

Teaching Body Language

We communicate a lot of information about our feelings through our body language: our facial expression, the way we position ourselves, distance from others, and gestures. We receive this information primarily through our vision. The child with dual sensory impairments does not get this information from others. He also is not aware of how others see him. These children must have help to learn to express their feelings through appropriate body language. If their feelings and body language do not match, their communication may be misunderstood and the child may be frustrated.

You can help the child in the following ways:

1. Have the child feel your face while you say/sign the name of the feeling expressed. Have him feel the tension in your muscles when you are angry, relaxed muscles when you're happy, or a frown when you're unhappy.
2. Also have him feel your shoulders and hands to learn about body position related to the different feelings. An upright body frequently shows a positive attitude and confidence. A slumped body sometimes signals sadness or fatigue.
3. If you feel comfortable allowing the child to feel your heart rate, this will also give a lot of information. You can have a young child feel your heart. An older child can feel your neck or wrist. Your heart rate will show when you're angry, happy, excited, etc.
4. Have the child feel his own face, posture, and heart rate to become aware of how he appears to others.

*Adapted from Sternberg-White, S., Chen, D., Watts, J., 1992,
Developing Social-Emotional Skills, INSITE, Utah State University, Logan, Utah*