

Hot Wings

Reading Expressions Make it Fresh and Fun

Somehow we just expect kids to learn to read facial expressions automatically. Some do; others are slow to understand these emotional clues. But it's a readily taught skill. And it's fun, if you use Pick a Pic!

Pick a Pic

Part of becoming a socially aware person is learning to recognize emotions in others. We work with our kids on how to do this, and teach them that facial expressions are an important key.

This skill is important at home, in school and on the playground. Many misunderstandings arise from kids misinterpreting the emotions of others. Sometimes kids can be confused by what a particular look means. They may easily mistake a look of disappointment and think someone is angry instead or misunderstand a nervous expression as amusement, for example.

To give kids practice at paying attention to facial expressions and the emotions they signify, try this activity.

For younger kids (up to 3rd grade)

- Have someone take a picture of you demonstrating some facial expressions, or set the camera to take your picture automatically. Examples: angry,

proud, embarrassed, disappointed, frustrated, excited.

- Print the pictures and write the emotion of the back of each.
- Sit down with your kid and look over the pictures, having them guess the emotion in each picture, and then flipping it over to see if they guessed correctly.
- Once you go through the stack, talk about different scenarios and ask the kid to choose the picture of the facial expression they think you'd show at that time.

Examples:

- "We are walking through the store and you ask for a pack of gum. I say "No," and you begin to beg in a loud voice for the gum."
- "You bring home a note from your teacher that says you have been having a great week in math class."
- "I go into your room and it's a mess after I have asked you three times to clean up."
- Now when you are in real-life scenarios and something happens, you can remind your kid (respectfully – not in anger) to take a look at your face so they can understand what you are feeling.

For older kids (4th grade and up)

- Have kids take pictures of themselves

as well. Go through the activity and participate. Talk to them about how you will also use these pictures to understand how they feel.

- You can also use the pictures for times when you don't really know what's wrong and your kid is having a hard time opening up and expressing feelings. This technique can open the door to a deeper conversation.

Examples:

- "I noticed that you came home and slammed your door today after soccer practice. Let me see the 'pic' of how you are feeling."
- "I don't know whether to cheer you up or leave you alone when you are in this mood. What's the pic that shows me?"

These cards make it much easier to focus on the positive and reinforce your kids' good behavior. At WINGS we are mindful of the research showing that positive reinforcement is a powerful tool for changing behavior. Try incorporating this strategy with your family for a month or two – the results may surprise you.



Example Card: FRUSTRATED