

Tips for parents to help with coronavirus changes:
The next phase of emotional coping and change

Introduction:

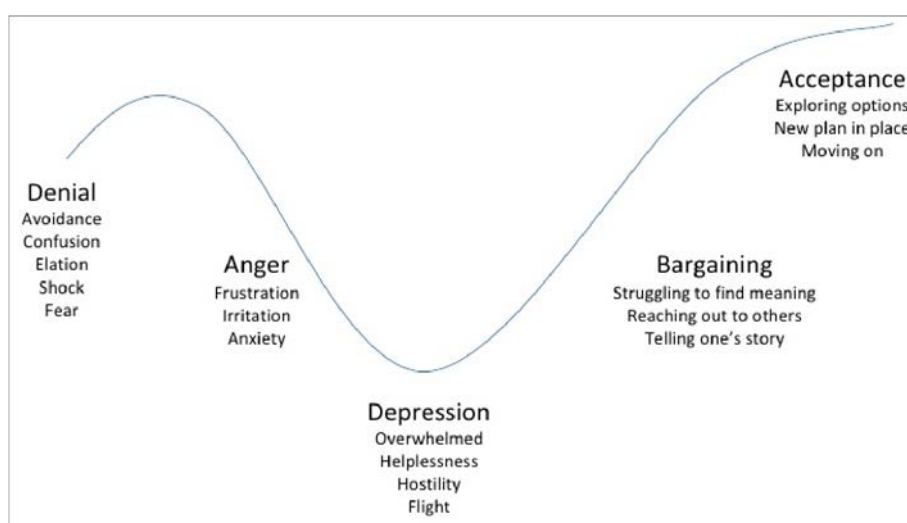
We have put together this resource to support families with planning for their child over the next phase of transition relating to coronavirus changes. For many this includes thinking about or making decisions about your child's return to school as well as continuing to support their emotional and practical needs.

This resource contains some ideas to help you with some initial thinking around the emotional needs of your child over this next transition phase.

Of course, as always, take those bits that are helpful for you and your family and remember that at times of change trying to do too much can be quite overwhelming for children with autism as well as their parents. For some parents it will just be an awareness of these issues that is helpful whilst other families may wish to employ a few more strategies or visuals to help with planning their transitions.

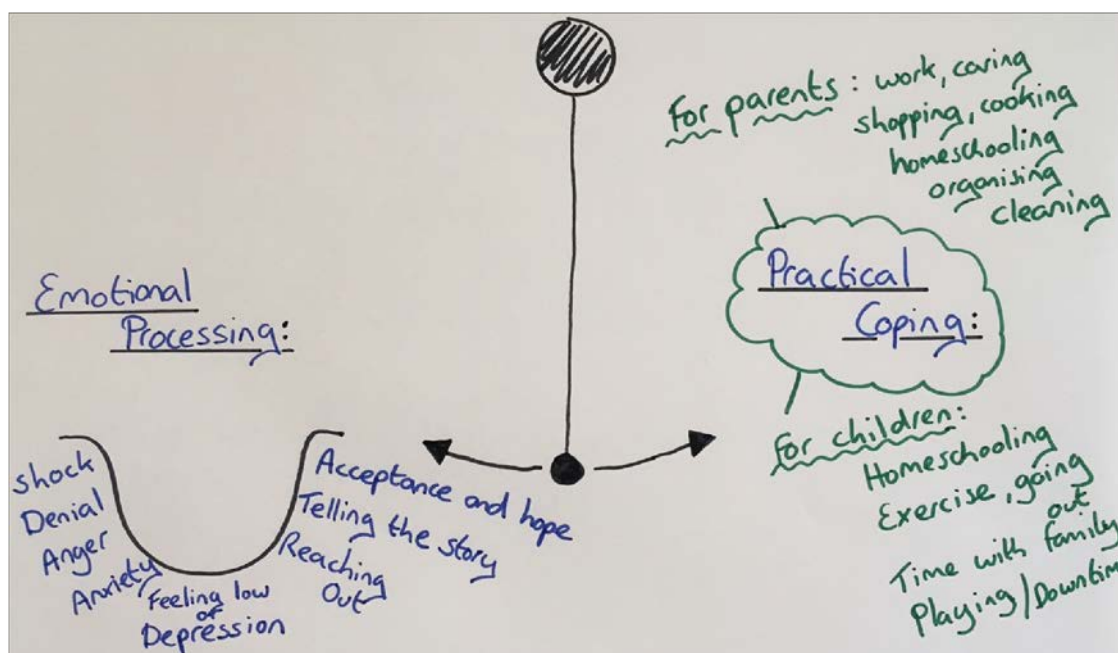
Be aware of you and your child's emotional coping over this time:

Although coronavirus has been a new and different experience, theories about how people cope with loss and trauma have been helpful in supporting us to understand coronavirus coping:



This drawing shows a cycle of the feelings that can often come up in coping with a big change. Many describe a sense of swinging between different emotions and this can feel a bit like an emotional wave. This model has been useful over lockdown (for example, in work with teenagers) to explain some of the more extreme highs and lows. The good news is that as time goes on most find that the swinging reduces and more time is usually spent with feelings like acceptance and hope.

We are also thought to swing between these emotions and coping with everyday life. The sketch below shows what this process might have been like for families in relation to coronavirus coping:



It explains why at first things just didn't feel real but as time has gone there has been more reaching out and a sharing of stories/experiences.

For those who have had a stressful time during lockdown emotional processing may have been delayed where they have just needed to focus on the practical and time to reach out to others has been limited. Families should not worry about this if they have been working hard to cope – it just means that some recovery/processing time will be helpful further down the line. For some emotions may come up at later stage when life becomes more settled and this will be part of a natural process of recovery.

Some parents have described how their children with autism have had a positive time at home appreciating less demands from the outside world. These children may be more worried about returning to how things were and we also need to consider that things will not be the same.

Trauma experts have been forthcoming over the pandemic in reminding us there are many emotional difficulties which children can naturally show more of when responding to big changes. These include: fear of being alone, speech/concentration difficulties, clinginess, increase in difficult behaviours, sleep disturbance, regression in toileting and spending more time alone.

For children with autism, sensory behaviours (including stimming), anxiety-based routines and special interests are also likely to increase as their way of trying to regulate themselves to feel better. It is helpful to be aware that you may see a range of differences in your child's behaviour and that this is part of their natural response.

It is helpful to keep a record of changes and let others who support your child know about them so that they are prepared for these as well.

Do seek further advice from professionals/services (shown at the end of this document) if your child appears stuck for too long in an emotional process or behaviour or as always if safety becomes an issue.

Children who have experienced bereavement or stressful situations over lockdown are likely to need more support in their return to school. For these children it will be helpful to speak with your child's school and/or take advice from organisations (such as Winston's wish www.winstonswish.org.uk) in planning around your child's particular adjustment needs.

Margot Sunderland has produced some lovely books and resources to help children with additional needs cope with difficult changes – we have included some of her books in the references.

Parents will also be adjusting and coping which means that it is extra important to take things slowly, build in self-care and seek support for yourself if you are finding it difficult to cope.

Help your child with their memories and story of their time at home:

'We are all in the same storm but not all in the same boat' – whilst there may be some similarities, every family will have had different experiences over lockdown.



It is helpful at this stage to start thinking about some of the important memories and stories that your child will take forward from their experience and this is an important part of moving on. Think about how to support your child in their communicating with others. For children with autism this is particularly important as they are vulnerable to repeating or even taking on things that others might say.

Try to find ways of keeping this simple for your child – it does not need to be a long verbal or written account. The more that you can visually reinforce some of your child's lockdown story (positive and negative) the more confident your child will be to remember this and keep their story separate to that of their peers.

Here are some ideas for activities that you could use to help with this:

- We have attached some PDFs '**My lockdown experience**' (by Reachout ASC) and worksheets from '**My 2020 COVID-19 time capsule**' (developed by Natalie Long of Long Creations, <https://www.facebook.com/LongCreations>). These kinds of resources can help you and your child to document some of their experiences.
- Look through pictures on your phone with your child to reinforce what they have done – jot down some of the things that they say so that you can keep practicing some story highlights/phrases with them. Some children might like to do this in a role play.
- Create a short film of your pictures/videos with your child using an App which can be sent to your child's teacher.
- Print a few of the pictures and keep some of their work/memories as reminders – perhaps using a special frame or cork board.
- Create a memory box or scrap book using pictures and memories. Some children have enjoyed being creative over lockdown and will benefit from sharing their work with others (even if this is just in pictures) which will also help to prompt their memories and communication.



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If your family has experienced significant trauma or stress over lockdown then it is even more important to think about how to frame this in a simple way for your child. Share important events with school so that they can be aware and monitor how your child is.

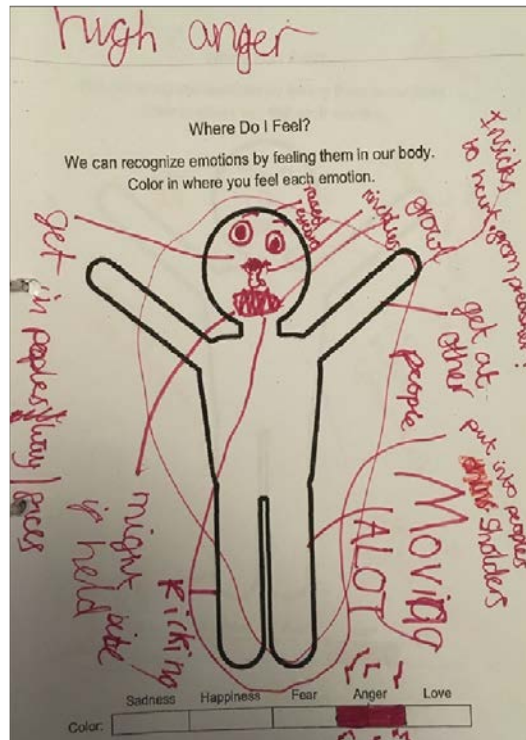
Helping your child with their feelings and worries:

Some children with autism find it hard to notice their feelings in time to prevent behaviours where others are hyper-emotional and very sensitive to changes in emotional temperature. Wherever your child is on this spectrum and whatever their lockdown experience, finding



ways of helping children to recognise their feelings (as part of their story) will support moving onto the next phase.

It could help to look at different feelings in the body with your child – they may need some help with this, but it can then help them to identify how they feel. Here are some examples:

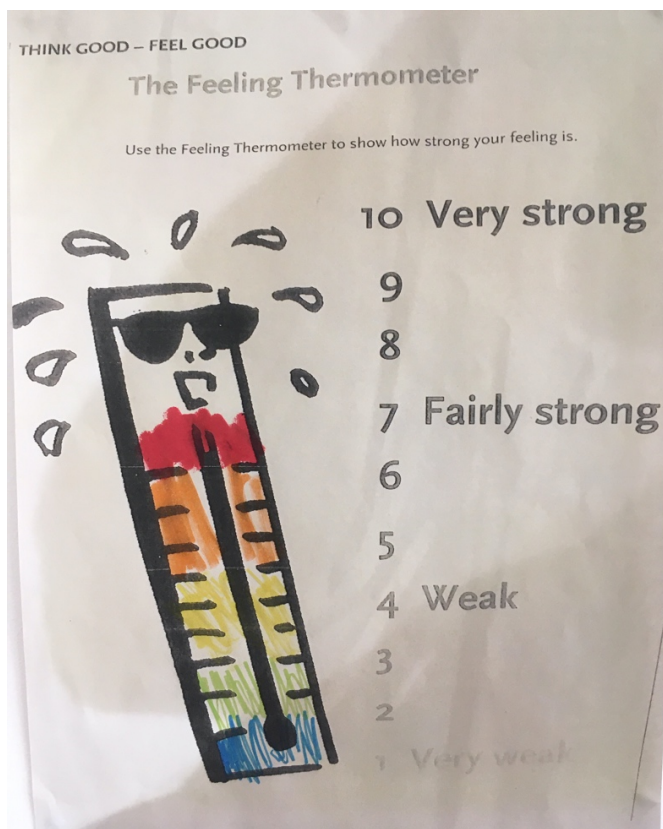


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If your child has had an emotions key fob or other communication system for feelings at school then it could be a good time to reintroduce this (and practice it at home if you can). Any strategy that supports them to communicate feelings when they start going to other places or back to school is helpful:












Big and small feelings are very different (for example, relating to worry). So working on the size of feelings can be also helpful - either in terms of big, medium or small (showing them gestures) or with a scale:



The attached visual (from Reachout ASC) can help with mapping your child’s coronavirus related feelings and their intensity:

Transitioning Back to School

	 Intensity	 How I Feel
 Virus		
 vaccine		
 social distancing		
 shops closed		
 Isolated		
 washing hands		
 coughing		

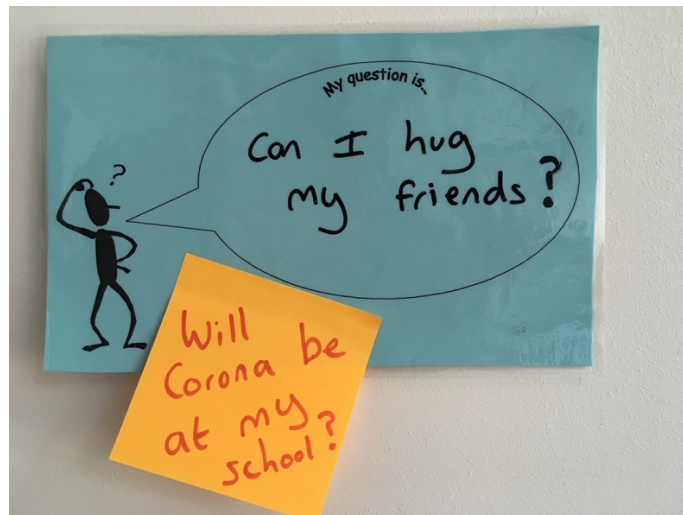
Created in WidgeOnline.com for Emma Turver

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Some children like to create worry boxes or other ways of posting or storing their feelings and sometimes their strategies too:



Keep open to your child's questions across the transition:



It is important to encourage these and find ways of answering them. Some coronavirus worries may affect children more as they return to school and hear others talking about the virus.

Try to form your own rational ideas when talking with your child and responding to their questions. These can be guided by checking in on the latest possible evidence. The research on children and coronavirus infection is changing all the time and the government's latest guidelines reflect this:

- <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

Checking in with school will also be helpful so that you can understand the safety measures that they will have in place. You may want to discuss plans with your child's teacher in relation to your child and their autism profile.

Anxious children will benefit from responses being written to avoid patterns of repetitive questions and answers establishing.

This article contains some helpful advice for responding to children's coronavirus worries:

- ChildMind: Talking to Children <https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>

Access resources for coronavirus worry if your child could benefit from them:

For children who have strong coronavirus worries, it has been helpful to use stories to help with explaining that these feelings are natural. There are now many social stories and You Tube clips around to provide a starting point for some thinking time with your child:

For example:

- Here is a link to a simple little story with lovely illustrations:
<https://en.calameo.com/read/000777721945cfe5bb9cc?authid=Xu9pcOzU3TQx>
- Here is a link to a You Tube clip using playmobile characters:
<https://youtu.be/5DI0GKpMNs4>
- ELSA: Coronavirus Story for Children <https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/coronavirus-story-for-children/>
- This lovely story is available in many different languages and has already been used to support many children from around the world:
<https://www.mindheart.co/descargables>

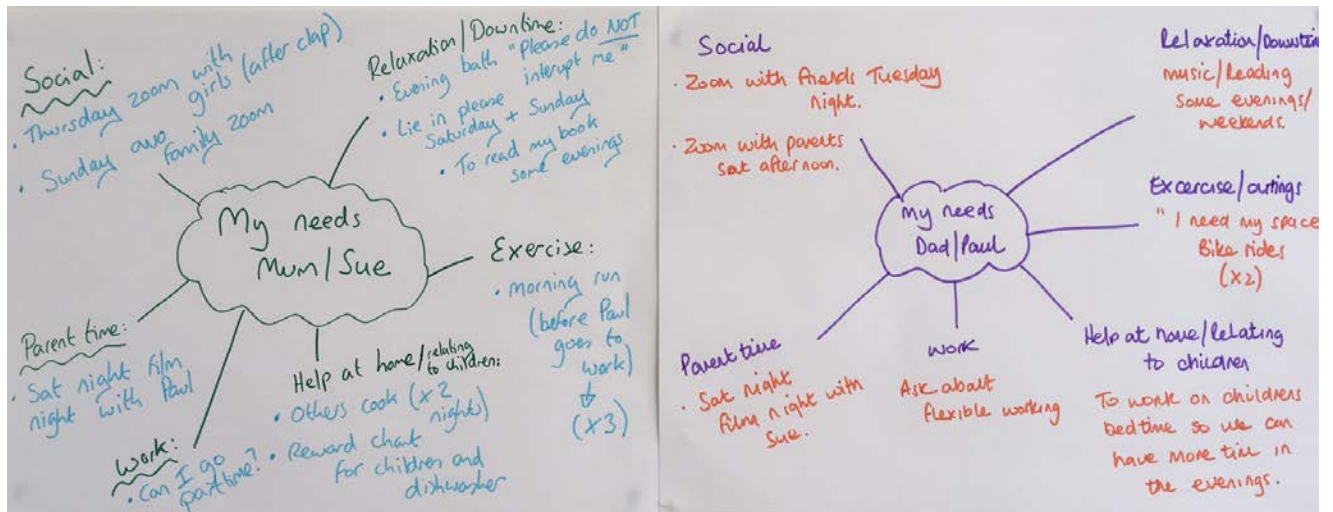
Some children may not have many coronavirus worries at all and so it is important not to create anxiety if your child seems to be fine with things. However, stay open to their curiosity which may change as they start to mix with other children.

Be aware of your own anxiety and needs:

A lot of the helpful support for adults has described the importance of focusing on what we can control and taking this forwards. Whilst worrying about what is going on is very natural, spending lots of time worrying about what is out of our control is difficult and can make things feel harder.

To feel more in control some parents have found it helpful to mind map their needs along with those of others in the family. This can be one way of keeping aware of what is important to you and finding some practical ways forwards.





Further references for coronavirus coping:

Here are some further and updated links relating to coronavirus:

American Psychological Association: Information on Pandemics (a wide range of resources)

https://www.apa.org/practice/programs/dmhi/research-information/pandemics?utm_source=linkedin&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=apapandemics&utm_content=pandemics-resources

BBC: How to protect your mental health

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-51873799>

CBBC: Video and Questions

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51861089>

ChildMind: Talking to Children

<https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>

ELSA: Coronavirus Story for Children

<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/coronavirus-story-for-children/>

Evidence for learning: Including Barry Carpenter's work on the need for a recovery curriculum

<https://www.evidenceforlearning.net/recoverycurriculum/>

National Association of School Psychologists: Parent Resources

[https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-\(coronavirus\)-a-parent-resource](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-(coronavirus)-a-parent-resource)



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National child traumatic stress network

Describe the range of natural responses that children may show relating to coronavirus trauma and change
https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/parent_caregiver_guide_to_helping_families_cope_with_the_coronavirus_disease_2019_covid-19.pdf

Reach out ASC

Lynn McCann is an autism specialist and teacher. She has put together a comprehensive course to support the transition of children back to school following lockdown – this free course made up of 5 minute talks is highly recommended for parents and teachers (following the www.schudio link below).
<https://www.reachoutasc.com> (see transition resources in the resources section)
<https://www.schudio.tv/courses/preparing-autistic-send-children-for-going-back-to-school>

Star Stream

The Star Stream team based in Leeds have put together a comprehensive collection of social stories and resources to support children with autism in their emotional coping and transition packs for different ages all relating to coronavirus. There is a useful free symbols sections for parents to personalise their own stories and timetables: <http://www.starsteam.org.uk/coronavirus-resources>

Young Minds: Feeling Anxious about Coronavirus

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-you-re-anxious-about-coronavirus>

This educational psychology website provides a further helpful overview of advice and resources:

<https://edpsy.org.uk/blog/2020/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-children-families-and-professionals/>

Here are some books which may be help communication of feelings:

Draw on Your Emotions

Margot Sunderland. A resource to help people express and communication their emotions.

Have You Filled A Bucket Today? A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids

Carol McCloud. Encourages positive behaviour and expressing kindness and appreciation.

How are you Peeling: Foods with Moods

Saxton Freymann & Joost Elffers. Explores how emotions look through pictures of Foods. A good way to talk about emotions with young children.

The Way I Feel

Janan Cain. Explores feelings and a helpful way to talk about emotions with young children.

'Think Good Feel Good': A CBT workbook for children and young people Paul

Stallard (2002).

What To Do When You're Scared & Worried: A Guide for Kids

James Crist. A help guide to processing fears and worries (ages 9-13).



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Scaredy Squirrel (Series of children's books for children who worry about outings/events)
Melanie Watt (2008). Also available in spoken form over You Tube

Here are some books which may help communication about difficult events or bereavement:

Something Bad Happened: A Kid's Guide to Coping with events in the News Dawn Huebner. How to process different world events (ages 6-12).

The Day the Sea Went Out and Never Came Back
Margot Sunderland. A story for children who have lost someone they love (ages 4-12).

I have a question about death: clear answers for all kids, including children with ASD. Grad Gaines, A & Polsky, M (2007) Jessica Kingsley.

**With thanks to children and parents for sharing their work and resources (any work/drawings shared in this document is done so with permission from children and their parents)
With thanks to Lynn McCann and www.reachoutasc.com for sharing their resources**

**This document has been researched and developed by Tanya Rawlinson
(Clinical Psychologist and NAS licenced EarlyBird Trainer)**



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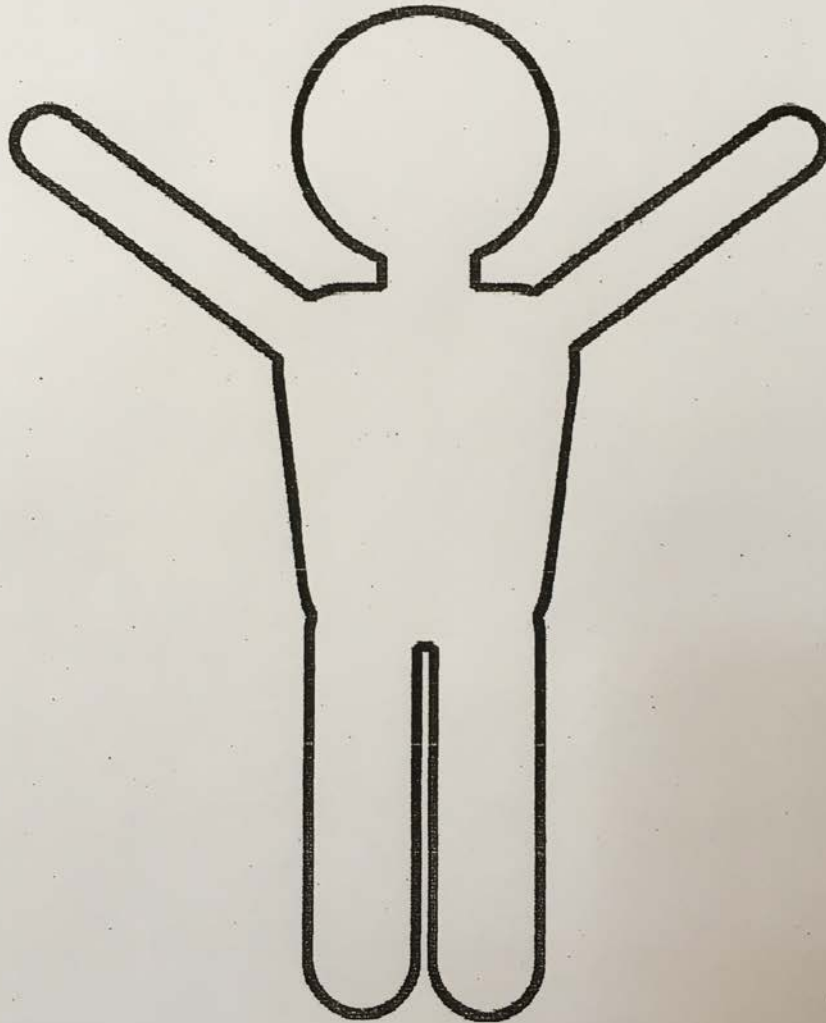
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Where Do I Feel?

We can recognize emotions by feeling them in our body.
Color in where you feel each emotion.



	Sadness	Happiness	Fear	Anger	Love
Color:					

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