

PARENT HANDOUT: MOOD TRACKING



WHAT IS MOOD TRACKING?

- ▶ In order for you and your child to better understand how your child feels, they will need to practice feelings identification and feelings expression.
- ▶ Feelings identification is a term for being able to name your feelings with detail and accuracy. Feelings identification goes beyond saying you feel “good” or “bad” and instead involves developing a richer feelings vocabulary. Feelings expression is a term for sharing emotions in safe and productive ways.
- ▶ The use of mood tracking to identify and record feelings is a helpful way to increase feelings identification and expression. A Mood Tracker is a simple system that can help your child label and record their feelings.
- ▶ As your child improves their feelings identification and expression through mood tracking, you and your child may notice patterns in their moods. Paying attention to these patterns is an important first step to figuring out ways to improve mood. Having a better understanding of their emotions will help your child use other helpful skills, such as the Relaxation Skills (Depression Skill 3) and Problems Solving worksheets (Depression Skill 5) in this guide.

HERE'S HOW TO BEGIN MOOD TRACKING AT HOME

- 1 Make a master list of emotions.
 - a **Important Feelings for Children:** You may want to track the following feelings: **Happy, Sad, Mad, and Scared.** You can add more based on your child’s vocabulary, understanding, and needs.
 - b **Important Feelings for Adolescents:** You may want to track the following feelings: **Happy, Sad, Depressed, Angry, Frustrated, Stressed, Worried,** and **Neutral.** You can add more based on your adolescent’s vocabulary, understanding, and needs.
- 2 Expand feelings vocabulary.
 - a **Expanding the Feelings Vocabulary:** You will need a timer, two pieces of paper, and two pens. Set the timer for one minute (30 seconds for younger children) and say to your child, **“We are going to come up with as many different feelings words as we can. Words like happy, sad, and any more you can think of. When I say go, start your list. I’ll do mine at the same time. We will put our lists together at the end.”** When time is up, compare your lists and create a “master list” that contains the feeling words you and your child think are most necessary for tracking their moods. Use tips 1 and 2 above to make sure you are including key feelings.
- 3 Introduce mood tracking.
 - a **Introduction to Mood Tracking for Children:** “Feelings have names like happy, sad, mad, and scared. We show how we are feeling on our faces, through our words, and through our actions. Feelings can also be called emotions or moods. We are going to try an activity that will help us understand more about your feelings. At the end of each day, we will use this worksheet to track your feelings for that day. Did you feel happy, sad, mad, or something else? We will also write down what happened that day. Doing this will help you become an expert at sharing your feelings, which will let us work together on helping you feel better.”
 - b **Introduction to Mood Tracking for Adolescents:** “We named a lot of different feelings during the Speed Game. Feelings can also be called emotions or moods. Happy, sad, depressed (which means really down and hopeless), angry, frustrated, stressed, worried and neutral (that means no feeling) are important ones that you and I are going to make sure we include in our vocabularies. Many people find it helpful to track their moods in order to get more practice identifying how they feel, notice any patterns in moods throughout the day, and then use the information to figure out ways to improve mood. This worksheet is one good way to try this. You can record your feelings and the situation that caused those feelings for morning, afternoon, and evening. Some people like to do this in the moment and other people like to do this at the end of the day. What would you like to do?”

CHILD WORKSHEET: HOW I FEEL

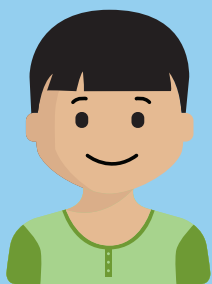
- 1 Make copies of this worksheet so you can continue this practice beyond the first week.
- 2 Keep the master list of emotions you made with your child near the mood tracking worksheets for easy reference. Adolescents and older children with electronic devices may want to keep the list on their device.
- 3 If your child can't think of a feeling word when it's time to fill in their worksheet, provide examples from the master list.
- 4 If your child can't think of something for the What Happened? section, ask, **"Where were you when you noticed your feeling? What was the situation? What were you doing?"**
- 5 Once your child has completed a week of Mood Tracking, start to look for patterns together. Read all of the emotions and situations from the week's Mood Tracker. Ask, **"What do you notice? Are certain events connected to certain feelings a lot?"**
- 6 Once you and your child notice and identify their patterns, think about which other skills in this guide could help. Many families find that the Relaxation Skills (Depression Skill 3) and Problem Solving worksheets (Depression Skill 5) in this guide are useful.

Week: _____

	Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Mood	happy	sad	mad				
What Happened?	took muffin to dog park	forgot my homework at home	I wanted to play more, but it was time for dinner				

Here are some emotions that you may be feeling:

Happy



Sad



Mad



Scared



CHILD WORKSHEET: HOW I FEEL



Week: _____

	Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Mood							
What Happened?							

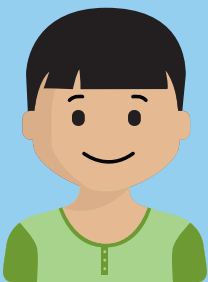
Week: _____

	Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Mood							
What Happened?							

Week: _____

	Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Mood							
What Happened?							

Happy



Sad



Mad



Scared



CAREGIVER HANDOUT: MOOD TRACKING TIPS



Depression Skill 1

HOW CAN MOOD TRACKING HELP MY FAMILY?

- ▶ Children and adolescents who are having a hard time with sad or depressed mood sometimes struggle to both explain how they feel and show how they feel in appropriate ways. Mood Tracking can help your child become more skilled at feelings identification and feelings expression.
- ▶ Improving these skills can help your child feel more in control when a low mood occurs. This can in turn reduce certain behaviors that may be connected to difficulty expressing emotions (e.g., temper tantrums, acting out, withdrawing from friends and family, etc.).
- ▶ Mood Tracking can help you and your child notice patterns in their moods that can give you valuable insight into your child's triggers and challenges (e.g. they notice that they tend to feel worse when they're left out at school).
- ▶ You can use this information to work together to find coping skills that can improve specific moods and solve problems that may be causing stress.

COMMON PARENT CONCERNS

When I ask my child how they feel, they say they don't know!

Sometimes Mood Tracking can feel overwhelming or confusing. Use your master list of feelings to give your child ideas. You can also ask them questions about how they felt in specific situations (e.g., "How did you feel in math class? At recess? After school?"). You can first ask them to use "good" or "positive" and "bad" or "negative" to identify if they were feeling a positive or negative emotion. Then focus together on narrowing that range of emotions down to be more specific, using the list we provide for suggestions.

My child refuses to mood track.

Empathize with your child. It can feel hard to begin expressing emotions if you've kept them bottled up inside. Your child could be feeling overwhelmed, or too down to be motivated. Mood Tracking should not be another chore but something short and simple that you can work into your daily routine (e.g., can they fill out the worksheet after dinner, or use their phone to keep track?). Together, set a specific goal for regular mood tracking (e.g., three times a week to start) and think of a small but fun reward your child can earn for reaching it.

I'm not sure how to use the Mood Tracker to plan or problem solve.

Think of the Mood Tracker as data: important information about your child's day-to-day experience. Look for patterns, such as certain moods that happen over and over on the same day, at the same time, or in the same situation. Use this information to brainstorm ways to improve those situations together. Are they always sad on Mondays? Maybe Mondays would feel more positive if there were occasionally a fun activity or special dinner to look forward to. See the Making Time for Fun worksheets (Depression Skill 2) for more ideas like this. Are evenings stressful? Perhaps this could be improved by starting homework earlier or thinking of a calming bedtime routine. Read the Relaxation Skills (Depression Skill 3) and Problem Solving (Depression Skill 5) worksheets for more ideas like these. Once you have more information about the specific circumstances around certain moods, you can plan ahead.

Our Mood Trackers show that my child is almost always in a low mood, no matter what.

Help your child figure out ways to add more fun and relaxing activities to their daily life (see Making Time for Fun and Relaxation Skills, Depression Skills 2 and 3). Notice if this results in any changes. Also discuss with your child whether negative thinking may be impacting their report of their mood. Are they reporting the facts? Would using a skill from Thinking Traps help (Depression Skill 4)? If your child's low mood continues, talk to your primary care provider. They can connect you to a behavioral health specialist who can help. If your child's mood causes you concern for their safety, seek emergency help.