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Helpful Ways to Talk About Feelings

Size

When your child shares an upset feeling, ask them to show you with their body if the feeling is small, medium, or big. Use your arms and hands to communicate each size as you speak it. For example, *"Are you a little mad, medium-sized mad, or really, really big mad?"* When we talk about the size of feelings, we are helping our children learn that feelings:

- Come in different intensities
- Come and go
- Can be made smaller or more manageable when we learn what to say and do to make things better

Practice

Use the word "practice" frequently as you practice your own communication and guide your child to practice their communication. For example, you might talk about your own communication by saying something like, *"I am going to practice my patience so I can make sure to handle this situation with kindness."* Or you might coach your child by saying, *"Practice using your Talking Voice so I can listen to what is upsetting you."* When you use the word "practice," your children will understand that we need to put effort in and try again when we have not yet formed a positive communication habit. Let your children know that practice does not make perfect, but it does make things better!

Tools

Talk with your child about how tools help us. Hammers help us build. Pencils help us draw and write. Communication tools help us make and keep friends and do our best in school. Using the word "tools" makes communication sound and feel more tangible and lets children know there are positive actions we use to help us express feelings. (The Kimochis Keys to Communication are the tools!)

Habit

Using the word "habit" instead of "skill" can also make a big difference. The word "skill" gives the impression that you either have the ability or don't have the ability. The word "skill" can also make one think that there is a right and a wrong way to do something.

Now take the word "habit." Habits are often acquired without being directly taught. We can develop not-so-good habits, but with teaching, repetition, practice, positive feedback, and gentle reminders, we can learn and change to new, positive habits. Using the word "habit" in relation to communication can help your child feel more hopeful that they can improve. It can also encourage children to be more open to redoing or trying again when they forget to use positive communication.

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Story

Most people start a conversation with "wh" questions: *"What? When? Where? Why? How?"* Typically, these questions result in simple answers. Consider the response you get when you ask someone, *"How are you?"* Most people will say, *"Fine."* Instead, try using the word "story" as a way to encourage a fuller, richer response. *"Tell me a story about recess today."* Everyone likes a story, and using the word "story" also can make a child feel less interrogated or on the spot.

Mistakes

Make your family a "Second Chance Family." Tell your child that everyone will make mistakes when we express feelings. We may yell or accidentally say unkind words in the heat of the moment. Make an agreement that in your family, everyone gets the chance to stop and start again or redo a moment if they make a communication mistake.

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Kimochis Keys to Communication
for Early Childhood

Get someone's attention.
SEL TOOLS: Eye contact, Communication Tap

Use a talking voice.
SEL TOOLS: Talking Voice, Fighting Voice, Serious Voice

Use a talking face and body.
SEL TOOLS: Talking Eyes, Fighting Eyes, Serious Eyes

Choose helping words.
SEL TOOLS: Helping vs Hurting Words, "Ouch"

Redo hurtful moments.
SEL TOOLS: Everyone Makes Mistakes, Kimochis Re-do

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The Kimochis Characters

Character	Feelings SEL Tools	Story	Personality
CLOUD 	Happy, Mad, Sad • Self-Regulation	• Lives in the sky • Favorite number: 9 • Favorite color: gray • Loves butterscotch pudding and tea	• Unpredictable; happy one day, then mad or sad • Can be moody • Working on controlling his emotions
BUG 	Brave, Left Out • Self-Talk	• Lives in a manzanita tree • Favorite number: 2 • Favorite color: magenta • Loves honey • Plays the mandolin	• Smart & very thoughtful • Cautious & a little scared to try new things, but he dreams of flying • Afraid of change • Shy & can get left out
HUGGTOPUS 	Silly, Frustrated • Attention and Focus	• Lives in a swimming hole • Favorite number: 8 • Favorite color: pink • Special treat is bubblegum! • Plays the xylophone	• Silly, excited, sometimes, out of control • Gets too close to friends • Not aware of others' needs • Can make anyone feel better
CAT 	Curious, Cranky • Re-Do Hurtful Moments	• Lives in a cherry blossom tree • Favorite number: 10 • Favorite color: purple • Loves warm milk & almond cookies	• Is a strong leader, but can be too bossy • Can get cranky & take it out on her friends • Is practicing how to redo her mistakes
LOVEY DOVE 	Proud, Kind • Compassion and Empathy	• Adopted her baby, Turtle Dove • Lives in a Japanese maple tree • Favorite number: 11 • Favorite color: yellow • Loves carrots, raisins • Loves to sing	• Sweet and loving • Proud of her friends • Hopeful that everyone will get along, anxious when they don't • Sends friendly signals • Acts and speaks in kind ways

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Glossary

Body Language: The body postures (head, face, arms, torso, legs) that convey emotion.

Bounce Back: When a child does not fall apart when feeling disappointed or frustrated, but instead copes and rebounds.

Calm-Down Breath: Strategy of taking a deep breath to calm feelings before speaking and/or acting.

Calm-Down Strategies: These are strategies that children select that will help them calm down when feeling upset emotions. Strategies could include: counting to 10; taking deep breaths; relaxing tight muscles in arms and hands; squeezing a stress ball; kneading clay; visualizing a peaceful place; rubbing a smooth stone; wiggling a pipe cleaner; writing in a journal; getting up and walking around; and others.

Communication Tap: A light, gentle tap on the shoulder of another person as a way to get their attention.

Eye contact: Looking at others' eyes when listening and talking.

Facial Expression: When eyes, mouth and face posture show an emotion.

Fighting Body: A tight and tense body position.

Fighting Face: A pinched, mean and scary face.

Fighting Voice: A loud and hurtful tone of voice that conveys aggressiveness.

Friendly Signals: Using gestures and words to convey friendliness; eye contact, head nod, smile, wave, pat on the back

Helping Words: Positive words that resolve feelings and conflicts.

Hurting Words: Negative or loaded words that create upset feelings.

Know When to Be Silly and When to Be Serious: A way to help children differentiate between times to be silly and times to be serious.

Kotowaza: A Japanese word for a wise wisdom. Used as self-talk statements to promote positive behavior.

Name It: State the obvious. For example: 1) describe exactly what you said and/or did that was not okay; 2) explain yourself *("I get bossy when I feel cranky."* or *"I feel excited, so I'm talking really fast."*); or 3) share a unique quality about yourself *("I'm colorblind." "I'm adopted."*)

Negative Self-Talk: When we say things in our head that don't help us. For example, *"I can't do this."*

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Or *"This is too hard."*

Not Now Signal: A nonverbal strategy so children can realize they interrupted. Place your pointer finger between your ear and the person you can't give your attention to, do not make eye contact, wait.

"Ouch:" Said in a soft voice with hurt facial expression to let someone know in a gentle, shame free way that they hurt your feelings.

Own It: Bravely apologizing for unkind words and actions; taking full responsibility with no excuses. This strategy is paired with the Name It strategy.

Positive Self-Talk: The talk you use inside your head. Positive self-talk is encouraging talk such as, "*I think I can; I have done hard things before; I can do this."*

Re-Do: To begin again and do words and actions over in a more positive way.

Serious Face: Wide eyes and raised eyebrows that communicate that what you are saying is important. Use a serious face when you want to send an *"I Mean It"* message without being mean.

Serious Voice: Slow, stretched speech that communicates your message is important. Use a serious voice when you want to send an *"I Mean It"* message without being mean.

Stop Hands: Hold hands up near face in a friendly way. These hands say *"Please stop"* nonverbally.

Take the Time to Be Kind: Never miss a chance to include and be kind to others.

Talking Body: An open and relaxed body that conveys respect and self-control.

Talking Face: Relaxed eyes, brows, and mouth that convey respect and self-control.

Talking Hand: Put your hand out palm up. Use your other hand to tap your open palm. Wait patiently for the person to return the object. Say *"Thank You"* with eye contact when they do.

Talking Voice: A calm tone of voice, slightly slowed down, with appropriate volume that conveys respect and self-control.

Use Your Eyes and Ears to Be Kind: Look and listen for the signs that someone is feeling left out.

Social-Emotional Behavior Scale

Kimochis™ Educational Tool Kit

Teacher (Student's) Name _____ School _____Grade _____Date _____

☐ Check box if using to rate full class. ☐ Check box if using to rate one student.

How often does your class (student) engage in these behaviors?

1 = Almost never 2 = Once in a while 3 = Occasionally 4 = Usually 5 = Almost always

	1	2	3	4	5	NOTES
Student(s) gains peer's attention before speaking (tap shoulder, call name, use eye contact)						
Student(s) uses calm eyes when expressing upset feelings						
Student(s) uses calm tone of voice when expressing upset feelings						
Student(s) uses calm facial expression and positive body language when expressing upset feelings						
Student(s) uses "helpful" and kind words when expressing upset feelings						
Student(s) expresses sympathy for others						
Student(s) can redo a hurtful moment when prompted by an adult						
Student(s) self-corrects or re-does hurtful acts						
Student(s) maintains focus and attention when distracted by peers or environment						
Student(s) realizes when they have invaded others' space and makes adjustment						
Student(s) responds appropriately when others invade their personal space						
Student(s) uses effective strategies to join activities with peers						
Student(s) knows what to say and do when excluded						
Student(s) invites others to join in group activities						
Student(s) knows what to say and do when teased						
Student(s) apologizes and takes ownership for hurtful words and actions						
Student(s) works in kind and respectful ways with classmates who can be difficult						
Student(s) tries to work out problems with others before going to teacher						
Student(s) returns from playground reporting fewer problems						
Student(s) makes positive comments about themselves (does not make comments like, "Nobody likes me.")						
Student(s) makes positive comments about others (does not make comments like, "Everybody is mean.")						