

Why labelling feelings is so important

Helping children put their feelings into words can help them work through strong, emotional experiences. For example, being able to say they are mad, sad, happy, scared, frustrated (a little mad) or excited (very happy).

Through the use of brain imaging, we now know that naming emotions helps children. The activity that takes place in the prefrontal cortex when one labels an emotion acts as a "braking" system for the brain. It slows down the reaction of the limbic system (emotional base) of the brain. We can literally help kids start "putting on the brakes" to emotional reactions by helping them learn to label feelings.

Fun Ways to practice labelling feelings

- Use books or pictures to label and talk about feelings (e.g., mad, happy, sad).
- Make different feeling faces while looking in a mirror – notice how the different parts of your faces look for different feelings (e.g. my eyebrows are raised high when I am scared).
- Incorporate feeling words into play (e.g. my superhero figure might say, "I'm really frustrated that my web is all tangled").
- Draw, paint or make playdough faces and talk about the feelings.
- Sing songs about feelings. Here are two songs on YouTube:
 - How Are You?
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fMR8Hr9Xby4>
 - If You're Happy
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4WNRvVjiTw>

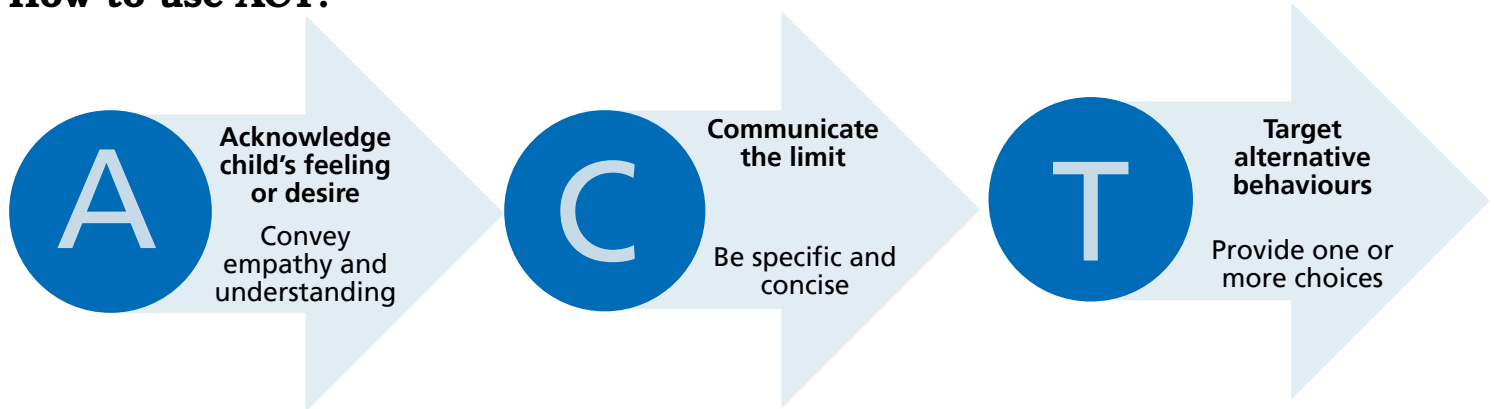


Labelling emotions is just the first step. Once the feeling is identified, we need to help children learn and practice coping skills to manage their emotions in a positive, healthy way. Using ACT is one way to do this.

Limit Setting with ACT Approach

Consistent limits → **predictable, safe environment** → **sense of security**

How to use ACT:



An example of ACT:

Jessie wants to colour on the table surface with markers.

- A** "Jessie, you really want to use the marker to colour the table."
C "Markers are for colouring on paper."
T "You can colour on the white paper or blue paper."

Remember – it is not your job to force your child to obey, it is really up to the child to accept or break the limit. Your job as the parent or caregiver is to consistently enforce the limit.

What if...

The child does not make a choice? Repeat. Several times if necessary – staying calm while you do so.

The child chooses something else? If it is a choice that is acceptable to you and stays true to your limit, that is okay.

I have repeated the limit four times and the child still refuses to make a choice and follow the limit? Try this – If you choose --, then you choose --(insert your consequence here – be sure it is both reasonable and enforceable). For example, in the above scenario you might say, If you choose to colour on the table, then you choose not to use the markers.

Adapted from Child-Parent Relationship Training Landreth & Bratten (2006).

- ~You will often have to repeat ACT – it is a long-term investment.
- ~Be calm, patient, and firm when setting limits.
- ~Try to match child's emotional level when you acknowledge their feelings.
- ~Think up possible alternatives to common situations before they happen.
- ~Offer choices that are acceptable to the child and you.
- ~Pointing to an alternative can help redirect the child's attention.