



BCDI
Black Child
Development Institute
ATLANTA

TAKING CARE OF OUR FEELINGS

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

MAY 2025

AGES 0-5



ACTIVITY GUIDE

FOR PARENTS & EARLY EDUCATORS

bcdiatlanta.org



BCDI
Black Child
Development Institute
ATLANTA

TAKING CARE OF OUR FEELINGS

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

MAY 2025

AGES 0-5

May Activity Guide

Taking Care of Our Feelings: Mental Health Awareness

Mental health is essential to overall well-being, even for our youngest children. "Taking Care of Our Feelings" introduces little ones to emotions and provides caregivers with tools to help children develop emotional awareness. Through play-based activities, we can teach children to identify, express, and manage their feelings healthily. These foundational skills build emotional resilience and promote positive mental health from the earliest stages of development.

This guide embraces cultural diversity in emotional expression and regulation. Different cultural backgrounds influence how emotions are understood, expressed, and processed. By incorporating diverse perspectives, we honor each child's unique cultural identity while providing inclusive tools for emotional well-being. The activities encourage children to draw strength from their cultural backgrounds and family traditions, building universal emotional skills in the process. By engaging in these culturally responsive activities together, you're teaching valuable life skills and strengthening your bond with the children in your care while affirming their cultural identities.

- 1) 0-1 year olds
- 2) 1-2 year olds
- 3) 2-3 year olds
- 4) 3-4 year olds
- 6) 4-5 year olds

Ages 0-1

Infants are beginning to make sense of their world and form attachments. While they cannot verbalize emotions, they express feelings through cries, coos, facial expressions, and body movements. Cultural background influences how caregivers respond to infant emotions and what soothing techniques are used. Activities for this age focus on sensory experiences, culturally diverse soothing techniques, and building secure relationships.

1 Global Touch Exploration

- **Goal:** Introduce positive sensory experiences that promote calm feelings and security using textures from diverse cultural traditions
- **Materials:** Variety of culturally diverse fabrics (silk, kente cloth, flannel, cotton muslin, etc.), soft natural items from various cultures
- **Instructions:** Place the baby on a comfortable surface. Gently stroke their arms, legs, and back with different textures while naming the feeling and cultural origin: "This is soft silk. In many Asian cultures, silk represents calm and comfort." Watch for their reactions and continue with textures they respond positively to. Encourage families to share traditional fabrics from their cultural background to incorporate into the activity.

2 Emotion Face Mirror Play

- **Goal:** Help babies begin to recognize facial expressions associated with emotions across cultures
- **Materials:** Baby-safe mirror, pictures of diverse faces showing expressions
- **Instructions:** Sit with the baby in front of a mirror. Make simple emotional expressions – smile widely, look surprised, frown gently. Name each expression: "I'm happy!" or "I'm surprised!" Incorporate simple emotion words from different languages if appropriate for the family. Display pictures of diverse faces showing similar emotions to expose babies to universal emotional expressions across cultures.

Continued

3 Cultural Calming Corner

- **Goal:** Create a soothing environment for babies that incorporates culturally relevant elements
- **Materials:** Soft blankets (including culturally significant patterns if available), gentle music from diverse cultures, comfort items representative of the family's heritage
- **Instructions:** Designate a comfortable corner with soft items that reflect the child's cultural background. Use this space when the baby needs calming. Hold them close, speak softly (using words from their home languages), play gentle music from their cultural tradition, and dim lights if possible. Invite families to suggest traditional lullabies or calming techniques from their culture to incorporate.

4 Global Lullabies

- **Goal:** Use music from diverse cultures to express and regulate emotions
- **Materials:** Recordings of lullabies from various cultures or knowledge of traditional songs
- **Instructions:** Share lullabies from different cultural traditions, noting the universal themes of comfort and security. Rock, bounce, or move with the baby according to the cultural traditions of the songs. Invite families to share lullabies from their cultural backgrounds and teach these songs to caregivers.

Ages 1-2

Toddlers are developing language and independence. They experience big emotions but have limited ability to express them with words. Cultural context significantly shapes how emotions are named and expressed. Activities for this age group focus on naming feelings using culturally inclusive approaches, providing simple coping strategies that respect diverse traditions, and beginning to connect feelings with behaviors.

1 Multicultural Feelings Basket

- **Goal:** Introduce basic emotion vocabulary using diverse cultural representations
- **Materials:** Small basket, pictures of faces showing different emotions from diverse cultural backgrounds, comfort objects representing different cultures (small dolls, soft cloths, etc.)
- **Instructions:** Fill a basket with pictures of diverse children/adults showing happy, sad, angry, and scared expressions. Sit with the toddler and take out each picture, naming the emotion clearly in English and any other languages relevant to the children. Add comfort objects from various cultures they can choose when feeling upset. Discuss how people from all cultures experience these feelings.

2 Cultural Calm-Down Bottles

- **Goal:** Provide a visual tool for emotional regulation that celebrates cultural diversity
- **Materials:** Clear plastic bottles with secure lids, water, items representing different cultures (colored sand patterns, beads in cultural colors, small symbols)
- **Instructions:** Create calm-down bottles with colors or objects that have significance in different cultures. For example, a bottle with red and gold glitter can reference Chinese cultural celebrations, while another might use colors from a family's national flag. When introducing the bottles, note: "People worldwide find different ways to feel calm. This special bottle shows colors that are important in [culture]."

Continued

3 Global Feelings Play

- **Goal:** Express emotions through tactile play, incorporating cultural elements
- **Materials:** Non-toxic playdough in diverse skin tones, simple face templates drawn on paper, cultural items to imprint patterns (textiles, utensils)
- **Instructions:** Provide toddlers with playdough in multiple skin tones and help them create simple faces. Show them how to make a smile, a frown, or a surprised mouth. Incorporate pattern-making using cultural items. Name each face's emotion in multiple languages if appropriate: "You made a happy face with a big smile! In Spanish, we say 'feliz' for happy."

4 Cultural Movement Expressions

- **Goal:** Connect physical movement to emotional expression using diverse cultural dance elements
- **Materials:** Open space, optional music from different cultures
- **Instructions:** Introduce simple movements inspired by cultural dance traditions that express feelings. For example, demonstrate gentle swaying movements from hula for calm feelings, or energetic jumps from African dance traditions for joy. Say, "In many Pacific Island cultures, people show their feelings through gentle movements like this." Keep movements simple and appropriate for toddlers.

Ages 2-3

Two-year-olds are gaining independence and experiencing frustration as their desires often exceed their abilities. They're learning to use words for feelings but still rely heavily on physical expression. Cultural context influences what emotional expressions are encouraged or discouraged. Activities focus on expanding emotional vocabulary across cultures and introducing culturally diverse self-regulation techniques.

1 Global Feelings Storytime

- **Goal:** Identify emotions through diverse stories and build emotional vocabulary
- **Materials:** Age-appropriate books about feelings featuring diverse characters and cultural settings (suggestions: "The Color Monster" by Anna Llenas, "My Heart Fills With Happiness" by Monique Gray Smith, "Jabari Jumps" by Gaia Cornwall)
- **Instructions:** Read books about feelings that feature children from various cultural backgrounds. Point to the characters' facial expressions and discuss how people from all cultures experience similar feelings. Connect to children's experiences: "Remember when you felt excited about the celebration? Your face looked happy like this character's face!"

2 Cultural Color Feelings

- **Goal:** Associate colors with emotions while recognizing that color symbolism varies across cultures
- **Materials:** Clear jars or containers, colored water (food coloring and water), information about color meanings in different cultures
- **Instructions:** Create jars of colored water, discussing how colors can represent feelings differently in various cultures. For example, explain that while white often represents peace in Western cultures, it can symbolize mourning in some Asian cultures. Red might represent happiness in Chinese culture, but danger in others. Use this to start simple conversations about how we share feelings even when we express them differently.

Continued

3 "How Big Is My Feeling?" Universal Measuring

- **Goal:** Help children identify the intensity of their emotions using culturally inclusive metaphors
- **Materials:** Paper with several simple "feelings thermometers" drawn using metaphors from different cultures (growing plant, rising sun, filling bowl, etc.), stickers
- **Instructions:** Introduce that feelings can be small, medium, or big across all cultures. Offer various cultural metaphors: "In some cultures, people talk about feelings like growing plants - starting as a seed and growing bigger. In others, they might think of a bowl filling up with water." Let children choose which measurement style resonates with them and use stickers to show their feeling size.

4 Global Breathing Buddies

- **Goal:** Introduce deep breathing as a calming technique practiced across cultures
- **Materials:** Small stuffed animals or objects representing various cultures
- **Instructions:** Have children lie down and place a culturally diverse stuffed animal on their belly. Explain that people around the world use breathing to calm down, although they might use different words or practices. Demonstrate how to take deep breaths so the toy rises and falls. Introduce simple terms from various cultural traditions that relate to breathing and calming, such as "pranayama" (yogic breathing) or "mindfulness breathing."

Ages 3-4

Three-year-olds are more verbal and socially aware. They can identify basic emotions in themselves and others but still need help with regulation. Cultural values influence which emotions are emphasized or discouraged. Activities focus on understanding emotion causes and effects, building cross-cultural empathy, and practicing diverse self-calming techniques.

1 Global Emotion Detective

- **Goal:** Identify feelings and their causes across cultural contexts
- **Materials:** Pictures from diverse sources showing people of various cultures with different expressions, a magnifying glass (optional for fun)
- **Instructions:** Look at pictures together and be "feeling detectives." Ask, "What do you think this person is feeling? What might have happened to make them feel that way?" Discuss how people from different places might show the same feeling slightly differently, but we can often understand each other through our expressions. Note cultural universals while respecting differences in emotional display rules.

2 My Cultural Feelings Book

- **Goal:** Personalize emotional awareness and expression while honoring cultural identity
- **Materials:** Paper, crayons/markers, stapler to bind pages, photos of the child and diverse children (optional)
- **Instructions:** Create a book with pages titled "When I feel happy," "When I feel sad," etc. Have children draw pictures or describe situations that cause these feelings. Encourage them to include cultural celebrations, foods, or traditions that evoke specific emotions. For example: "I feel joy when we celebrate Diwali" or "I feel proud when I help make tamales." Write down their words and read the book together.

Continued

3 Cultural Feelings Expression

- **Goal:** Express emotions physically while recognizing cultural variations in expression
- **Materials:** Music from diverse cultures, open space, optional scarves or simple props
- **Instructions:** Play music from different cultural traditions and discuss what emotions the music might express. Explain that in some cultures, people might express happiness quietly, while in others they might be very energetic. Demonstrate and invite children to show the same emotion (like joy) differently: "Show me a quiet way to feel happy. Now show me a big, energetic way!" Validate all expressions while being sensitive to cultural norms.

4 Community Calm Corner Creation

- **Goal:** Develop a self-regulation space incorporating diverse cultural calming practices
- **Materials:** Pillows with diverse patterns, books featuring diverse characters, cultural comfort items (stress balls, worry dolls, mandalas, etc.), pictures of peaceful places from around the world
- **Instructions:** Create a special corner together, incorporating calming elements from various cultures. Introduce items with cultural context: "These worry dolls are from Guatemala. Some children tell their worries to the dolls before sleep." Include peaceful images from diverse landscapes. Practice using various cultural calming techniques: taking deep breaths, using worry dolls, looking at mandala patterns, or holding a smooth stone.

Ages 4-5

Four-year-olds have expanded emotional vocabulary and greater self-awareness. They can discuss feelings in more detail and begin to understand cultural influences on emotional expression. Activities focus on emotional problem-solving with cultural sensitivity, empathy development across cultural differences, and preparing for social-emotional aspects of school readiness in diverse settings.

1 Global Emotion Solution Kit

- **Goal:** Develop strategies for managing different emotions using techniques from various cultures
- **Materials:** Small box decorated with global designs, index cards with simple drawings of diverse coping strategies (taking deep breaths, using worry dolls, counting, visualization techniques from different traditions)
- **Instructions:** Create the kit together, discussing each strategy and its cultural context: "In some Native American traditions, people might use a 'talking stick' when expressing feelings. In parts of Asia, people might count breaths." Role-play using the strategies from different traditions. Emphasize that people around the world have developed helpful ways to manage emotions.

2 Cultural Feelings Weather Report

- **Goal:** Normalize emotional changes while incorporating diverse weather metaphors
- **Materials:** Weather chart with symbols relevant to different climates (not just sunny/rainy but also desert heat, snow, misty mountains, etc.), clothespins with children's names
- **Instructions:** Create a daily check-in using weather from different regions: "How's your emotional weather today? Are you sunny like a day at the beach, misty like a mountain morning, or stormy like a thunderstorm?" Discuss how weather varies around the world, just like our emotions, and that all weather patterns are natural and temporary.

Continued

3 Cultural Celebration Emotions

- **Goal:** Connect emotions to cultural celebrations and traditions
- **Materials:** Pictures of diverse cultural celebrations, art supplies
- **Instructions:** Share images of celebrations from various cultures, discussing the emotions they might evoke. Ask: "How do people look in this picture? How might they feel during this special time?" Invite children to draw a celebration from their family tradition and the feelings it creates. Emphasize that special days often bring strong emotions in all cultures, though the celebrations look different.

4 Global Calm Body Practices

- **Goal:** Introduce simple mindfulness and calming techniques from diverse traditions
- **Materials:** Yoga mats or soft space, gentle music from various cultures
- **Instructions:** Introduce simplified versions of calming body practices from different traditions: a basic yoga pose, a gentle tai chi movement, a mindful walking practice, or a simple breathing technique. Frame each as: "This is one way people in [region/culture] help their bodies and minds feel calm." Practice each method briefly and discuss which ones they find most helpful for their bodies.

Conclusion

The early years provide a critical foundation for lifelong emotional wellbeing. Through these culturally responsive activities, children ages 0-5 learn to recognize, name, and manage their feelings while developing respect for diverse emotional expressions.

Remember that children learn about emotions primarily through relationships with caring adults. When you acknowledge and validate children's feelings within their cultural context, you help build emotional intelligence that honors both their unique heritage and universal human experiences.

Consider each child's family traditions when implementing these activities. Invite families to share how emotions are expressed in their home culture, and incorporate these practices into your approach.

By weaving together universal emotional skills with culturally specific expressions, you help young children develop emotional resilience that draws strength from their cultural identity – a foundation that will support them as they grow.

[Click here for the survey!](#)

TAKE ACTION!

**SHARE YOUR
STORY**



bcdiatlanta.org/impact

**GIVE
TODAY**



bcdiatlanta.org/donate

**BECOME A
MEMBER**



bcdiatlanta.org/members

**SUBSCRIBE TO
NEWSLETTER**



bcdiatlanta.org/news