

Emotional Vocabulary Conversation Starters

15 Questions to Help Kids Name, Understand,
and Express Their Feelings



How to Use These

- **Best times:** Dinner, bedtime, car rides, or anytime you have a few minutes together
- **No right answers:** You're creating space for emotional expression, not testing knowledge
- **Listen more than you talk:** Resist the urge to fix, teach, or minimize what they share
- **Adjust for age:** Use simpler language for younger kids, allow silence with teens
- **Start with yourself:** Model emotional vocabulary by answering first sometimes

1

Ages 4+

If today had an emotional 'weather report,' what would it be?

Makes emotions playful and accessible, especially for younger kids. Allows for mixed emotions (sunny with clouds, stormy then clearing).

Follow-up questions:

- Were there any weather changes during the day?
- What caused the weather to change?
- What kind of weather do you hope for tomorrow?

2

Ages 4+

What was the strongest feeling you had today?

Helps kids identify and prioritize their emotional experiences. Encourages them to go beyond 'good' or 'bad' day.

Follow-up questions:

- What do you think caused that feeling?
- Where did you feel it in your body?
- Did the feeling change or stay the same?

3

Ages 5+

When did you feel proud of yourself today?

Connects emotions to specific actions and builds self-awareness. Teaches kids that pride isn't about perfection—it's about effort.

Follow-up questions:

- What did that pride feel like?
- Did anyone else notice, or was it just for you?
- What made you choose to do that?

4

Ages 5+

What made you feel calm or peaceful today?

Helps kids recognize positive emotions beyond excitement. Builds awareness of what creates internal peace.

Follow-up questions:

- Where were you when you felt that way?
- Who was with you, or were you alone?
- Could you create that feeling on purpose?

5

Ages 5+

When did you feel brave today, even in a small way?

Reframes courage as everyday actions, not just big moments. Builds confidence through recognition of small acts of bravery.

Follow-up questions:

- What made that feel brave to you?
- Were you nervous before you did it?
- How did you feel after?

6

Ages 6+

Was there a moment today that felt hard or uncomfortable?

Normalizes discomfort and introduces nuanced emotion words like frustrated, overwhelmed, awkward, or nervous.

Follow-up questions:

- What word would you use to describe that feeling?
- Did you handle it the way you wanted to?
- What would have made it easier?

7

Ages 6+

Was there a moment you felt disappointed or let down?

Helps kids distinguish disappointment from sadness or anger. Creates opportunity for parents to model empathy.

Follow-up questions:

- What were you hoping would happen?
- Is the disappointment about the situation or about a person?
- What helps when you feel disappointed?

8

Ages 6+

When did you feel left out or lonely today?

Validates social-emotional experiences that kids often hide. Opens conversations about belonging and friendship.

Follow-up questions:

- What did you do with that feeling?
- Is there someone you wish had included you?
- Do you think others felt that way too?

9

Ages 6+

What emotion are you feeling right now while we talk?

Brings emotional awareness into the present moment. Teaches kids that emotions exist even during ordinary activities.

Follow-up questions:

- Is it comfortable or uncomfortable?
- Does talking about feelings change how you feel?
- Do you notice emotions during regular activities usually?

10

Ages 7+

What made you feel connected to someone today?

Builds relational vocabulary and helps kids recognize moments of belonging, trust, and attachment.

Follow-up questions:

- How did that connection feel different from being alone?
- Did you do anything to create that feeling?
- Who makes you feel most connected usually?

11

Ages 7+

What emotion was hardest to handle today?

Encourages reflection on emotional regulation without shame. Acknowledges that some feelings are harder to manage than others.

Follow-up questions:

- What did you do when that feeling showed up?
- What helped, even a little bit?
- Is that an emotion that's often hard for you?

12

Ages 8+

Did anything surprise you emotionally today?

Teaches that emotions can be unexpected and changeable. Introduces words like confused, relieved, startled, or delighted.

Follow-up questions:

- What were you expecting to feel?
- Was the surprise feeling pleasant or unpleasant?
- Do surprises usually bother you or excite you?

13

Ages 8+

What feeling do you wish had shown up more today?

Encourages emotional intention and goal-setting. Introduces aspirational emotions like calm, confident, patient, or curious.

Follow-up questions:

- When do you usually feel that way?
- Is there anything you could do tomorrow to invite that feeling?
- What gets in the way of feeling that way?

14

Ages 8+

Was there a feeling you tried to hide today? Why?

Teaches that all emotions are valid, even ones we don't want others to see. Opens discussion about emotional authenticity.

Follow-up questions:

- What made you want to hide it?
- Do you usually hide that feeling?
- What would happen if you didn't hide it?

15

Ages 9+

When did you feel misunderstood today?

Particularly valuable for tweens and teens. Teaches complex social-emotional vocabulary and validates the experience of not being heard.

Follow-up questions:

- What do you wish that person had understood?
- How did being misunderstood make you feel?
- Have you ever misunderstood someone else that way?



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