

## HELPING YOUR CHILD LEARN APPROPRIATE WAYS TO EXPRESS FEELINGS

**Actively listen** - catch your child expressing feelings and demonstrate your interest in listening through encouraging remarks, body language, silent listening and eye contact.

**Help your child express and label feelings** - encourage the expression of feelings with open ended questions. Example: How did you feel when that happened?

**Praise** - praise your child's appropriate expression of feelings  
Example: Your child says, "I'm angry at my friend." Instead of: hitting his/her friend.

**Homework:** More feelings activities to try with your child.

Role plays - act out scenes that allow your child to practice expressing his/her feelings. See sample role plays on the next page.

During role plays, children are likely to demonstrate more and less appropriate ways of expressing feelings. Offer a great deal of specific, enthusiastic praise when your child demonstrates effective ways of expressing feelings. When your child suggests ineffective ways of expressing negative emotions (e.g. using bad language or doing something destructive), actively ignore this or briefly ask the child how that would make the other person feel and then quickly move on to another role play using a more effective way of expressing the same negative feeling (e.g.

talking it out or writing about the problem). Parents can end role plays with negative feelings with a question like: Now, what can you do to help yourself feel better?"

### **Sample role plays:**

Below are examples of role plays that you can use. If you like, you may come up with your own ideas for role plays.

**MAD:** Parent sets up the role play saying something like:  
"Pretend that I'm your friend and you want to watch your favorite TV show and I won't let you. What's a good way to let me know you are mad?"  
*Or for older children,*  
"Pretend I am your friend and I spread a rumor about you at school. What's a good way to let me know you are mad?" Child will give some response and parent should finish the role play by responding the way another child might. Parent should praise the child for appropriate expression of feelings.

**EXCITED:** Parent sets up the role play saying something like:  
"Pretend that you are feeling very excited because it is your birthday. What is a good way to let me know how excited you are?" Child will give some response and parent should finish role play by sharing in the child's excitement. Parent should praise the child for appropriate expression of excitement.

SAD: Parent sets up the role play saying something like: "Pretend that you are feeling sad because a friend is angry at you and you wanted to talk to me about it, but I wasn't home from work yet. What can you do?" Child will give some response and parent can encourage the child to draw or write about what happened and share it with them later. Then the parent continues the role play saying : "Pretend that I just came home and you are going to tell me about what happened. "Hi, how was your day?" Allow the child to tell the parent about what happened. Parent praises the child for sharing his/her feelings.

ANGER: Parent sets up the role play saying something like: "Let's pretend that you are asking me to have a friend over and you feel angry when I say no. Let's practice some good ways to let me know you are angry." Child: "Mom, can I have a friend over?" Parent: "Not right now." Allow child to continue and help child express anger appropriately (e.g. "Mom, that makes me angry because I'm bored and I really want my friend to come over"). Parent should offer some response that acknowledges the child's anger and praises him/her for sharing his/her feelings (e.g. "I'm sorry that you are angry, but your friend can't come today. Maybe she can come another day. I'm very glad you shared your feelings about this with me.") Parent could also help child identify other feelings he/she may have in addition to anger (e.g. disappointment, loneliness) and encourage child to talk about those feelings as well.

## Identifying Your Problematic Thoughts

It is important to look at the way you think and feel about problems. The way you think about things can dramatically affect the way you feel and the way you behave. Negative and pessimistic thinking causes troubling emotions. These emotions can make it difficult for you to heal and function in your daily life.

We want to help you learn to identify and change the thoughts that cause your troubling emotions. When you learn to think about negative experiences (such as your child's sexual abuse) in more hopeful and positive ways, you will feel better and be a better model for your child.

Upsetting events often lead to very distressing thoughts. These thoughts are often permanent, pervasive, or too personalized, and are frequently inaccurate and unproductive. Look at your thoughts to see if they have any of these problem qualities.

- ◆ **Permanent**: A permanent thought tells you things will never change. However, there are few things in life that are permanent. Things constantly change.

**Original thought**: "My child will *never* be happy again."

**Replacement thought**: "Actually, I do sometimes see my child laughing and smiling. Maybe with my help my child will be able to enjoy happy times in the future."

**Original thought**: "This will affect every part of my child's life. My child's life is ruined."

**Replacement thought**: "Actually, my child is still doing well in school and still gets along well with friends. I think with

counseling and my help, my child will overcome the problems from the sexual abuse."

- ◆ **Pervasive:** A pervasive thought tells you that something that is true for *one* situation is true for *every* situation. However, most problems are specific, not widespread.

**Original thought:** "I can't trust any man with my child."

**Replacement thought:** "Some men sexually abuse children, but most men do not. Growing up I knew many men who did not sexually abuse me."

- ◆ **Personal:** A personal thought

a) leads you to take **too much responsibility** for things that are not in your control, or

b) leads you to believe that the problem only happens to you.

There are many problems that are not in your control and there are very few problems that only happen to one person or one family.

**Original thought:** "I am a lousy parent because my child was sexually abused."

**Replacement thought:** I am not a lousy parent because my child was sexually abused; sexual abuse is a lousy thing that happens to some kids."

**Original thought:** "I should have known that man was a sex offender."

**Replacement thought:** "Even experts in the field cannot identify an adult who would sexually abuse a child by looking at or talking to them. How can I expect so much of myself?"

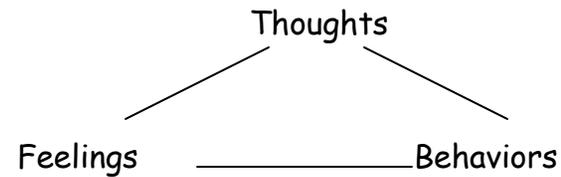
If you are still wondering if a thought is problematic, ask yourself these two questions:

- ◆ "If my best friend's child had a child who was sexually abused, would I say to him or her what I am saying to myself?"
- ◆ "Would I want my child to overhear me making this statement out loud?"

If you would not say this thought to your best friend or in front of your child, then it may be a problematic thought.

<b>Homework:</b>
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Complete the cognitive coping sheet during this week at times when you feel some distress regarding your child's experience of sexual abuse. List the feelings and thoughts that you experience. Then identify those thoughts that seem to be problematic and try to replace them with more productive, hopeful thoughts that are based on accurate information and evidence. Also, read the information sheet on child sexual abuse, which will provide you with accurate information.
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What are  
your feelings?

What are  
your thoughts?  
What are you  
saying to yourself

Are your thoughts  
accurate & helpful?  
If not, change them  
to make them more helpful.

What are your  
feelings now?

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**Remember: Dysfunctional thoughts are often inaccurate; they may be too permanent, too personal, and too pervasive.**

Caregiver's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Thoughts

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Feelings

Behaviors

1. What are your feelings?	2. What are your thoughts? What are you saying to yourself?	3. Are your thoughts accurate and helpful? If not, change them to make them more helpful.	4. What are your feelings now?
EXAMPLE Guilty	I should have known he was a sex offender	Even child abuse experts can't identify an	Helpful
		offender. The important thing is that I did	Supportive of my
		find out and am I'm helping my child.	child

**Hint: Dysfunctional thoughts are often inaccurate; they may be too permanent, too personal and too pervasive.**

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Thoughts

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Feelings

Behaviors

1. What are your feelings?	2. What are your thoughts? What are you saying to yourself?	3. Are your thoughts accurate and helpful? If not, change them to make them more helpful.	4. What are your feelings now?
EXAMPLE Guilty	I should have told someone right away	Most kids don't tell because they feel afraid, ashamed, embarrassed or were told by the offender not to tell. The important thing is that I told someone and they are helping me deal with what happened.	Relieved, Reassured

**Hint: Dysfunctional thoughts are often inaccurate; they may be too permanent, too personal and too pervasive.**

