

# **RHYTHM & RHYME:** ACTIVITIES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH

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***Facilitation Toolkit***



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>2</b>
SONGS AND FINGER PLAYS	3
STORYTIME	8
<b>RESOURCES</b>	<b>11</b>
WORDBANK	11
LOCAL MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES	13
MENTAL HEALTH BOOKLIST	15
EMOTION CARDS	20
<b>WORKS CITED AND ADDITIONAL READINGS</b>	<b>21</b>

# Introduction

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## What is Social and Emotional Development & Why is it Important?

During the early years of life, the basic architecture of the brain is still developing. This development process has lifelong implications on our capacity for learning and relating to others.<sup>4</sup>

Early experiences—including children’s relationships with parents, caregivers, relatives, teachers, and peers—interact with genes to shape the architecture of the developing brain.<sup>5</sup>

Social and emotional development, also known as infant and early childhood mental health, can be seen in a young child’s ability to experience, express, and regulate emotions; form close, secure interpersonal relationships, and explore his or her environment and learn within the context of family and cultural expectations.<sup>5</sup>

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**THIS TOOLKIT IS INTENDED TO GUIDE EDUCATORS, LIBRARIANS, CAREGIVERS, CHILDCARE PROVIDERS, AND ANYONE WHO WISHES TO INCORPORATE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL EDUCATION PRACTICES INTO THEIR WORK WITH YOUNG CHILDREN.**

## WHERE WE BEGAN

In celebration of May Mental Health Awareness Month 2019, Dorchester, Roxbury, and Mattapan residents came together under the Vital Village Network to support mental health for all ages by uplifting strategies and developing community engagement activities. One innovation that emerged from the committee was a Mental Health for Young Children Storytime at Boston Public Library branches. The response from the community, including providers, caregivers, and children, was incredibly receptive and prompted the creation of this toolkit to spread the breadth of impact.

# Activities

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In this section, you will find a selection of songs, finger plays, and reading activities to help create your storytime. By including a spectrum of emotions, the lyrics and storylines of each activity can help children become familiar with emotional recognition and expression.

Additionally, since the children are doing the activities in a participatory group alongside their peers, the activities can develop empathy, cooperation, and interpersonal skills. After you've sung a few rounds of each song, feel free to let the children take the lead: even if they don't get the lyrics quite right, this can help build self-confidence.

# Songs & Finger Plays

## **Greeting Song<sup>1</sup>**

### Emotional Expression

**Verse 1** (*Sung to tune of If You're Happy and You Know It*)

*Hello, Jane Doe how are you?*

*Hello, Jane Doe, how are you?*

*You can stand up, you can tell it,*

*You can show it, you can YELL it!*

*Hello, Jane Doe, how are you?*

***[Invite child to share how they are feeling]***

### ***Additional Verses and notes:***

*Continue around the circle until every child gets a chance to share.*

*Encourage children to share in any way they want, it could be verbally, through a dance move, a gesture, or by pointing to an emotion card. This is a great song to learn everyone's name if there are many new children in the group.*

## *If You're \_\_\_ and You Know it!*

### *Emotional Expression*

#### *Verse 1*

*If you're **happy** and you know it, clap your hands [two claps]*

*If you're **happy** and you know it, clap your hands [two claps]*

*If you're **happy** and you know it, and you really want to show it, if  
you're **happy** and you know it clap your hands [two claps]*

#### *Additional verses:*

*Try swapping out the emotion and movement each verse! Below are  
some examples:*

*If you're **angry** and you know it, stomp your feet [two stomps]*

*If you're **excited** and you know it, say "hooray" ["hooray!"]*

*If you're **sleepy** and you know it, yawn it out [yawn]*

*If you're **grumpy** and you know it, cross your arms [cross arms]*

# Who Can Make a \_\_ Face?

## Emotional Recognition

### Verse 1

Who can make a **happy** face, a happy face, a happy face

Who can make a **happy** face, let me see!

*[Model a happy face]*

### Additional verses:

*Repeat the verse above and swap out “happy” for different emotions, exploring emotions that are harder to identify through facial expressions. Here are some examples:*

Who can make a **confident** face

Who can make a **proud** face

Who can make a **confused** face

# **The Itsy, Bitsy Spider**

## **Goal Setting**

### **Verse 1**

*The itsy, bitsy spider went up the water spout*

*[use your finger to show the spider climbing]*

*Down came the rain and washed the spider out*

*[wiggle your fingers to make the rain, and then sweep your hands out to wash away the spider]*

*Out came the sun and dried up all the rain*

*[make a circle with your hands over your head for the sun]*

*So the itsy, bitsy spider went up the spout again*

*[use your finger to show the spider climbing]*

### **Additional verses and notes:**

*For other verses, replace “itsy bitsy” with emotions:*

*The **angry, angry** spider*

*The **tired, tired** spider*

*The **grouchy, grouchy** spider*

*To go along with the finger play, try changing your facial expression to match how the spider may be feeling along its journey. You can also ask your group how they think the spider is feeling after each line!*

# **The Feelings Song<sup>1</sup>**

## Emotional Regulation

**Lyrics** (Sung to the tune of *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*)

*I have feelings,*

*You do, too*

*Let's all sing about a few*

*I am **happy** [smile]*

*I am **sad** [frown]*

*I get **scared** [wrap arms around self]*

*I get **mad** [make a fist and shake it]*

*I am **proud** of being me [hands on hips]*

*That's a feeling too you see*

*I have feelings [point to self]*

*You do too [point at someone else]*

*We just sang about a few!*

*This is a great way to set the stage if you're doing several activities that involve social and emotional learning.*

# Storytime

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*Reading and listening to stories are great ways for children to explore more complex emotions and to learn coping skills. By following characters on their journey and seeing themselves represented in stories, children are strengthening key social-emotional skills like empathy, social awareness, and identity development.*

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## Setting the Stage

Before starting the book you have chosen for your storytime, begin by setting the stage for what your group should look and listen for. Here are some suggestions for how to begin a storytime:

**1.** Start by sharing a short story about yourself where you experienced a range of emotions, for example: *once, I got an ice cream cone and I was so excited! But then as I was walking home, it fell on the ground. When I got home, my mom was waiting for me and gave me a big hug.* Pause and ask your group how they think you were feeling at different points in the story. You can use this short activity to prepare your group to be on the lookout for emotions during the reading.

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**2.** Share the book cover and title with your group, ask what they think the story might be about, and how it will make them feel while they're reading it.

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**3.** Ask your group about a time when they were sad, mad, happy, etc. (whichever emotion best relates to your book,) and how they acted or coped when they were feeling that emotion. Use this as a lead-in to talk about how when we feel a certain way, there are many different ways of expressing that emotion.

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## Reading

The number one thing that is going to help your group stay engaged is for them to see your enthusiasm! Remember that the book is just the starting point, see what you can do to enrich the story. Need some inspiration? Here are some suggestions:

**1.** Incorporate movements and gestures to add emphasis the story. You could do this yourself, or have several children act out the story as you read it.

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**2.** Use your voice to portray how each character is feeling, try whispering, speaking fast or slow, and raising your voice to exaggerate the emotions.

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**3.** Pause for discussion during parts of the story and invite your group to share their reactions, relations, or ideas about where the story is going to go next.

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**4.** If there are multiple characters in the story, invite a discussion about each of their perspectives -- how do they differ, and why? What do the characters think about each other?

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**Wrap Up:** While the storytime is coming to an end, the learning is still happening! The goal for wrapping up your storytime is to make sure the children in your group can take the skills, discussion, and practices with them. Here are some tips for creating storytime takeaways:

### End with a song



- Closing the storytime with a song is a great way to bring the group back together.

### Highlight a coping skill



- Was there a particular way that the character expressed their emotions? Try connecting the coping skill with a phrase, or action and have your group practice it before ending the storytime.

### Incorporate a craft



- Having something to take home with them that relates to the theme of your activity is a great way to promote your group using the skills practiced outside of the storytime.

# Word Bank

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*The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is one of the leaders advancing evidence-based SEL research and policy, and supporting educators in integrating SEL into their educational practices and classrooms. Below are definitions of key concepts surrounding SEL that CASEL uses to explain their work.*

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**Social Emotional Learning (SEL):** SEL (also known as infant and early childhood mental health) is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.<sup>2</sup>

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Competency	Key Skills
<p><b>Social-awareness:</b></p> <p>The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perspective-taking</li> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Appreciating diversity</li> <li>• Respect for others</li> <li>• Goal-setting</li> <li>• Organizational skills</li> </ul>
<p><b>Self-management:</b></p> <p>The ability to successfully regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations — effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impulse control</li> <li>• Stress management</li> <li>• Self-discipline</li> <li>• Self-motivation</li> <li>• Goal-setting</li> </ul>
<p><b>Relationship Skills:</b></p> <p>The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Social engagement</li> <li>• Relationship-building</li> <li>• Teamwork</li> <li>• Organizational skills</li> </ul>
<p><b>Responsible decision making:</b></p> <p>The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying problems</li> <li>• Analyzing situations</li> <li>• Solving problems</li> <li>• Evaluating</li> <li>• Reflecting</li> <li>• Ethical responsibility</li> </ul>

Source: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

# Child & Family Mental Health Resources

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## Find Resources:

- **Local - Boston Public Health Commission:** <http://bphc.org>
  - Metro-Boston Trauma resource guide
  - Early childhood mental health
  - **Child Witness to Violence Project:** <http://www.childwitnessstoviolence.org/>
  - Service provider
  - **Boston Medical Center Dept. of Behavioral Health:** <https://www.bmchp.org/>
  - Service provider
- **National - American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry:** <https://www.aacap.org>
  - Medication guide
  - Finding the right care
  - Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist Finder

## Learn the Facts:

- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration:** <https://www.samhsa.gov/>
  - Behavioral health issues, conditions, and disorders factsheets and publications
- **National Institute of Mental Health:** <https://www.nimh.nih.gov>
  - Mental health information by topic
  - Mental health statistics in the United States

## Mental Health on The-Go:

### — KnowBullying by SAMHSA

- *Put the power to prevent bullying in your hands*

### — Suicide Safe

- *The suicide prevention app for Primary Care and Behavioral Health Providers*

### — Headspace

- *This meditation app teaches you how to breathe, meditate, and live mindfully*
- *Headspace for kids: Guided exercises designed for young meditators*

### — Moodpath

- *Interactive test for a personal mental health assessment, mood tracker, and reflection tool*

## MA-Based Hotlines:

### – **Mayor's Health Line Program:** (617) 534-5050, Toll Free: 1-800-847-0710

- *The Mayor's Health Line works to ensure Boston residents' ability to access services and programs that promote health and wellness. The MHL staff is available to help residents with a variety of services including, answering questions about health insurance eligibility, enrolling in health insurance, finding primary care providers, finding social services, locating free clinics and many more.*

- Hours: Monday - Friday from 9 am - 5 pm

### – **Parental Stress Line:** 1-800-632-8188 press 1

- *A program of Prevent Child Abuse MA (MA Citizens for Children) that is staffed by trained volunteer telephone counselors who care and are concerned about the preservation of families.*

- Hours: 24 hours a day 7 days a week

### – **Samaritans, Suicide Prevention:** (877) 870-HOPE (4673) [call/text]

- *Samaritans provides lifesaving suicide prevention services throughout Greater Boston, MetroWest, and across Massachusetts. Our services are free, confidential, and nonjudgmental.*

- Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

# Social & Emotional Learning and Mental Health Books for Children and Families

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*\*Denotes book available in languages additional to English*

## Self-Awareness

*How Are You Peeling? Foods with Moods* - Saxton Freymann & Joost Elffers – Young Child

*I Like Myself!* - Karen Beaumont - Toddler/Young Child

*Ish* - Peter Reynolds – Young Child

*It's Okay to Make Mistakes* - Todd Parr – Young Child

*Looking Like Me* - Walter Dean Myers & Christopher Myers – Young Child

*Lots of Feelings* - Shelley Rotner – Young Child

*My Many Colored Days* - Dr. Seuss – Toddler/Young Child

*On Monday When it Rained* - Cheryl Kachenmeister – Young Child

*Sometimes I'm Bombaloo* - Rachel Vail – Young Child

*The Feel Good Book* - Todd Parr – Young Child

*The Way I Feel* - Janan Cain – Young Child

*Yesterday I Had the Blues* - Jeron Ashford Frame – Young Child

## Self-Management, Emotional Regulation, & Relaxation

*A Volcano in My Tummy: Helping Children to Handle Anger* - Eliane Whitehouse & Warwick Pudney - Young Child/Preteen

*Angry Octopus: A Relaxation Story* - Lori Lite – Young Child

*Cool Cats, Calm Kids: Relaxation and Stress Management for Young People* - Mary L. Williams – Young Child/Preteen

*Cool Down and Work Through Anger* - Cheri J Meiners, M.Ed – Young Child

*Courage* - Bernard Waber – Young Child

*Everyone Can Learn to Ride a Bicycle* - Chris Raschka – Young Child

*Frog's Breathtaking Speech: How Children (and Frogs) Can Use the Breath to Deal with Anxiety, Anger and Tension* - Michael Chissick & Sarah Peacock - Young Child/Preteen

*Hands Are Not for Hitting* - Martine Agassi\* - Young Child

*How to Take the Grrrr Out of Anger* - Elizabeth Verdick and Marjorie Lisovskis - Young Child/Preteen

*I Spy* - Jean Marzollo and Walter Wick (book series) - All

*Ladybird's Remarkable Relaxation: How children (and frogs, dogs, flamingos and dragons) can use yoga relaxation to help deal with stress, grief, bullying*

*and lack of confidence* - Michael Chissick & Sarah Peacock - Young Child/Preteen  
*Mouse Was Mad* - Linda Urban – Young Child  
*Press Here* - Herve Tullet\* - Young Child  
*Sam's Pet Temper* - Sangeeta Bhadra & Marion Arbona – Young Child  
*What to Do When you Grumble Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Negativity* - Dawn Huebner, PhD - Young Child/Preteen  
*When I feel Angry* - Cornelia Maude Spelman – Toddler/Young Child  
*When I Feel Sad* - Cornelia Maude Spelman – Toddler/Young Child  
*When Sophie Gets Angry – Really, Really Angry...* - Molly Bang – Young Child  
*Where's Waldo?* - Martin Handford (book series) - All  
*Zach Gets Frustrated* - William Mulcahy – Young Child

## Social Awareness

*Being Friends* - Karen Beaumont - Toddler/Young Child  
*Hey, Little Ant* - Phillip & Hannah Hoose – Young Child  
*The Name Jar* - Yangsook Choi – Young Child  
*Yo! Yes?* - Chris Raschka - Toddler/Young Child

## Attachment, Separation & Connection

*"More More More," Said the Baby* - Vera B. Williams\* - Toddler/Young Child  
*Don't Forget To Come Back* - Robie Harris – Young Child  
*Guess How Much I Love You* - Sam McBratney\* - Young Child  
*How Do I Love You? Como Te Amo?* - P. K. Hallinan\* - Young Child  
*Hug* - Jez Alborough – Toddler/Young Child  
*I Love You All Day Long* - Francesca Rusackas – Young Child  
*Little Monkey's One Safe Place* - Richard Edwards\* – Toddler/Young Child  
*Llama Llama Misses Mama* - Anna Dewdney – Young Child  
*Love You Forever* - Robert Munsch\* - Young Child  
*No Matter What* - Debi Gliori - Toddler  
*Owl Babies* - Martin Waddell\* - Toddler/Young Child  
*The Invisible String* - Patrice Karst – Young Child  
*The Kissing Hand* - Audrey Penn & Ruth E. Harper\* - Young Child  
*The Runaway Bunny* - Margaret Wise Brown\* - Young Child  
*When I Miss You* - Cornelia Maude Spelman – Young Child  
*Wherever You Are My Love Will Find You* - Nancy Tillman – Young Child  
*You Go Away* - Dorothy Corey - Toddler

## Friendship & Relationship Skills

*Friends Always* - Tanja Wenisch – Young Child

*Hunter and Stripe and the Soccer Showdown* - Laura Malone Elliot – Young Child

*I Have a Little Problem, Said the Bear* - Heinz Janisch – Young Child

*The Little Red Hen (Makes a Pizza)*- Philemon Sturges – Young Child

*Zach Apologizes* - William Mulcahy – Young Child

## Family and Fun

*Goodnight, Gorilla* - Peggy Rathmann\* - Toddler/Young Child

*Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale* - Mo Willems\* - Young Child

*Shh! We Have a Plan* - Chris Haughton – Toddler/Young Child

*The Big Elephant in the Room* - Lane Smith – Young Child

*There's a Wocket in My Pocket* - Dr. Seuss\* - All

## Responsible Decision-Making

*One* - Kathryn Otoshi – Young Child

*The Peace Book* - Todd Parr – Toddler/Young Child

*The Summer My Father was Ten* - Pat Brisson – Young Child

## ADD/ADHD

*80HD: A Child's Perspective on ADHD* - Dr. Trish Wood -Young child

*ADHD and Me: What I Learned From Lighting Fires at the Dinner Table* - Blake E.S. Taylor - Young adult/Adult

*Cory Stories: A Kid's Book about Living with ADHD* - Young child

*One Boy's Struggle: A Memoir (Surviving Life with Undiagnosed ADD)* - Bryan L. Hutchinson - Young Adult/Adult

*Putting on the Brakes: Young People's Guide to Understanding Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (3rd Edition)*- Patricia Quinn, MD & Judith M. Stern, MA - Young Child -- Adult

*Shelley, the Hyperactive Turtle* - Deborah Moss - Young child

*The Survival Guide for Kids with ADHD* - John F. Taylor, PhD - Young child

## Anxiety

*Please Explain "Anxiety" to Me!: Simple Biology and Solutions for Children and Parents* - Laurie Zelinger, PhD, & Jordan Zelinger, MS Ed – Young Child

*Scaredy Squirrel* - Melanie Watt - Young Child

*The Girl Who Never Made Mistakes* - Mark Pett and Gary Rubinstein - Young Child

*Wemberly Worried* - Kevin Henkes - Early Child  
*What to Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety* - Dawn Huebner, PhD – Young Child w/ Adult  
*When I Feel Scared* - Cornelia Maude Spelman - Young Child  
*When I Feel Worried* - Cornelia Maude Spelman - Young Child  
*Wilma Jean the Worry Machine* - Julia Cook – Young Child/Preteen

## Autism

*A Special Book about Me* - Josie Santomauro - Parents of children with Asperger Syndrome  
*Freak, Geeks & Asperger Syndrome: A user guide to Adolescence* – Teens -- Adults  
*I Am Utterly Unique* - Elaine Marie Larson - All  
*Ian's Walk, a sister's story about her brother with Autism* - Laurie Lears – Young Children  
*Little Rainman* - Karen L. Simmons. Audience - Children with autism w/ Adult  
*The Ride Together: A Brother and Sister's Memoir of Autism in the Family* - Paul & Judy Karasik - Preteen  
*What it is to be me! An Asperger Kid Book* - Angela Wine – Children with Asperger Syndrome

## Bipolar Disorder

*Brandon and the Bipolar Bear: A Story for Children with Bipolar Disorder* – Tracy Anglada – Young Child  
*Turbo Max: A Story for Siblings and Friends of Children with Bipolar Disorder* - Tracy Anglada – Young Child – Adult

## Trauma

*A Place for Starr: A Story of Hope for Children Experiencing Family Violence* - Howard Schor – Child -- Teen  
*A Terrible Thing Happened* - Margaret M. Holmes - Young Child  
*After a Murder: A Workbook for Grieving Kids* - The Dougy Center – Young Child -- Teen  
*After Charlotte's Mom Died* - Cornelia Spellman – Young Child  
*Gran-Gran's Best Trick: A Story for Children Who Have Lost Someone They Love* - L. Dwight Holden, MD – Young Child -- Adult  
*I Miss You: A First Look at Death* - Pat Thomas – Young Child

*Samantha Jane's Missing Smile: A Story About Coping with the Loss of a Parent* - Julie Kaplow & Donna Pincus – Young Child  
*Tell Me, Papa: A family book for children's questions about death and funerals*  
- Joy & Marv Johnson – Young Child/Preteen  
*The Tenth Good Thing About Barney* - Judith Viorst – Young Child

## Miscellaneous

*Feeling Better: A kid's book about therapy* - Rachel Rashkin – Young Child/Preteen  
*What to Do When Your Brain Gets Stuck: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming OCD* - Dawn Huebner, PhD – Young Child

# Feelings Cards



## WORRIED

anxious, overwhelmed,  
uncomfortable, unsafe, fearful



## PROUD

self-reliant, strong,  
empowered, pleased



## CALM

quiet, relaxed,  
peaceful, serene



## HAPPY

loved, joyful,  
safe, cheerful, hopeful



## SAD

unhappy, disappointed,  
miserable, hopeless, gloomy



## BRAVE

courageous, fearless, empowered,  
strong, daring, independent



## ANGRY

annoyed, frustrated, cross,  
outraged, hurt, mad



## SCARED

frightened,  
terrified, fearful



## DISAPPOINTED

unhappy, sad,  
upset



## CONFUSED

overwhelmed, puzzled,  
muddled



## LONELY

sad, overwhelmed, ignored,  
forgotten, unhappy, hurt



## SHAME

unhappy, unsafe,  
guilty



## GUILTY

shame, confused,  
unhappy, uncomfortable



## EMBARRASSED

confused, worried, sad,  
uncomfortable, shy, unhappy



## EXCITED

happy, joyful, thrilled,  
curious, silly, interested



## CONFIDENT

relaxed, secure,  
comfortable

✂ Cut out each card. Cut out and paste the key word and alternative words on the back of each card, or fold under.



## References

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The Vital Village Network is committed to maximizing child, family, and community well-being. Since 2010, Vital Village has fostered partnerships between residents and organizations aimed at improving the community capacity of Dorchester, Roxbury, and Mattapan. Vital Village collectively promotes child well-being and prevents early life adversities by increasing civic engagement and bolstering community-led solutions. Our focus areas include promoting family strengths and social connections during the preconception and prenatal period, peer-to-peer advocacy aimed at addressing societal and interpersonal hardships, and innovations in early childhood education. For more information about Vital Village, visit <http://www.vitalvillage.org/>.

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