

Growing Orchids: Week 2 Homework

The Emotional Life of the Orchid

This week for homework we will focus on identifying concrete steps you can take to help your child with their emotional struggles and strengths. Part of this is going to involve you becoming more aware of how you respond to these emotional states and thus this homework may take longer than the single week between lessons depending on how much time it requires for you to complete the observation period and then the “intervention” period. The hope is that at the end of this homework, you have found ways to tailor your parenting to your child’s emotional state and needs.

Part 1: Observation

For the first part of this homework, I am going to ask you to fill out the observation page with examples of the three main types of emotional areas discussed this week: big feelings, self-awareness, and awareness of others. Depending on the age of your child you may find more or less examples of each area and that’s okay. The key here is to identify *your child’s emotional baseline*. You are noting these regardless of how you respond to them; that is, this isn’t about only identifying hard times for you, but also the positive because, as we know, the orchid needs that positivity to thrive and if you ignore it, you do so at your own peril.

An example: Tommy, age 4 (totally made up)

Big Feelings	Self-Awareness	Other-Awareness
<i>Meltdown over having to stop playing and go to child care; screamed and cried all the way in</i>	<i>Explained that he was angry at someone and so he hit them and that made him happy</i>	<i>Tried to help sister when she was sad by offering a toy</i>
<i>Lashed out at sister when she was getting attention – very aggressive towards her</i>	<i>Said he bit his sister because he was mad at her</i>	<i>Told his sister it would be okay and held her hand when she hurt herself</i>
<i>Throwing toys and when asked to stop, physically attacked with lots of anger and tears</i>	<i>Said he was really happy when mom and him went to the park together</i>	<i>Providing lots of hugs when Mom is sad or hurt</i>
<i>When couldn’t go to the store to get requested toys, became very sad with lots of tears</i>		<i>Told mom and dad that they are angry</i>
<i>Manically happy when playing a game with his sister that was rough and tumble</i>		<i>Asks to play games where he tells a scary story, mom gets scared, and he offers comfort</i>

As you can see, depending on age, you may have more big feelings than self-awareness or other-awareness. Crucially, the order of appearance will *often* be big feelings → other awareness → self-awareness.

The second part of observation is to observe *your own reactions* to the situation and how you may be helping or hindering.

Big Feelings	Self-Awareness	Other-Awareness
<i>Meltdown over having to stop playing and go to child care; screamed and cried all the way in Me: dragged him to the car as we were late</i>	<i>Explained that he was angry at someone and so he hit them and that made him happy Me: Explained we don't hit people, even if we're angry; talked about an alternative (he didn't seem to care)</i>	<i>Tried to help sister when she was sad by offering a toy Me: Just watched happily</i>
<i>Lashed out at sister when she was getting attention – very aggressive towards her Me: Got angry and sent him away while I focused on her</i>	<i>Said he bit his sister because he was mad at her Me: Explained we don't bite people, even if we're angry; talked about alternative (again, not really caring)</i>	<i>Told his sister it would be okay and held her hand when she hurt herself Me: Watched happily and said it made me happy to see</i>
<i>Throwing toys and when asked to stop, physically attacked with lots of anger and tears Me: Stopped him from hurting me and said we don't hurt</i>	<i>Said he was really happy when mom and him went to the park together Me: Told him I was really happy too and had a good time</i>	<i>Providing lots of hugs when Mom is sad or hurt Me: Thanks him when he does</i>
<i>When couldn't go to the store to get requested toys, became very sad with lots of tears Me: Waited until the tears passed – left him alone</i>		<i>Told mom and dad that they are angry Me: Sometimes I agree and sometimes I have said no I'm not, especially if it's just a quick moment</i>
<i>Manically happy when playing a game with his sister that was rough and tumble Me: Laughed as they were happy</i>		<i>Asks to play games where he tells a scary story, mom gets scared, and he offers comfort Me: plays along and loves the comfort</i>

Part 2: Intervention

Now comes the time when you identify *your role* in helping your child develop their emotional capacities to the best of their ability. The first step here is to identify where your child may struggle or do well in their emotional world by looking at what you've observed. An example (taken from above):

Big Feels	<i>Clearly struggles with emotional control over change and not getting what he wants (possibly because he has it in his mind it's going to happen and thus this is a form of change). Is acting out when he isn't getting the connection needed and this is of the aggressive type which can make it harder to empathize with him and provide the type of support needed.</i>
Self-Awareness	<i>Is aware of linking aggressive actions to anger, but can't seem to stop himself from acting that way and doesn't seem too upset by it either. In terms of awareness, he seems to have it, but the behaviour is potentially a problem? Or not because he's 4? Is able to identify positive emotional states and link them to events, which is great.</i>
Other-Awareness	<i>Is very aware of other people's sadness and can act with empathy and care, not personal distress. Is identifying negative emotions pretty well in others for his age, but they are focused on the negative in terms of his vocalization. Maybe he just doesn't take the time to talk about the positive if they're more common? Hasn't linked other people's positive emotions to his behaviours which could help with his negative behaviours.</i>

Do the same for your own actions in response to these behaviours:

Big Feels	<i>Not handling the negative times well. Am often frustrated and rushed which doesn't help things. I do apologize, but I don't think this is quite enough. I also don't think I'm identifying his needs for connection as readily as I should be and this is leading to big, aggressive feels.</i>
Self-Awareness	<i>I'm not focusing on his emotional connections that he's making. I'm focusing on the behaviours. He's 4 so I know these behaviours are normal and that I am talking about alternatives, but I haven't given him anything positive for the fact that he is making huge self-awareness strides.</i>
Other-Awareness	<i>Again I have enjoyed his amazing empathy, but I don't think I've done enough to reinforce this and make it something he can feel proud about. I focus so much on anything negative that I'm amazed he's still positive 😊 Maybe that's why he hasn't linked positive emotions to his behaviours – I haven't made that clear</i>

The final step is for you to link your behaviours to helping your child to both overcome their struggles and build upon their strengths. It's too easy to forget to build on the strengths as we focus on the struggles. For this part you will need to identify exact steps that you will take for each area and then, if you want, keep track of how this is working with your child.

Big Feels	<i><u>Change:</u> Provide warnings for change; use a visual schedule; identify times on the schedule when he will be going to get things like toys</i> <i><u>Connection:</u> When he asks to play or gets excited to see me, I will know he needs some connection time and allow for it; put aside 15-20 minutes when I get home from being out to engage 1-1 with him</i> <i><u>My reactions:</u> When he has big feels, I need to work at keeping calm and saying little until I've calmed; need to focus on providing physical comfort and accepting his emotions</i>
Self-Awareness	<i><u>Linking emotions to his actions:</u> Keep talking to him about linking our emotions to actions. He's doing well so far and as he is 4, some aggression is expected and that's separate from his emotional awareness. Will tell him more stories of my own emotional reactions leading to behaviours – good and bad – to keep up his self-awareness.</i>
Other-Awareness	<i><u>Empathy:</u> Will work to ensure I comment on how wonderful his empathic reactions are</i> <i><u>Linking other positive emotions to his behaviour:</u> Will tell him something each day that he did that led me to feel happy/joy/love/etc.</i> <i><u>Identifying other's emotions:</u> Identify emotional states in stories we read or videos we watch or for kids we see in real life (aim for once a day)</i>

Part 1: Observations for _____

Big Feelings	Self-Awareness	Other-Awareness

Part 1: Observations About Me

Big Feelings	Self-Awareness	Other-Awareness

Part 2: Intervention: Identifying _____'s Struggles and Needs and Your Responses

Big Feels

My Response

Self-Awareness

My Response

Other-Awareness

My Response

Part 2: Intervention: Your Specific Parenting Goals

Big Feels

Self-Awareness

Other-Awareness
