Lesson 9.1 Recognizing and Understanding Feelings

**Goal:** To increase parents’ awareness of how feelings dictate behavior.

**Materials:** Parent Handbooks, clipboard/flip chart, magic markers, small pieces of paper, pens/pencils

# Procedures:

1. Today’s lesson will focus on recognizing and understanding feelings in us and in our children.

2. Ask each parent to respond to the following statements:

**One feeling I have difficulty handling is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.**

**When I feel \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, I usually behave \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.**

3. Explain to the parent(s) that every experience we have leaves us with both a memory and a feeling about the experience. Good experiences leave us with good memories and feelings of comfort. Bad experiences leave us with unpleasant memories and feelings of discomfort. If we do not talk about the bad times and express our feelings of discomfort, we end up suppressing (consciously) or repressing (unconsciously) our feelings; i.e. keeping our feelings hidden inside.

4. The purpose of having emotions is to express them. All emotions need expression, and the expression of feelings has to follow three rules: 1) Respect yourself, don’t hurt yourself; 2) Respect others, don’t hurt others; 3) Respect the environment, don’t hurt the environment.

5. Mention that every experience is like a giant spring full of feelings and thoughts. When we choose not to talk about how we feel, or what we think, we have to stuff these feelings and thoughts inside. It is like standing on a spring: the spring wants to pop up, but we have to use our energy to keep it down. People have generally been taught to keep painful and scary feelings hidden (suppressed).

6. Have the parent(s) take one piece of paper and tear it into thirds.

a. Have parents write one feeling on each piece of paper. The feeling could be any they want.

b. Instruct each parent to fold each piece of paper into a small square.

c. Ask parent(s) to stand up and walk around taking their pieces of paper with them. As parents are walking around, have them notice their freedom of movement.

d. Have each parent drop one of their pieces of paper on the floor and cover it with their shoe. Mention that when we choose to hide our feelings, we are essentially covering them up.

e. Have them continue walking, dragging their paper with them under their shoe. Mention that freedom is restricted when we choose to cover how we feel or stuff our feelings inside.

f. Next, have them drop the second piece of paper on the floor and cover it with their other shoe. Have them walk shuffling both feet as they are covering the pieces of paper.

g. Instruct the parents to drop the third piece of paper on the ground. Keeping both feet on the ground, have them cover the third slip with their hand, assuming a three-point position. Ask them to move. Listen to the moans and groans.

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h. Have the parent(s) stop in their position and look around. What do they notice? Instruct parents to pick up their pieces of paper and return to their chair. Note that when we accept what has happened to us, we can move again and get on with life.

i. Ask parents to share the feelings they wrote on their paper that they were not allowed to express. Have them notice the range of feelings.

7. Mention that each piece of paper represents an emotion, a thought, or an experience that people do not want to deal with or accept. The more we try to cover up our feelings, the less freedom we have. The more experiences (pieces of paper) that a person tries to cover up, the more energy it takes; the less movement a person can make. The feeling of depression is when there are so many experiences that the person uses most of their energy to cover up their feelings of discomfort.

8. Mention that children and adults receive messages all their lives that only certain feelings are acceptable (or good) and the majority of feelings are unacceptable (or bad).

9. On your clipboard or flip chart, make two columns: label one **GOOD FEELINGS**; label the other **BAD FEELINGS**.

10. Brainstorm with the parents “Good” and “Bad” feelings. Write them in the appropriate columns.

11. Explain to parent(s) that instead of referring to feelings as good or bad, refer to the two categories of feelings as **Feelings of Comfort** and **Feelings of Discomfort**. Refer to the feelings the parents expressed at the beginning of the exercise as the feelings they have difficulty handling. Notice that feelings of discomfort are generally feelings people have difficulty handling.

12. Ask parents to share with the group the messages they received as children (and still may receive) regarding expressing their feelings.

13. Discuss with the parents that every feeling has a physical expression. When we feel a feeling, our body responds. Using the list of feelings generated, have each member of the group discuss ways in which their body responds to the feeling. Example: People who get angry often tighten their jaws, clench their fists, become rigid, etc.

# Notes and Suggestions:

The goal is to teach parents the importance of recognizing and expressing emotions in healthy ways. If working with only one parent, facilitator may participate in the activity.

**Visit Time:** As parents transition to the supervised visit, ask them to encourage their child(ren) to express their feelings

**Post Visit:** If possible spend 10-15 minutes processing the visit after the children leave.

**Home Assignment:** Have the parents locate the information **“Feelings Exercise*”*** on **Page 69** in the **Parent Handbook**. Ask the parents to complete the exercise and bring to the next session.