Supporting Young Children Through Big Feelings

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Abstract

This is a service-learning project centered around solving the problem of how I can provide support to young children and their adults as they work through big emotions. Specifically, I wrote a children’s book titled *My Big Feelings*, which tells a narrative from a child's perspective about what they need from their adult as they experience big feelings. The second part of this project is a companion section in the back of the book focusing on emotional intelligence concepts. Included in this section are quick tips, ideas, and other resources designed to help adults provide support for children as they work through big feelings.

*Keywords:* children, support, big emotions, emotional intelligence, children’s literature
Section 1: Introduction to your Capstone Project

My experiences personally, professionally, socially and academically inspired me to write a children’s book focused on what they need the most from their adults when faced with big emotions. First, as a parent who raised four kids, I remember the challenge of helping my children work through their big emotions. At the time, I did not fully grasp how important emotional intelligence skills are to the overall health and wellbeing of children. As I parented my children, I found that I needed to unlearn my own unhealthy coping skills all while doing my best to support their emotional growth. Looking back, I believe I would have benefited from resources focusing on emotional intelligence concepts, much like the book I designed for this project. Additionally, my experience in various early childhood settings reminds me of and reinforces the important role adults play in helping young children learn to work through their emotions. It is my desire to provide relevant and supportive emotional intelligence tools for young children and their adults, especially for my grandchildren and their parents. Lastly, since I thoroughly enjoy reading to young children, I am inspired to write my own children’s literature.

I completed a service-learning project where I set out to solve the problem of how I might provide support to children and their adults as they work through big feelings. Specifically, I wrote a children’s book titled My Big Feelings, advocating for what children need, but cannot always articulate, when faced with big emotions. Also included in the book is a section in the back titled Supporting Young Children: Quick Tips for Parents and Caregivers and Children’s Literature and other Resources with Emotional Intelligence Focus. This section is designed to provide specific ideas, tools, tips, and support for parents and caretakers as they help their children grow in emotional intelligence skills.
Section 2: Elements coming together

Innovative Approach

My project is a combination of several different perspectives, to include a narrative from a child’s viewpoint about big emotions, a rhyming style of writing, and a resource section for adults. The viewpoint of a child provides an opportunity for both children and adults to connect with the emotional intelligence concepts in the book. Research has shown that high quality children’s literature, focused on emotional intelligence skills, facilitates important conversations and teachable moments for children (Harper, 2016). The characters and storyline are relatable, inviting children and their adults to engage in this important subject matter. Additionally, I intentionally used a rhyming style of writing in my book, which supports children’s early literacy (Maclean, et. al., 1997). My book also has an extension for adults who are looking for helpful ideas and ways to scaffold their child’s emotional intelligence skills. Altogether, these differing perspectives wrapped in one book demonstrate an innovative approach beyond either/or problem-solving.

Emotional Intelligence

My capstone project is centered around emotional intelligence concepts, specifically self awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation. Without the ability to understand our own emotions and extend empathy, it is difficult to provide proper support to young children, especially in the throes of big emotions. Accordingly, my research considers both what children and their caregivers need in the areas of self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation. My work for this project comes from my own growth journey in emotional intelligence, as I have cared for children in various different settings. I also let curiosity lead me and sought to
understand the perspectives of both children and their adults. Relating to my stakeholders provides me with empathy and helps me prioritize their needs. Furthermore, shedding light on what children need when faced with overwhelming feelings invites adults to engage with empathy. My book also considers the child’s needs as it incorporates both simple language and a rhyming style. In addition, rather than focusing on research that I thought was valuable, I sought feedback from my stakeholders.

**Creative Thinking**

I foster my creativity best when I allow for an incubation period, specifically getting outside and moving my body while running with my dog. Creative writing, like poetry and prose, comes easily to me, so that part of my project was a breeze. The illustrations, however, were challenging because art expression, whether drawing, painting, or using a digital medium, is unique and new for me. I struggled with the pressure to bring my ideas and narrative to life on a blank page. After attempting a few drawings by hand, I quickly realized this modality was not working for me and would take more time than I had. Consequently, I decided to step away for a few days, giving myself space for incubation and perspective taking. Then, I decided to look for a digital program for my illustrations. Through research, I stumbled upon a storybook template that I liked on Canva with customizable characters and props. I was encouraged and excited by how this medium brought my ideas to life and helped me find my creative flow. Most importantly, I was reminded to trust the steps of creativity that work best for me, especially allowing time for an incubation period when I feel stuck.
Your Innovative Solution

There are many innovative ways one can solve the problem of how to provide support for adults and children as they work through big feelings. One idea I had in the early stages was to create a workbook for children centered around emotional intelligence skills. I believe, however, that my children’s book demonstrates a more relatable and innovative approach than a workbook. Specifically, my project focuses on expressing what children need when faced with big emotions, told from the viewpoint of a child. For example, in the book the child tells their adult, “I don’t mean to let my feelings get in the way.” As I sought feedback from several stakeholders, they expressed that they were able to receive the message in a new way because of how the story was told. Additionally, I took into account feedback I received from my stakeholders about incorporating a resources section into the back of my book, rather than making a separate brochure. Since I had originally planned to create a companion brochure for parents and caretakers as part of my project, this change was innovative to me. Altogether, the narrative told by a child, and the emotional intelligence resource section wrapped into one book demonstrates an innovative approach to the problem I set out to solve in my project.

Section 3: Results

Throughout the stages of my project, I used several different methods to measure results, including conversations, surveys, and seeking feedback from my stakeholders. Before I drafted my book I started by talking to several other early childhood educators about my ideas for a story focused on children and their emotions. Then, before I compiled the parent/caregiver resources portion, I sent out a Google survey to a total of fifteen people who work with or have young
children within my personal, professional, and social circles (I heard back from nine). The main purpose of my first survey was to get an idea how many stakeholders would benefit from a children’s book and resources on emotional regulation. I also inquired who would be willing to provide feedback on a rough and final draft. During the writing and illustration phase, I received invaluable feedback from a few of my stakeholders who are well-versed in specifics like design, message, flow, and general editing. Once my project was complete, I first read the book to my granddaughter, and then to two groups of children I teach (twenty-one children together, ranging from three to eleven years of age). Finally, I sent out my finished project with a Google survey to the original nine stakeholders who participated in the first survey (I heard back from six). In this survey my focus was to find out if the child’s message in the book was clear, if the illustrations lined up with the story, and if the quick tips information portion was new and/or helpful.

The results of my surveys, conversations, and reading my book to children affirmed the positive benefits my project provided to my stakeholders. In my personal realm, my granddaughter wanted me to read the book over and over to her on facetime. She is only three, and is a little shy on video chat, but the look on her face said it all. My daughter-in-law said the book was impactful and gave her a renewed perspective about helping her little ones work through their feelings. In my professional realm, my two supervisors were excited about the subject of my book, and said they would buy a copy for their library. They were also supportive of my request to read my book to my students during class (an early learner class of nine children, and a homeschool mixed-age class of twelve children). Reading the book to the children in my classes facilitated conversations about emotional intelligence concepts, which was what I had hoped would happen. Several of the older children in my mixed-age group said they
would buy the book to help their parents and little siblings. The results from the final Google survey showed that my stakeholders believe the book is a beneficial resource that provides a valuable perspective and helpful tips for supporting young children through big emotions.

**Section 4: Conclusion**

When I set out to do this project, I did not expect I would become so passionate and excited about the process or the results. As my focus shifted from simply checking a major project off my list to diving in and enjoying the creative process, I was pleasantly surprised at how invested I became in my work. My heart also shifted as I learned the importance of considering my stakeholder’s needs and inviting them into my process. I did not originally anticipate how these important shifts in perspective would impact me personally, making my project much more meaningful to me and my closest stakeholders. I am also pleasantly surprised by the positive and encouraging feedback I received about my book. In fact, doing this project has inspired me to come up with a few narratives and concepts for other children’s books. Consequently, the one thing I would do differently is I would give myself more time to gain experience and practice doing my own illustrations, rather than using the template on Canva. As an early childhood educator, and now grandparent, I believe this project is a valuable resource for both children and their adults.
Section 6: Appendix

My Big Feelings Book with resources pages included:

https://www.storyjumper.com/book/read/171300061/6610b4f7bbc4a

Link to parent/caretaker resource pages of my book:

3 Items

1st Google Survey Results Report:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1y6h3CUJ39V0-wJvSKc-JAa65XIkJ0BzPl6n5ylNCx78/edit?usp=sharing

Final Google Survey Results Report:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1lQO4Iiu6ec3AqDduCaobh7qsUVkvyMLAwi8t2HTURY/edit?usp=sharing
References


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SUPPORTING YOUNG CHILDREN THROUGH BIG FEELINGS:
QUICK TIPS FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Consider Child's Needs

- Take an inventory: is there a physical need your child has that could be contributing to or exasperating their emotional state (hungry, tired, etc.)?
- Establish predictable routines: children thrive when they know what to expect and have consistency from day to day.
- Move to a more calming space: sometimes a change in the physical space can go a long way to support both the child and their adult. Consider getting outside, creating a designated calm down corner, or leaving a public space if needed.

Allow for Time to Slow Down

- Learning emotional intelligence (EQ) skills takes time, practice, and plenty of grace. Allow yourself the time and space to work on your own EQ skills so you can better support your child; you are the best one to model the way.
- Children need time to prepare for transitions: provide clear and concise communication with reminders to help them move from one activity to the next; for example, “In five minutes play time is all done, then we will put on our shoes and coat.”
- Give yourself permission to change plans if needed to slow down and work through big emotions. You are helping your child build important and foundational EQ skills.
Name and Explain Emotions

- Help children name their emotions, For example: “You felt furious because you wanted to keep playing but playtime was all done.”
- Consider incorporating EQ focused children’s literature and other EQ resources, such as an emotions wheel, self-regulation games, and toys (see next section for ideas).

Validate and Empathize

- Acknowledge and validate your child’s emotions: whether positive or negative, this can help them feel understood and accepted, for example: “It’s okay to feel angry.”
- Provide a calm and steady presence: the focus is supporting your child as they move through their emotions, rather than trying to “fix” the emotion or situation. For example consider saying, “I am here with you.” and ask, “Do you need a hug?”
- Some children get more upset when asked questions or when given intended physical supportive touch, like a hug or backrub, too soon. It takes time and practice to help your child express what they need the most as they grow their EQ skills.

Provide Clear & Loving Limits

Let children know their feelings are valid, and at the same time help them clearly understand what is and is not okay; For example, “It’s okay to feel angry, it is not okay to hit.” or “It’s okay to be frustrated, it’s not okay to hurt yourself.” This can take time, consistency, and modelling healthy EQ skills.
EQ Focused Children’s Literature:
- 1-2-3 My Feelings and Me Book by Goldie Millar
- Even Superheroes Have Bad Days by Shelly Becker
- Glad Monster, Sad Monster, A Book About Feelings by Ed Emberley
- In My Heart by Jo Witek
- Lots of Feelings by Shelley Rotner
- My Body Sends a Signal by Natalie Maguire
- Sometimes When I’m Mad by Deborah Serani
- The Boy With Big, Big Feelings by Brittnay Winn Lee
- The Color Monster by Anna Llenas
- The Emotions Book: A Little Story About Big Emotions by Liz Fletcher
- The Feelings Book by Todd Parr
- The Grumpy Morning by Darola Labrosse
- The Pigeon Has Feelings Too by Mo Williams
- The Way I Feel by Janan Cain

Book Series:
- A Little Spot Series by Diane Alber
- My Many Emotions Series by Czeena Deverya

Misc. EQ Resources & Ideas:
- Emotions wheel: plush pillow, wooden, poster, or other versions: check Amazon
- Emotions dice game from Pinterest (shortened link here): https://tinyurl.com/mt5wdws3
- Calming bottle craft (shortened link here): https://tinyurl.com/dubswq3h
- Bubble blowing art: https://kidsactivitiesblog.com/572/bubble-art/
- Feelings paper bag puppets: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=grewskwmAM
- Create a designated calm down corner: https://pin.it/1kdoH6U
Results of 1st Survey Sent out on 3/5/2024 to 9 people:

How often do you find yourself in situations where you need to support children with big emotions?

- Always: 55.6%
- Often: 22.2%
- Sometimes: 11.1%
- Rarely: 11.1%

How confident do you feel when it comes to helping children work through big emotions?

- 1 (11.1%)
- 2 (22.2%)
- 4 (44.4%)
- 1 (11.1%)

Do you think a quick reference brochure with tips for helping children work through big emotions would be helpful?

- Yes: 9 (100%)
- No: 0 (0%)
What are some of the challenges you face when it comes to helping children work through big emotions?

9 responses

- Staying calm yourself: 5 (55.6%)
- Knowing how to respond: 4 (44.4%)
- Keeping the child safe: 3 (33.3%)
- Keeping others safe: 3 (33.3%)
- Understanding the child’s reaction: 5 (55.6%)
- No time to think: 3 (33.3%)
- All of the above: 1 (11.1%)
- Having patience and empathy: 1 (11.1%)

What are some of the ways you know that provide support to children when they experience big emotions?

9 responses

- Staying calm yourself: 4 (44.4%)
- Validation statements: 6 (66.7%)
- Provide empathy: 6 (66.7%)
- Manage your expectations: 4 (44.4%)
- Understanding the child’s behavior: 5 (55.6%)
- Problem solve: 4 (44.4%)
- Model calm behavior: 4 (44.4%)
- All of the above: 7 (77.8%)
- Problem solve when ready...not ready: 1 (11.1%)
When it comes to children and big feelings, what are the ones you find most challenging?
9 responses

- a child's anger: 6 (66.7%)
- a child's silliness: 2 (22.2%)
- a child's sadness: 3 (33.3%)
- a child's fearfulness: 3 (33.3%)
- a child's excitement: 0 (0%)
- a child's fear: 2 (22.2%)
- all of the above: 0 (0%)
- none of the above: 0 (0%)
- Distractedness (though probably not a feeling): 1 (11.1%)
- I think the feelings aren't challenging: 1 (11.1%)

How often do you read books to the children you care for?
9 responses

- 1 (22.2%)
- 2 (11.1%)
- 3 (11.1%)
- 4 (11.1%)
- 5 (44.4%)

Have you seen or read children's literature centered around emotional intelligence?
9 responses

- 1 (22.2%)
- 2 (22.2%)
- 2 (22.2%)
- 2 (22.2%)
- 2 (22.2%)
Do you and/or the children you care for enjoy children's literature that incorporates rhyming words?
9 responses

Would you be willing to review and provide feedback on my children's book and educational brochure centered around supporting children through... I project will be completed over the next 7 weeks.
9 responses
Results of Final Google Survey sent to 9/6 responded:

Message to stakeholders:
For my final Capstone project, I have created two books with the intent to provide tools and support to children and their adults when it comes to big feelings. You will see that both books feature my two oldest grandchildren. Though both are similar, there are a few changes to characters and situations. I am providing a link to the videos where I read the books, as well as the Canva links for the book manuscripts. Your answers will come back completely anonymous, so please provide honest feedback. I appreciate your time so much!

Book 1: [https://go.screenpal.com/watch/cZf60pVsapc](https://go.screenpal.com/watch/cZf60pVsapc)

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**Is the story told from the perspective of a child?**

- **yes**: 6 (100%)
- **no**: 0 (0%)
- **a little bit**: 0 (0%)

**Do the illustrations help tell the story?**

**100% yes**
What page(s) might benefit from a tweak in the illustrations to help them match the story more closely? 3 responses/6 responses

None, they are all great!
none
None, they're all great!

Can you tell what the child is trying to say to their adult?
6 responses

Was there anything about the quick tips pages that provided new information to you?
6 responses
Are the quick tips pages helpful?
6 responses
100% yes

Do you have any of the books from the EQ book list suggestions?
6 responses
50% yes, 50% no

Have you thought of or done any of the emotional intelligence project ideas with your child or a child you care for?
6 responses
50% yes, 50% no
Would you and your child (or a child you know) enjoy and/or benefit from a customized form of this book (i.e. your child as the main character, their initials pages, and the child's family sitting on the couch? 6 responses

100%

yes
no