



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Betsi Cadwaladr  
University Health Board

## NEURODEVELOPMENTAL TEAM

### Understanding feelings

There are lots of things that may be impacting on how a child or young person is feeling such as:

- Managing sensory triggers within a particular environment
- Managing change to predictable routines
- Making sense of social interactions with others
- Coping with the demands of social communication in different situations









### Top tips

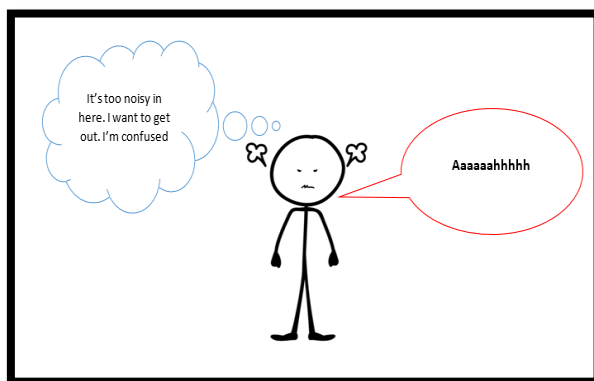
- ✓ Try not to talk to me or use lots of language with me when I am upset as it is hard for me to process what you are saying and can make me more frustrated/upset/angry
- ✓ It may help if I feel that you have acknowledged how I am feeling and why even if you do not agree with me e.g. "I understand that you are annoyed", "I would feel upset too if ....."
- ✓ Map how I am feeling onto my experience of the situation for me, as I may find this difficult to do myself – I may feel angry/upset/anxious but not understand why at the time e.g. "I think you are feeling worried because ..."
- ✓ Telling me to "calm down" is often not meaningful to me as it does not help me to understand what I need to do instead.
- ✓ Be clear and specific in the way that you talk to me
- ✓ Help me to develop an understanding of the link between physical sensations and the feelings/thoughts they represent as this may be confusing for me e.g. when your heart beats fast it can be because you are feeling worried
- ✓ Help me to build my own 'tool kit' of 'what works' for me and prompt me to do things that I find calming or distracting as I may not do this myself e.g. go and get my sensory bag, put my head phones on, play with my putty, go on the trampoline etc. Some strategies will work better at home than at school and vice verse

## Strategies that can help

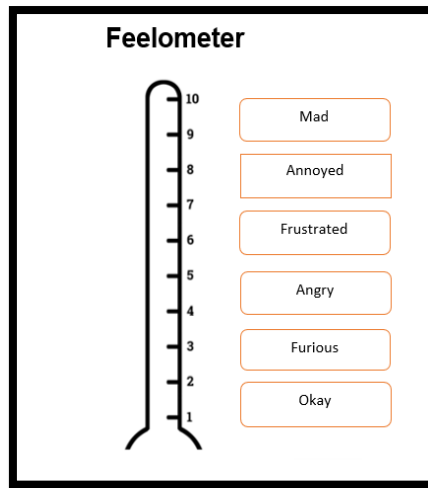
**Mapping emotions on to situations** – It is easy to assume that your child understands how they are feeling and why but this may not always be the case. Mapping emotions onto every day situations for your child can help them to relate the words that you use to the feelings that they are experiencing e.g. “I can tell you were really happy about that ...”, “I know that you are feeling cross because .....” (for examples of emotion pictures click [here](#))

5	Feeling Very angry/upset/worried	
		
4	Getting more worried or angry on the inside	
3	Starting to feel worried on the inside	
2	Feeling OK	
1	Feeling Happy/Good	

**The 5 point scale** is a very visual way of working out how much your child is able to identify their feelings and the things that impact on how they feel on a daily basis. The idea is that you start to map situations onto the scale from 1 to 5 with 1 representing things that your child enjoys, makes them feel safe or calm, up to 5 which are the things that send your child into ‘meltdown’, make them really angry or distressed. The experience of doing this is different for each person. Some young people may be very insightful into what makes them feel a certain way, others may need a significant amount of help to try and work this out. You need to have a basic understanding of the core emotions happy, sad, angry and worried before you would attempt to use the [5 point scale](#).



**Comic strips** are a great visual tool that can be used to help support a young person's understanding both of how they were feeling and how the other people in the interaction may also have felt. Using stick people, talking bubbles and thinking bubbles can be really helpful in making the process of talking about feelings simpler and easier. More information about comic strips can be found [here](#).



**Feelometers** are a good visual tool to help show and explain that feelings can go up and they can also come back down. Many young people can find grading within an emotion more difficult to understand, as their experience of feeling an emotion may be more 'black and white'. For example they may go from being 'OK' to very upset or angry very quickly but not have an understanding of how they got there. Similarly they may go from being distressed to 'OK' equally quickly which might sometimes come as a surprise to those around them (Click [here](#) for a Feelometer template)

## Talking about feelings

If you do not know how you feel and why, then using words to try and explain this can feel like an impossible task for some young people and can often then be an additional source of frustration and distress.

Even if you do know how you feel, being able to explain this using words can be very difficult, no matter how eloquent you are in other situations. This can be for a number of reasons:

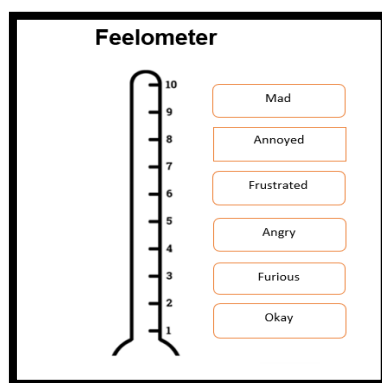
- Not having the emotional vocabulary
- Feeling anxious and so finding it harder to communicate
- Feeling overwhelmed from a sensory perspective
- Not being able to predict the other persons response

Other factors, such as a young person's language and learning profile will also play a part.

## Top tips

- ✓ Try to give me space and time to try to work out how I am feeling before talking to me. It may be that when I have calmed down I am more able to talk to you about how I am feeling and why
- ✓ Make sure we are speaking 'the same language' e.g. your interpretation of a feeling word and mine, may be different or I might use my own words for specific feelings e.g. "uppydowny" to let you know that I am not Ok, "tinselly" to tell you that I feel excited
- ✓ Sometimes words might be too difficult and I might need you to help me to find other, more visual ways of letting you know how I feel. Understand that just because I can tell you how I feel sometimes, does not mean that I will be able to do it all the time.
- ✓ Try to map out things that you know are likely to worry me, in advance, identifying whether anything can be done to reduce my anxiety e.g. "it might be a bit noisy so you could take your head phones", taking a 'fiddle toy' to keep me calm, making the situation predictable to me so I know what to expect.






## Strategies that can help:



✚ **Feelometers** can be a good way of finding out how a young person interprets the meaning of different 'feeling' words e.g. on a scale on 1-10 with 1 meaning 'OK' and 10 being 'furious' a young person might say 'frustrated' but mean "I am really angry"

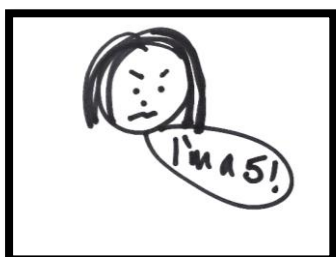
Having a shared understanding of the words that the young person uses to express their feelings is really important so that you know what they mean and can interpret their communication in the right way.

Write down the words that they use and map them onto a feelometer so that you can understand what those words mean to them.

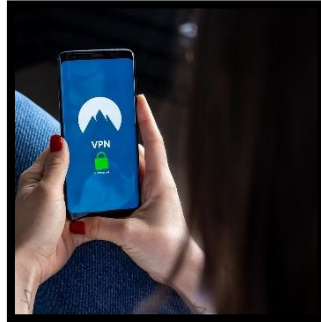
	2	3	4	5
<b>Happy</b> Ready and willing to work	<b>Anxious</b> Trying to stay focused Having a hard time staying on task	<b>Frustrated</b> I don't get it I'm getting stressed I need to take a break	<b>Overwhelmed</b> Everything is too hard Give me space	<b>Angry</b> I'm not listening any more I need a quiet place to calm down
				

There are alternative and more visual ways of expressing how or what a young person is feeling that do not rely solely on words:

- **they could use the 5 point scale** "I am a 4" which might mean "I am about to have a meltdown" (Examples of [5 point scales](#))
- **they could use a colour** which lets you know that they have had a good/bad day (Example of a [traffic light visual resource](#))
- **they could use pictures** that show you how they feel, which might help you to unpick what has happened. (Example of [feelings cards](#))



- ✚ **It does not have to be spoken** – sometimes a young person might be able to write down how they are feeling but not be able to tell you face to face. There are lots of ways that you can facilitate your young person in doing this, depending on their age e.g.
- A worry book where they can write down things about the day that have upset them for you to look at and talk through with them
  - They could text you how they are feeling or use the notes section on their phone.
- These are just a few ideas and you will need to work out what works best for your young person.



- ✚ **Use comic strips** as a visual way of making sense of feelings in situations. Sometimes this is easier for young people with Neurodevelopmental profiles, as the focus is less about a face to face conversation, which can increase the communication demands for that young person, and more about simplifying communication on paper. It also enables you to highlight that people may say something that appears to express one emotion, but think/feel a different emotion. This can be very helpful to develop the young person's insight into the way in which they communicate and why e.g. "It was too noisy and you wanted to get out so you shouted". Once there is a shared understanding, you can then build on this to develop the use of alternative strategies for next time e.g. "Next time it gets too loud at the table, you can get down and go in to the lounge for 5 minutes".

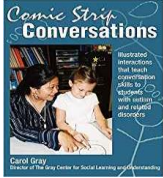
## Useful Links to resources:

### [ASDINFOALES website](#)

Resources to develop personal profiles, picture cards and advice sheets.

### [/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips](#)

More information on social stories and comic strips.



### [Carol Gray Social Stories](#)

Comic Strip Conversations: Illustrated interactions that teach conversation skills to students with autism and related disorders

### <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/search?term=feelings+chart>

Feelometer and feeling charts and templates.

### [Boardmaker software](#)

Software to develop visuals

### [Blobcards](#)

Blob cards

### [blacksheepress](#)

Practical Pragmatics 2006 Blacksheep Press Illustrations by Helen Rippon



### [5pointscale](#)

Incredible 5-Point Scale Assisting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders in Understanding Social Interactions and Controlling Their Emotional Responses

Bec Shanks

Senior Specialist ND SALT

Central Neurodevelopment Team

Updated April 2020