

Dear Family:

This is a busy time for young children. They are learning many new skills. Children might be learning to read, starting to write, tying shoelaces, trying to help out at home, and wanting to do things by themselves. These are important tasks for young children to learn.

Children are also learning how to understand and manage their feelings. They are learning how to make a friend and be a friend. And they are learning how to solve problems with other children. They are learning these things throughout the day in the classroom, on the playground, and at home. Children are learning by watching and listening to how teachers, family members, and friends interact with each other. But just like reading and writing, these areas of learning also have specific skills that need to be taught. We will be using a program called *Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum* to help us learn and practice these social-emotional skills. Children who learn and use these skills are more likely to get along with other people and to do better in school.

Families are an important part of the *Second Step* program. You will receive letters with information about the social-emotional skills your child is learning in school and ideas you can use at home to help your child learn and practice these skills.

You are welcome to come and observe one of our *Second Step* lessons. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,

Dear Family:

As you know, we have started the *Second Step* program in your child's class. Our first unit is about learning to identify our own and others' feelings, and we will also practice how to show care to others. Together, these skills are called *empathy*.

We are starting with learning how to use clues to identify how someone else is feeling. The children are learning that faces, bodies, and what is happening are all clues that they can use. They are learning to identify important feelings and their "feelings words": *happy, sad, angry, scared, surprised, and disgusted*. Ask your child to make these faces for you.

Learning to use clues to figure out how someone else is feeling is one step in developing empathy for other people. Here are some fun things you can do at home to help your child learn to recognize others' feelings:

- When you are reading a storybook together, look carefully at the pictures and ask your child to figure out how the characters are feeling. Talk about what is happening in the story and how that too is a clue to how someone is feeling. (This exercise also helps build a child's early reading skills.)
- When watching movies, watch the faces and ask your child how the characters are feeling. To make it more fun, you could turn off the sound and just watch the faces and bodies.
- Cut out photos of people's faces from magazines. Glue them to a piece of paper. Talk about the different feelings shown.
- Share your feelings with your child so that he or she can see your face and hear your words describing the feelings. This is an important way for children to learn. Don't be afraid to use big words like *frustrated, disappointed, and confused*. These are all feelings your child has, and it helps to be able to name them.

Your child is learning a song about feelings. Ask him or her to sing it for you.

Don't forget that you are always welcome to come and see one of our *Second Step* lessons.

Sincerely,

Dear Family:

We are continuing to work on feelings in our *Second Step* lessons. This week, we are focusing on how to recognize our own feelings. The children are learning two very important things about their own feelings:

- Feelings are called *feelings* because we “feel” them in our bodies. Our bodies give us clues to how we are feeling.
- All of our feelings are okay.

The main feeling we learned about is worry. Young children have many things that they worry about. Having a word to describe how they are feeling can be very helpful. In the lesson, we encourage children to talk to a grown-up if they are worried about something. The worries of young children often may seem small or unimportant to an adult, but they are very real and very distressing to young children.

Take time to listen to your child’s worries and let him or her know that you understand how upsetting it is to be worried. Use caring words and actions (maybe a hug is needed). These will let him or her know that you understand and make him or her feel better. Help your child figure out how to handle worries during school when you are not around. Be sure to tell me if it is something I should know about or can help with.

Sincerely,

Dear Family:

The children are continuing to learn all about feelings in our *Second Step* lessons. They have been learning that feelings can change with time. For example, they may have felt scared at the beginning of the school year, but now they are used to it and feel happy at school. They have also learned that people can have different feelings about the same situation. For example, a given child might like big dogs but have a friend who is scared of dogs.

Young children need lots of help with learning about their feelings. Below is a simple listening process that you can use at home. This process will not only give your child support and encouragement, but it will also help him or her name and express feelings. The process is called *reflective listening*. Here's how it goes:

- Give your child your FULL attention. Make a date to listen later if you are busy: "After dinner, we can sit and talk."
- Use phrases like "Tell me more" or "Go on" to encourage your child to keep talking.
- Listen and watch for feelings. Put yourself in your child's place and imagine what he or she is feeling.
- Reflect that feeling back to your child with words such as "You sound really angry" or "I guess you're sad about that." This lets your child know that you understand, it teaches him or her to put a name to the feelings inside, and it helps your child learn to talk about feelings rather than act them out.

Reflective listening is a powerful process that helps children learn to manage their emotions. It also lets them know that their feelings are okay and that adults do understand how they are feeling.

If you have any questions about our *Second Step* lessons, be sure to ask.

Sincerely,

Dear Family:

We have been talking about caring and helping in our *Second Step* lessons. Helping is one way of showing that you care. We have talked about giving and receiving help. There are many ways that young children can help out at home. Even though it can sometimes take longer to include children in doing family jobs, it makes them feel important.

Working together with your child on a job can be as valuable as playtime. Many jobs can be adapted so that you and your child can work together. Here are some suggestions:

- Cooking—stirring, pouring, kneading—anything that does not involve heat or sharp knives.
- Dusting—feather dusters, or those with a handle, are favorites.
- Gardening—digging, pulling weeds, harvesting vegetables, watering plants.
- Vacuuming—shorten the length of the attachments if possible.
- Washing windows—lower level for your child, upper windows for you.
- Sorting and folding laundry—sorting by color or family member, matching socks, folding towels. If you can, give your child his or her own laundry basket.
- Putting items into the grocery basket and putting them away at home—cereal and canned goods are easy to handle.
- Drying the dishes—silverware fits small hands, and sorting is like a game.
- Setting the table—let your child make placemats for each family member.
- Washing dishes that are not easily broken—sudsy, warm water is lots of fun for young children.

Each family will find different ways for children to show that they care by helping. Children love to be included in the important work of building a family. It is also fun for you and your child, and it can really help.

Please call or drop by for a visit if you have any questions about our *Second Step* lessons.

Sincerely,

Dear Family:

We are starting the second unit of the *Second Step* program. This unit is about managing feelings. The children are learning that they can have strong (intense) feelings, and that when they do, they may act in ways that other people notice. Children learn about frustration, excitement, and disappointment. These are all common feelings for young children. These feelings can easily become very strong—behavior can turn into crying, or children can become restless and out of control.

The children will be learning to check in with how they are feeling by putting their hands on their tummies. This helps them figure out how their body is feeling and gives their hands something to do. It also helps them know if they are taking the right kind of deep breaths. They will learn three ways to calm down strong feelings.

- **Say “Calm down.”** This cues them to the need to calm down and helps them think about how to calm down.
- **Take deep breaths.** Children learn “belly breathing” so that they breathe deeply into the bottom of their lungs. Their bellies move out as they breathe in, and in as they breathe out. Breathing in this way slows down the heart rate, which immediately leads to an increased feeling of calm. Have your child show you how to do this kind of breathing. Then practice with him or her at home.
- **Count out loud.** Children learn to count slowly from 1 to 4. This cues children to take a break before acting without thinking. Older children can learn to count slowly in time with their breathing.

The children will also learn other ways to manage strong feelings. These include physical activity (throwing a ball, dancing), doing something fun by themselves (playing with blocks, drawing, listening to music, petting a cat), or talking to a grown-up.

Your child is learning a song about the ways to calm down. Ask him or her to sing it to you.

Notice which things seem to calm your child down and encourage him or her to use them when he or she is having strong feelings. Be sure to also let me know so that I can use these methods at school.

Sincerely,

Dear Family:

Our *Second Step* lesson this week is about learning how to wait. Many times, children need to wait at school and at home. They wait for their turn, they wait in line, they wait for the bus, and they wait for parents. Waiting may be easy for some children who are more patient and quiet in nature. For other children, waiting is very hard. They may get more and more excited, frustrated, or worried. Children often misbehave when they are having these strong feelings. But children can learn ways to help with waiting.

In class, we are talking about ways to calm down. Children are practicing to check in with how they are feeling by putting their hands on their tummies. They then choose one of the following ways to calm down:

- Say "Calm down."
- Take deep breaths.
- Count out loud.

You might try one of the ways to calm down at home when your child is having difficulty waiting. Another way to deal with waiting is to do, or think about, something different. The next time you and your child are waiting together, talk about ways to have the waiting be fun or go faster. Adults sometimes have silly ways that children might enjoy. Some people draw doodles, tap their fingers, or sing songs in their head. Plan for the times that your child may need to wait and take something for your child to do, such as pens and paper or a book. You can also tell your child a story or play a question game: "What is the biggest thing in this room?" "How many red cars do you see?"

Children are learning that even though they have to wait sometimes, they can manage their feelings and behavior while they wait.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Dear Family:

In our *Second Step* lessons, the children are learning about anger and what to do about it. Here are some of the things they are learning:

- When we are angry, we often feel tight or tense in our bodies. Our hearts beat fast, and we can feel hot.
- The feeling of anger is okay, but angry, hurtful behaviors are not.
- A strong feeling of anger can make it hard to think, and we can act in ways that hurt others with our words or with our voices.
- When we are angry, we need to calm down.
- We can use the ways to calm down that we already know to manage our anger. (Say “Calm down,” take deep breaths, count out loud.)

Managing anger is often very hard for young children to do. They will need lots of help and encouragement to remember to calm down before they act in hurtful ways. Children learn by watching. If, when you are angry, you model the above ways to calm down in front of your child, he or she will learn how to do it more quickly. Also, when you see your child beginning to get angry, step in and remind him or her to use the ways to calm down.

Learning to manage anger is like any learning task—it takes time and lots of practice. Let your child know that it will get easier and that with practice, he or she will learn how to do it.

The children have been singing a song that reminds them about managing their anger. Ask your child to sing it to you.

Sincerely,

Dear Family:

In the third unit of the *Second Step* lessons, we are learning how to solve problems. We are using a rap song and our puppets—Impulsive Puppy and Slow-Down Snail—to help us learn our three simple steps.

Problem-Solving Steps

1. How do I feel?
2. What is the problem?
3. What can I do?

Feelings are a clue that there is a problem. If children are very upset about a problem, they practice ways to calm down. Once they are calm, they can think things through. Children are learning to talk about problems without blaming others. And they are learning to think of many ways to solve problems. Children are natural problem solvers, and they like the feeling of being able to figure things out. We can encourage them to solve problems by:

- Coaching them through the steps when there is a problem.
- Helping them talk about the problems they are having.
- Encouraging them to think of lots of solutions.
- Talking to them about how things would work out if they tried some of the solutions.

Children will be learning how to interrupt in a polite way by saying “Excuse me.” They will also be learning how to ignore distractions.

Young children often feel helpless or stuck when they have problems. They might give up looking when they can’t find something, or they may complain or walk away from a game they really want to play if they don’t get what they want. The Problem-Solving Steps show them that there is something they can do to solve problems.

When your child is having problems at home, try using these steps to help him or her figure out what to do. Ask to hear the rap song.

If you have questions, please call.

Sincerely,

Dear Family:

In our *Second Step* lessons, children are learning how to make and keep friends. Children who know how to make friends are happier at school and learn better. So knowing about friendship is very important.

Here are some of the things that the children are learning in class:

- That it's fair to share, take turns, or trade when two children both want to play with the same toy.
- How to make sure that two children both have fun when they are playing together. You can help by encouraging children to keep talking and listening to each other until they come up with an idea they both like. This way, they have fun and stay friends.
- How to join in with another group of children. Children who are successful do the following:
 - Watch what the group is doing.
 - Play the same thing side-by-side.
 - Say friendly things about what the other children are doing.
 - Then ask to join in.

Sometimes it can take two or three times before a child is successful, so encourage your child to keep trying.

A wonderful way to help your child learn these skills is to invite another child to come and play. Stay nearby and watch what happens. When the two children need help, step in with gentle support and coach them to solve the difficulty. Remember, all young children are naturally self-centered. They need lots of practice and support with these social skills, just as they do with reading skills. So be sure to praise them when you see them using the skills.

If you think that your child is having a hard time with friends, please let me know so that together we can come up with a plan to help your child.

The children have been singing a lively song that helps remind them of fair ways to play. Ask your child to sing it to you.

Sincerely,

Dear Family:

We have now finished all the lessons in our *Second Step* program. What a lot we have learned! We have learned about our own and others' feelings. We have learned how to calm down and manage our anger. We have learned how to solve problems and make and keep friends.

We will continue to practice these skills every day in class. Here are some ways that you can keep practicing at home:

- Play a board game with your child. Board games give lots of opportunities to practice managing feelings, following rules, taking turns, and having fun together.
- Cut out pictures of faces showing different feelings, or cut out pictures of fun things to do. Glue these onto a piece of paper. Talk about the pictures with your child.
- Make a list of simple, fun activities you can do with your child that do not cost money and don't take long to do. Examples include singing a song, cutting out a paper mask, running around the block, and telling a joke. Put each activity on a card. When you have a few moments, pull out a card and do the activity listed. You can keep adding to your collection.
- Read a story about friends. Talk about what a friend is. Talk about how the friends had fun together and stayed friends.
- When you have small problems (such as losing your sunglasses), ask your child to help you figure out what you can do. Use the *Second Step* Problem-Solving Steps. Make a badge for your child that says "Problem Solver."

If you come up with other fun ways to practice the skills, be sure to let me know so that I can pass them on to other families.

Sincerely,