Pandemic Parenting
Dealing with Emotional Overload

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When life becomes all discombobulated - such as during a pandemic - the ability to identify and acknowledge emotions is part of staying mentally healthy.

Why not just ignore emotions? Feeling overwhelmed can increase our emotional reactivity. That's the likelihood we'll experience intense emotions more frequently than we can manage. Responding thoughtfully and with intent becomes very challenging under these circumstances.

Fortunately, increasing awareness of our emotions may reduce some of that reactivity. Now - no one is saying you'll go from Hulk-level reactive down to Nick Fury-level chill in a few days, but with enough practice those messy emotions may not ruin your day as often.

For the Kids: While the adult humans are practicing their skills, they are normalizing emotions and modeling appropriate ways to express feelings.

What are they? Emotions are natural, normal, and an important part of being human. Physically, emotions are created in the brain as it responds to changes in the environment. Once we become consciously aware of these emotions, usually when our body reacts, we **feel** them. Then we can give a name to what we are feeling: excited, sad, anxious, joyful…etc.

Things to keep in mind:
-Emotions are not good or bad - positive or negative. They are just neurological signals created by your brain in response to the world around you.

-Don't know the name of an emotion? Check the list at the end of this article.

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IDEA is a quick way to remember these steps:

ID - Identify the Emotion

Emotions are endless globs of nebulous goo floating around in the vast space of our mind. That's intimidating. A label shapes the glob into something simple and recognizable. Less intimidating.

E - Express the emotion in a healthy way

One popular way of dealing with emotions is to shove them down, then stomp on them a bit so they'll never see the light of day.

If they aren't seen by anyone, do they really exist? Yes, yes they do. And hiding them away only makes them harder to deal with later. Expressing it allows us the opportunity to acknowledge the experience - good or otherwise, and to eventually process it.

What does healthy expression look like? Healthy is honest, but not mean. It does not blame, nor does it seek to violate another's physical or emotional safety.

-An example of **Healthy Expression** of <u>anxiousness</u> might mean taking space away from the situation, or sharing how you're feeling - or both!

"I'm feeling anxious about this situation. Let's take a break so I can take do some deep breathing to calm myself down a bit."

-Example of a **Healthy Expression** of <u>awkward</u> can mean just verbalizing how you feel.

"Can't believe I said *that*! So awkward!"

A- Acceptance of the emotion

Accepting means to acknowledge the emotion as part of being human. Without judgement, without wishing it away. This might take awhile depending on your relationship and history with a particularly uncomfortable feeling. And that's perfectly fine.

Some common human emotions:

Adore	Envy
Admire	Empathy
Awkward	Excited
Amused	Fear
Anxious	Interested
Bored	Joyful
Calm	Romantic
Confused	Sad
Desire	Sympathy
	Triumphant