

Verbalizing feelings in a healthy way can be difficult for adults and kids alike. Often this is because the feelings are negative, but it can be a challenge with positive feelings, too.

As parents, it's important to teach children how to express the wide range of emotions they may be feeling throughout the day. Oftentimes, especially with younger or elementary-aged children, they may be experiencing big feelings that they literally do not yet have the words to describe. Finding alternative ways to express these feelings can help children recognize, identify and eventually label them, which in turn supports their own social emotional health and well-being. One helpful way to foster this development in both young children and teens is to use art and colors.



Take Action

Art projects and coloring activities can be used in both the classroom and at home in the same ways and can be done with a variety of readily available supplies that are most appropriate for the age of your child. Suggestions for supplies based on the age of your children/ students, include:

Elementary-aged Kids

- Finger paint
- Multicolored tissue or construction paper
- Playdough
- Markers
- Pipcleaners
- Sidewalk chalk

Middle and High School-aged Kids

- Watercolors and acrylic or oil paints
- Multicolored fabrics
- Multicolored string and thread
- Colored pencils and pens
- Pastels



Additional Resources

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Using colors and art projects to learn and express emotions promotes self-regulation and reflection, planning and decision-making skills, mobility and fine-motor skills, focus, language development and more. Additionally, creating art can be used as a calming and grounding activity for many children.

- Have older kids and teens **create self portraits** using only the colors that match the feelings they're currently experiencing.
- Draw the outline of a heart, and ask younger children to fill it in with different **colors that their heart felt** that day.
- Initiate a conversation with younger kids about colors and feelings by using a stoplight to help them make the connection: **RED is used for extreme, heightened emotion**, like when we're feeling out of control. Can include intense feelings like anger, but also love; **YELLOW is used for elevated emotions, as well, but ones we may have more control over** like silly, or ones that may make us feel uneasy, such as feeling anxious or nervous; **GREEN is used for calming, easy-going emotions**, such as feeling happy or content.
- Encourage teens to try a version of **journaling with colors** — have them color in a piece of a geometric shape, such as a mandala, each day with the color that reflects how they feel. At the end of the month, they'll have a complex design showing the wide range of emotions they felt all month. In addition to helping label and identify their feelings, this activity helps them see that emotions are fluid, and although you may feel sad or angry one day, that feeling is temporary.



Sadie Bisceglie, featured artist

For more activities and ideas visit: www.actionforhealthykids.org/home-activities



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