelings may help you to cope with the day-to-day challenges you might face.

Learning how to handle stress is often linked to your biology; your experiences as a child; how people have helped you to understand and manage your own emotions; and the challenges you might be facing in your day-to-day life.

People who have not yet learnt how to manage their own emotions, may find they can become overwhelmed with big emotions quickly and find it difficult to tolerate and understand other people's emotions.

As an adult, you need to find ways to recognise your emotions and stay in control of your behaviours so that you can help your child to do the same as they grow.

This book will give you some ideas of how to do this (see **part 3**).



If things get too much

It is helpful if you get to know your own body's signals for when overwhelming feelings are building up. These might be emotional symptoms such as feeling anxious; angry; sad or scared, or physical symptoms such as a tensed jaw; clenched fists; pounding heart and feeling hot.

You might feel like exploding with anger (fight mode); you may want to get away from the difficult situation (flight mode); become frozen with fear (freeze mode); or become detached from what is happening (flop mode).

Learning to recognise and respond to your own feelings will be beneficial to your health. It will also help to calm situations before they start to escalate. Keeping calm in stressful situations, means that you can calm your child in the moment.

When a child or adult feels stressed, cortisol (the stress hormone) is released. When cortisol levels remain high for long periods of time, this can cause longer term health problems. Increased cortisol levels can also make it harder for your child to listen and learn.

Do not smack or physically punish your child, as this is illegal in Wales, to protect children and their rights, giving them the best start in life.

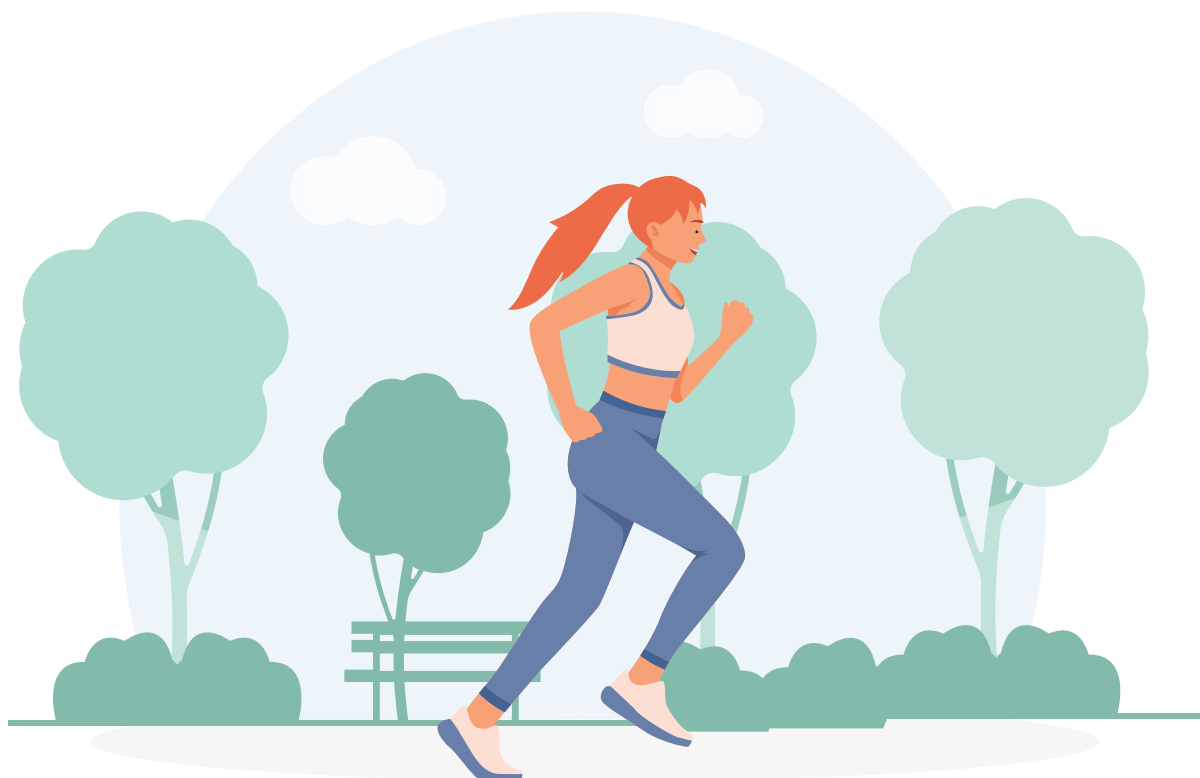


Tips to help calm your emotions

If your emotions are getting the better of you, it may help to:

- **Stop and count to 10.** Counting engages a different part of the brain. It also diffuses tension so you can 'reset' your emotions.
- **Breathe out the tension.** Try to breathe out for longer than you breathe in. The '**deep hand breathing**' exercise (in **part 3** of this book) could be just as helpful for you.
- **Take some time out.** Make sure your child is safe and leave the room briefly, phone a friend, or play your favourite music. You could ask a friend or family member to care for your baby or child for a while, to let you have time to yourself. If this isn't possible, it's important to find a way that works for you to keep you and your child safe.
- **Work it off.** Exercise can help you deal with stress and big emotions. Try swimming, walking, running or yoga. You could put your child in their pushchair and go for a walk or take them for a run or on their scooter to let off steam.
- **Ask yourself - "is it worth getting angry about?"** Is it about what your child has done or about you feeling stressed about something else?
- **Try not to bottle things up.** It may help to talk it over with friends, family or other parents.
- **Think.** Is there something else causing you to feel this way?

For more information on managing stress, see the attached [link](#).





If you still feel angry, anxious or stressed, in spite of everything you have tried, it may be worth getting some advice. It may help talking it through with a counsellor or getting some advice on managing feelings. Speak with a health professional about this or talk to the **Family Information Service** www.fis.wales.

In addition, you may find these helplines useful:

Community Advice and Listening Line
C.A.L.L. – (24 hour service) – call on **0800 132 737**. This is a confidential helpline which offers emotional support on mental health and related matters.

Samaritans Cymru – call on **116 123**. You can get in touch about anything that's troubling you, no matter how large or small the issue.

By getting help, you will be doing the best thing for your child, your family and yourself.



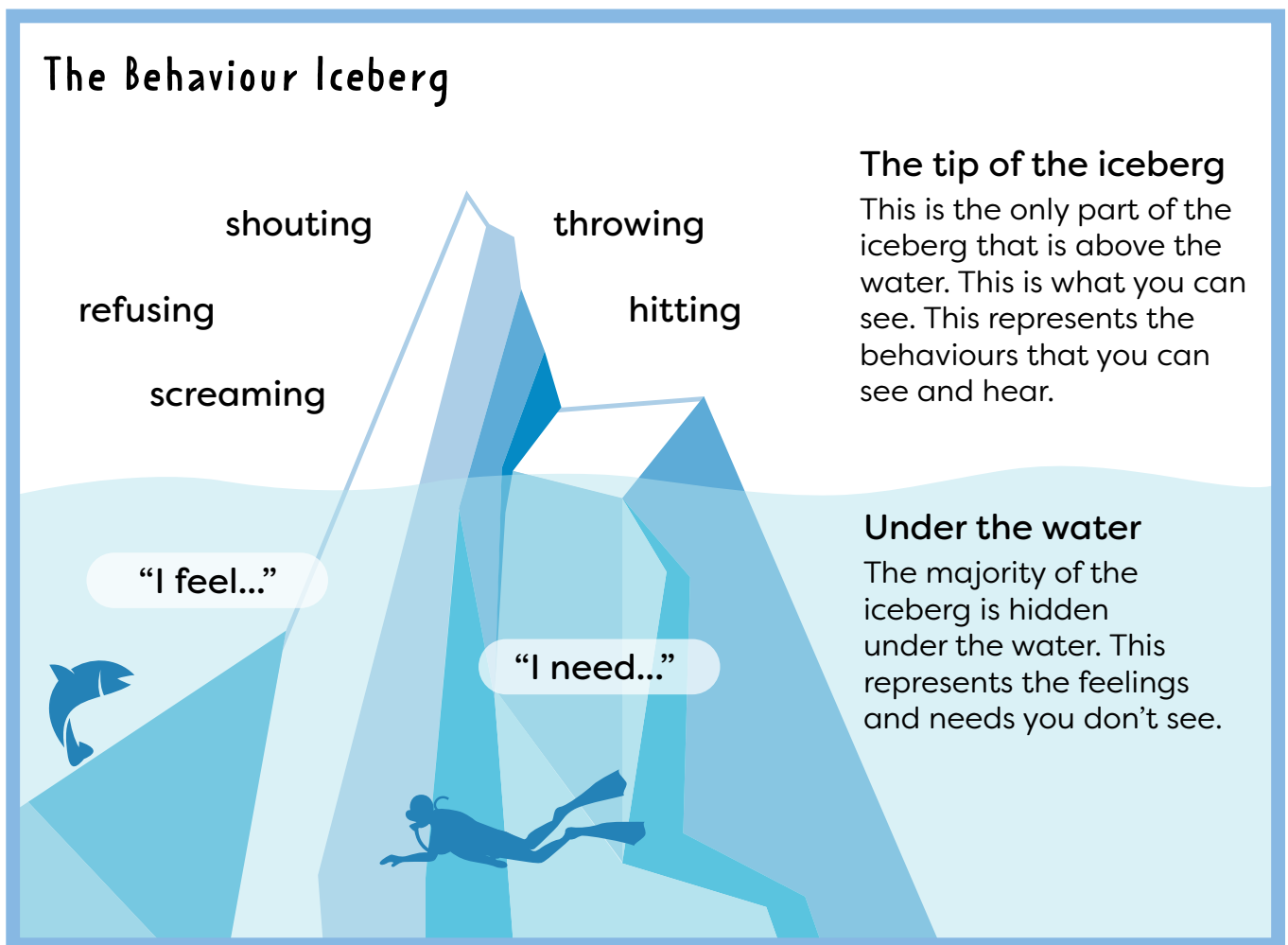
Part 2: How you can help support your child with their emotions

In this section, we offer you three methods to consider using when big emotions start to overwhelm your child. Every parent and child is unique and you can think about what works best for your family.

1. The Behaviour Iceberg and understanding your child's behaviour

Young children (and adults too) often communicate their emotions through their behaviour. A useful image to remember when trying to figure out what your child might be trying to tell you through their behaviour is the **Behaviour Iceberg** (see diagram below).

On the tip of the iceberg is the behaviour you can see, like shouting, refusing, throwing, etc. Underneath the water is the rest of the iceberg. This is what's going on inside your child's brain and body e.g., how they are feeling and whether there are any needs that you need to meet.



Understanding your child's behaviour

All behaviour is a form of communication. Be curious about some of the underlying emotions that would explain why your child is behaving in this way.

A useful acronym to remember in the early years is **H.A.L.T.** which stands for **Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired**. Are any of these needs unmet? Could this be the cause of their behaviour?

If you can help your child develop their ability to recognise and describe how they feel with words, it can help them understand and manage their emotions as they grow.

Young children can benefit from us wondering out loud about the emotions underneath the behaviours they are showing, and naming those emotions.

Examples of this type of wondering aloud are saying things like:



2. Parenting with P.A.C.E.

P.A.C.E was developed by Dr Dan Hughes whilst working with children and their parents/carers. It is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving, that aims to make your child feel safe. It helps you to gain a better understanding of what your child is feeling underneath the behaviours they are showing.

P.A.C.E. stands for:

PLAYFULNESS

The main aim of playfulness is to enjoy having a relationship with your child. This helps your child to experience and be open to positive experiences. You can be playful in your tone of voice or by making things into a game.



ACCEPTANCE

When parenting your child, you may not tolerate particular behaviours, but you will accept the experience underneath this behaviour.



CURIOSITY

Curiosity is a powerful tool in parenting. If we're not curious, we make rapid judgements leading to non-reflective action. This can shut down your relationship with one another. By staying curious, you avoid becoming defensive. You can do this by slowing down, thinking and talking about why a behaviour happened.



EMPATHY

Empathy is the ability to understand the feelings of another person. Through empathy you build relationships and make connections. When you express empathy, you're expressing your understanding of each other.



3. Responding to behaviour: The 7 C's (adapted from Kim Golding 2015)

During tricky parenting moments, when you are faced with big emotions, the **7 C's** below can help you to stay calm and stay connected with your child before responding to their behaviour. This allows you to set limits around your child's behaviour whilst also supporting their social and emotional development.

1. **Consider:** How can I be with my child during this tricky parenting moment?
2. **Calm yourself:** Check whether you are feeling calm and in control of your own emotions. It's important to calm yourself first so that you can respond to your child.
3. **Calm your child:** If your child is overwhelmed by big emotions, they will need your help to stay calm. Every child is unique. You, as their parent, will know what helps them.
4. **Curiosity:** Be curious about some of the underlying emotions that would explain why your child is behaving in this way (think **Behaviour Iceberg**).
5. **Connection:** Connect the underlying emotion to the behaviour you are seeing e.g., *"I think you are feeling cross and that's why you are throwing the toys"*.
6. **Correction:** Put in place a limit or boundary around the behaviour and stick to it. If you feel a consequence is needed, then natural consequences work best at this young age.
7. **Connect (again):** Once you've set the boundary and stuck to it, repair the rupture with your child, maybe with a hug or reading a story together. It's okay to say sorry if you have been cross. This will help you and your child recover from these little ruptures and your relationship will remain strong. Don't revisit the behaviour later in the day, be like Elsa and *'let it go'*.



Part 3: Shared approaches and activities for parents and children

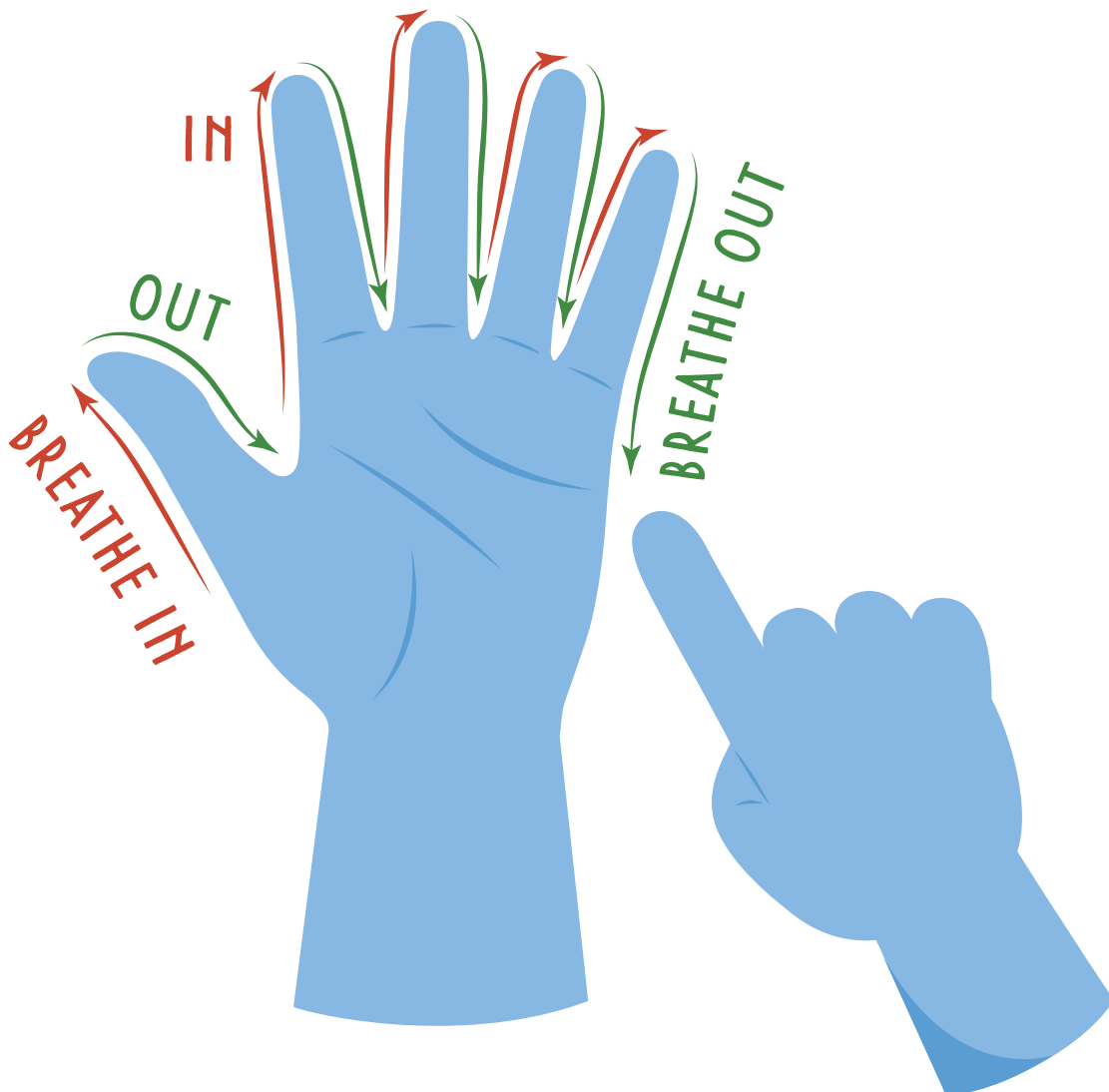
When your child is feeling overwhelmed by big emotions, there are lots of ways you can help them. In this part of the book, we have suggested a few approaches that you can do to support and guide their social and emotional development.

Deep hand breathing exercise

Hand breathing can be a useful way to calm yourself and/or your child when feeling overwhelmed.

Try holding your hand out in front of you, with your fingers open wide. Using a finger from the other hand, trace up the thumb while breathing in, and trace down the thumb while breathing out. Repeat this for your other fingers, breathing in while tracing up, and breathing out while tracing down.

By taking deep breaths, your heart rate slows, and more oxygen enters your bloodstream which starts to help your brain to relax. The relaxed breathing pattern starts to calm the nervous system down. Deep breathing also increases your endorphins, which is the feel-good chemical.



The R.U.L.E.R. approach

Expressing and dealing with big emotions is a difficult skill that takes years to develop (many of us as adults still find it hard).

A helpful way to think about the skills needed to express emotions is the **R.U.L.E.R.** approach, developed by Marc Brackett at the Yale Centre for Emotional Intelligence.



The following activities, using this R.U.L.E.R. approach, may help your child develop skills to understand and express their emotions.

Activities for you to do with your child

Here are some activities for you to try with your child to help them understand their feelings. The aim is to build up your child's language so they have the words they need to describe them in their own mind, and to others.

Activity 1 - What do I call my feelings?

We all experience lots of feelings every day, and these can change quickly, or take time to change. In this activity, help each other to **name and express** feelings, by drawing a picture or writing down feelings that you experience. You might find that you each have your own words to describe them, and that's great. The words might be common words like "happy" or "sad", or they might be words that are common to both of you, like "franger" - "this is when I feel fear and anger together." If you like a challenge, try and think of as many feelings in one minute.

Write/draw as many feelings as possible in the bubbles below.

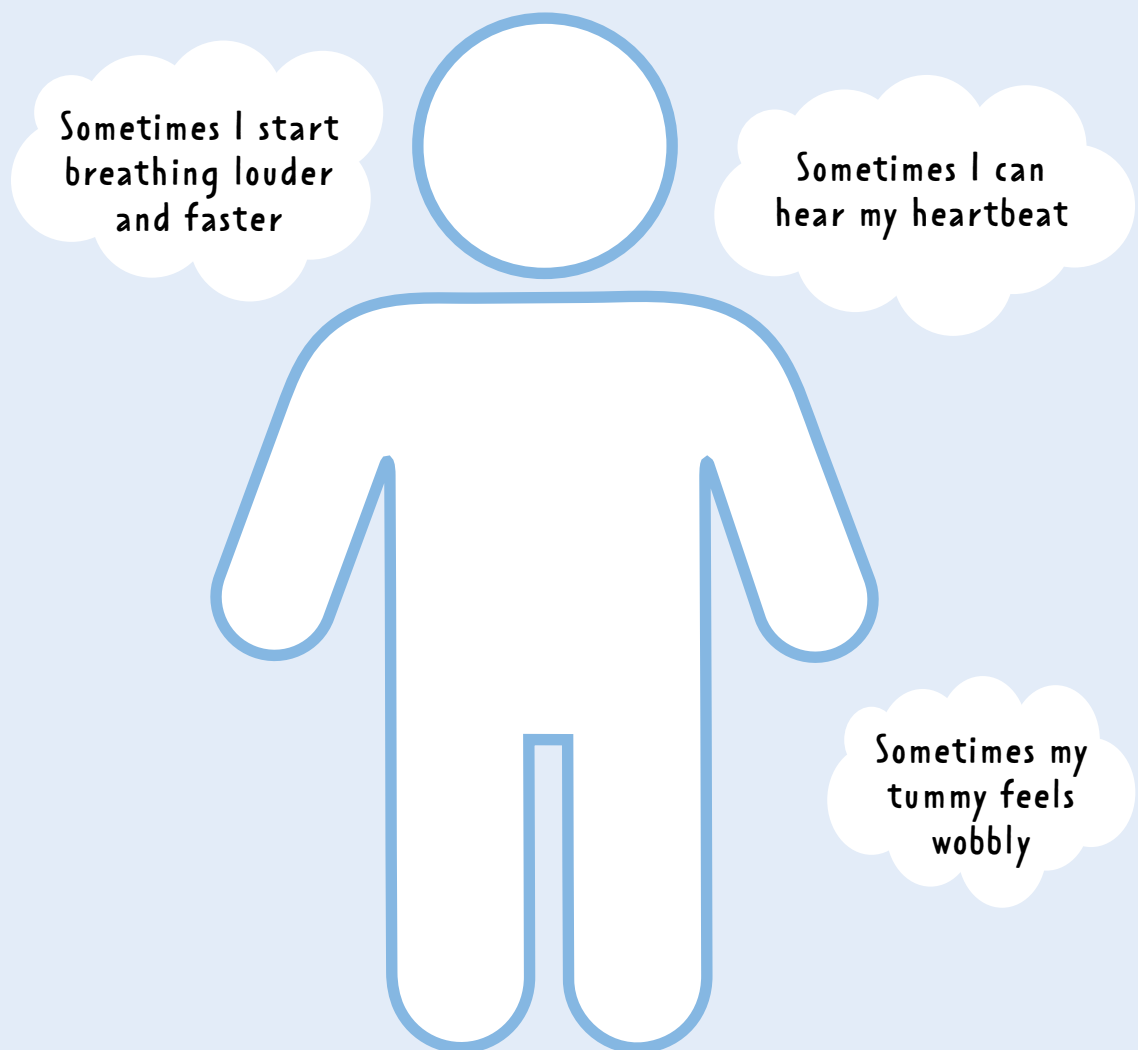


Activity 2 - Where do I feel it in my body?

We are all different. Even when we both say we feel “happy” or “sad”, we each might feel it in our own way. Our feelings might start as tingles in parts of our body, or an ache, a pain, a rumble, a tightness, a tension, or a flutter. This activity looks at how we feel these in our bodies.

Imagine this is your body. Using the feelings that you named in Activity 1, **draw or colour on the picture where you notice your feelings in your body and what it feels like** – it might be wavy blue lines, a dark black squiggle, a butterfly, *heart, cloud or red zig zags* – only you will know what it’s like for you. Your grown up might be able to help you to **recognise** your emotions and think about why you feel it there.

For example, you could ask each other “*I wonder where and how you feel scared?*” It might be things like:



Activity 3: Understanding and expressing my feelings

Sometimes we have feelings, and we know when to expect them and why we are feeling them. Other times, we might start to feel a certain way and not be so sure why we feel this way. **Think together about your feelings** – what do you feel? When does this happen? **Try and wonder together why this is?** You can record this in words or pictures below. Here is an example:

“Sometimes I feel excited, and I want to tell you about it, when I have done something new. I wonder if this is because I want to share this with the people that are important to me.”



Sometimes I feel...

when...

I wonder if this is because...

Activity 4: Responding to my feelings

Feelings are linked to how we think and behave. Sometimes, we have feelings that feel good and we want to enjoy and hold on to them. Sometimes, we have feelings that don't feel good, and we would like them to go away. Having a plan on what to do to **regulate** those feelings might help when they appear, as it might feel hard to think straight in the moment.

Talk together about feelings that **don't feel good** and how you can make them feel better, and feelings that **feel good** and how to hold on to them. You can record these in words or pictures below. Here are some examples:



When I feel.....
I can..... to feel better.

When I feel.....
I can..... to enjoy it.

If you have found this book useful or want to learn more about your child's feelings, here are some additional resources you might like to look at:

Parenting. Give it time

www.gov.wales/parenting-give-it-time

Teulu Cymru

www.gov.wales/teulu-cymru

NSPCC

www.nspcc.org.uk

Action for Children – Parent Talk

www.actionforchildren.org.uk

Family Lives

www.familylives.org.uk

BBC Tiny Happy People

www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people

Where to get advice and support:

Universal parenting support and advice is provided by midwives, health visitors, GPs and your local authority. Early help programmes such as Flying Start and Families First are also available.

Look after yourself. Meeting up with other parents can be great for your wellbeing. Your local **Family Information Service** www.fis.wales will be able to tell you what's on in your area.

For positive parenting tips and expert advice, visit: gov.wales/giveittime

