

The Feelings Translator

CREATIVE MAKING

SKILL: EMOTIONAL DISCLOSURE

50 MINUTES

RECOMMENDED AGE RANGE

Ages 8–14. Old enough to articulate abstract emotional experiences, young enough to engage with a creative, low-pressure format. Works best when at least one parent participates alongside the kids.

WHAT YOU NEED

Paper (one sheet per person)

Colored markers or pens

A timer (optional)

A quiet space without phones

ACTIVITY STEPS

- 01 List Your Feelings (5 min).** Each person gets a sheet of paper. Everyone writes down three feelings they have experienced this week. Just the feeling words, not the situations. Examples: nervous, left out, embarrassed, proud, confused, disappointed, relieved. Work silently. Keep your list private for now.
- 02 Translate One Feeling (10 min).** Each person picks one feeling from their list and translates it into something in the physical world: a weather event, an animal, a sound, a texture, or a color. Write or draw the translation on your paper. Example: "My nervousness is like a smoke alarm going off for no reason." Work silently. No sharing yet.
- 03 Share the Translation (15 min).** One person at a time shares their translation and names the feeling it represents. Nothing else yet. No context, no explanation of why. The family just listens without commenting. Go around the table until everyone has shared. The only response after each share is "thank you."
- 04 One Question Each (10 min).** Now the family asks each person one question: "Is there anything you need from us about that feeling?" The person can say yes, no, or "I'll think about it." No follow-up pressure. The point is to practice being asked and to practice responding. Both sides of the exchange are part of the skill.
- 05 Name a Real Person (10 min).** Each person names one real person — parent, sibling, friend, teacher, anyone — they could tell about that feeling if they wanted to. Then each person says one thing that would make it easier to actually do it. Go around the table. Listen for what makes real disclosure feel harder than typing it into a chatbot.

THE DEEPER LESSON

A RAND study found that 63% of teens using AI for emotional support never told anyone they were doing it. The reason is not that kids do not want connection. It is that real disclosure has a cost: you cannot control how the other person responds. This activity lowers that cost by separating the translation step from the sharing step. Turning a feeling into a metaphor gives a child just enough distance to approach it. The final step, naming someone real and what would make telling them easier, bridges from creative expression to actual practice.

CONVERSATION STARTER

If you had one feeling you were better at sharing with real people, which one would it be, and what makes that particular feeling harder to say out loud?