

EMOTIONS OF PRESCHOOLERS

The preschooler is full of emotions that contradict themselves. One minute they feel one way, the next minute they feel just the opposite. They cannot always control these emotions. It is the responsibility of the adult working with the child to help the child learn to control these emotions.

INDEPENDENCY/DEPENDENCY: Preschoolers go through times when they want to be and insist on being independent. They refuse help from adults and others. There are other times when they are very dependent and want to be helped. Parents and caregivers should show unconditional love and respect for the child's feelings and strive to recognize when to help and when to step back. Simple measures, such as arranging the home in such a way that make it easy for preschoolers to be independent help to eliminate power struggles; e.g, low coat hooks for children to hang their coats on, small chairs for their size, etc.

FEAR/ANXIETY: Fear and anxiety are a natural human protector against danger. However, too much or too little fear and anxiety are not healthy. Preschoolers' fears usually become more intense than during the toddler years. They show fear of the unknown or they imagine monsters, vampires, etc., that are associated with the dark. They often fear injury and pain. To deal with these fears, a parent or caregiver should:

- Listen to and accept the child's fears.
- Resolve or handle one fear at a time.
- Assure the child that you will protect him/her and keep him/her safe.
- Be a role model of courage. (Don't pass on your own fear of things, such as animals or thunderstorms, to the child.)

ANGER/AGGRESSION: Anger and aggression become specific during the preschool years. Instead of general anger and aggression displayed during the toddler years. Anger is a feeling, an emotion that is expressed if they fall off a bike or do not get to play with a certain toy, etc. Aggression is an attempt to hurt someone or something. Aggression is seen when another person takes away a toy and the child hits, kicks, or bites the individual. Anger, the emotion, should be contained or stopped. Preschoolers need to learn how to get rid of and deal with their feelings of anger in socially acceptable ways. Aggression, on the other hand, does need to be contained because it could be harmful to another human being. A child's aggressive acts should NEVER be disciplined with aggressive forms of punishment, such as spanking. This only demonstrates that a person can get what they want by hitting. The best way to limit aggressive acts is to prevent them from occurring; e.g., eliminate competition, encourage cooperation, and redirect activities that begin to get "heated" before they turn into a problem.

JEALOUSY/SIBLING RIVALRY: Jealousy occurs when a child recognizes that he/she must share the love and attention of an adult with another person. When that other person is a sibling, often times sibling rivalry occurs. Preschoolers, like toddlers, may resort to crying, sucking a bottle, clinging, wetting their pants, and signs of dependence to express their jealousy. These are called regressive behaviors. Parents should discuss the child's feelings. The parent and child should spend their own special time together going to the zoo or to the store. If the jealousy is over a new baby, provide a doll for the older child to play with. This helps him/her limit the feelings of jealousy. Having the child help with the needs of the new baby may cause increased jealousy and sibling rivalry.

GRIEF: Preschool-age children are just beginning to understand the concept of death and, therefore, begin to have feelings of grief over a death of a person and/or pet. If the child asks about death, at anytime, parents should talk about it and answer his/her questions openly and honestly. If a terminal illness occurs or a death occurs, the parents or adult should explain, truthfully, their personal belief concerning death. This should be on the child's level. The child should be encouraged to ask questions. Children also sometimes blame themselves for a death. This belief should always be addressed by the parent or adult to make sure the child does not feel this way. Most importantly, the child should be encouraged to talk about the memories of the person (or animal) that died, as well as ask questions and discuss death for a long time after the death. Children should know it is OK to feel sad or to cry. Adults should allow the child to see them cry or feel sad at times.

Decisions concerning the child's presence at funerals or viewing services should be based on the child's age, the child's wishes, and the belief of the family. For example, some believe that the child actually seeing the body and coffin and grave sight help the child to say good-bye and make the death more real. Others believe it is too much for the child and that the child should remember the person as living. If the child is to attend the services, the rituals and things that the child will see should be explained in advance and discussed afterwards as well. An adult should be by the child to explain what is happening and to answer the child's questions.