

Lesson Plan: Noticing, Naming, and Sitting With Feelings

A Social-Emotional Learning Lesson Inspired by *The Feelings Bench*

Grade Level: Pre-K–Grade 2

Duration: 30–45 minutes

Subject: Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

CASEL Competencies: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness

Lesson Overview

Children experience many emotions throughout the day, yet they often need explicit instruction and safe opportunities to notice, understand, and express those feelings. This lesson introduces emotions as natural visitors that come and go. Students learn that every feeling is welcome, physical sensations can help us identify emotions, and we can sit with both comfortable and uncomfortable feelings without needing to immediately change them.

Through discussion, movement, reflection, and creative expression, students build emotional vocabulary while strengthening self-awareness and emotional regulation.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify and name a variety of emotions.
- Recognize physical body cues connected to emotions.
- Understand that all feelings are valid and acceptable.
- Distinguish between comfortable and uncomfortable feelings.
- Practice sitting with emotions using simple self-regulation strategies.
- Recognize that multiple emotions can exist at the same time.
- Develop empathy by recognizing that everyone experiences feelings.

Materials

- *The Feelings Bench* by Erica Thayer
- Emotion cards or emotion picture cards (optional)
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Crayons, markers, or colored pencils
- Drawing paper
- Bench outline printable (optional)
- Feelings Journal pages (optional)

Vocabulary

- Emotion
- Feeling
- Comfortable
- Uncomfortable
- Notice
- Body clues
- Visitor
- Breathe

Essential Question

How can we notice, understand, and care for our feelings?

Before You Begin

Encourage a classroom environment where students know that every emotion is a natural part of being human.

Remind students:

- Everyone experiences feelings differently.
- Sharing is always optional.
- Listening respectfully helps everyone feel safe.
- There are no wrong answers when talking about feelings.

Lesson Procedure

Part 1: Read Aloud (10–15 minutes)

Read *The Feelings Bench* slowly, allowing students time to observe the illustrations.

Pause after each emotion.

Encourage children to notice:

- Facial expressions
- Body language
- Posture
- Movement
- Colors (if applicable)
- Other visual clues

Teacher Prompts

"What feeling do you think came to visit?"

"What clues helped you figure that out?"

"What do you notice happening in the child's body?"

"Does this feeling seem comfortable or uncomfortable?"

"Can uncomfortable feelings still belong?"

"What do you think this feeling might need?"

Accept all thoughtful responses.

Avoid labeling feelings as "good" or "bad."

Part 2: Guided Discussion (8–10 minutes)

Gather students together.

Explain:

"Feelings are like visitors. They come, stay for a while, and eventually leave. Some visitors are easy to spend time with. Others are harder. But every feeling has something to tell us."

Guide discussion using open-ended questions.

Discussion Questions

- Have you ever felt two feelings at the same time?
- Where do you notice feelings in your body?
- What happens in your body when you're excited?
- What happens when you're nervous?
- Can someone feel happy and scared?
- Can someone miss someone and still have fun?
- What helps you when a feeling feels really big?

Record student ideas on chart paper.

Part 3: Bench Check-In Activity (5–7 minutes)

Invite students to imagine a special feelings bench.

Explain:

"Today we're going to imagine a bench where our feelings can sit beside us. We don't have to push them away. We can simply notice them."

Invite students to quietly close their eyes (optional).

Lead them through a short reflection.

Teacher Script

"Take one slow breath."

"What feeling is sitting beside you today?"

"Can you give it a name?"

"Does it feel comfortable or uncomfortable?"

"Does another feeling want to join it?"

"What does your body notice?"

Pause between each question.

Students may respond by:

- Sharing aloud
- Pointing to an emotion card
- Whispering to a partner
- Drawing
- Simply thinking quietly

Participation should never be forced.

Part 4: Regulation Practice (5 minutes)

Explain that we do not have to make feelings disappear.

Instead, we can practice sitting with them kindly.

Lead students through calming strategies.

Option 1: Belly Breathing

Put your hand on your belly.

Breathe in slowly and pretend your belly is filling up like a balloon.

Breathe out slowly and let the balloon gently shrink.

Repeat three times, nice and slow.

Option 2: Heart Hug

Put one hand over your heart.

Take a slow, gentle breath.

Listen to your heart and remind yourself:

- "I can notice my feelings."
- "I can take a deep breath."
- "I am safe."

Option 3: Stretch and Release

Reach your hands way up high, like you're trying to touch the clouds.

Stretch as tall as you can.

Let your arms float back down.

Relax your shoulders.

Take one slow, calming breath.

Teacher Script

"Our feelings don't have to change right away."

"We can notice them."

"We can breathe."

"We can let them stay for a little while."

"And eventually, they move along."

Independent Practice

Students complete one of the following:

Option A: Draw Your Bench

Draw yourself sitting on your feelings bench.

Who is visiting today?

What colors would you use?

What is your body doing?

Option B: Feelings Journal

Complete the sentence:

Today my feeling is _____.

My body feels _____.

Every feeling comes and goes. Every feeling belongs.

Option C: Emotion Sort

Sort emotion cards into two groups:

- Comfortable Feelings
- Uncomfortable Feelings

Discuss that both groups belong.

Closing Circle (5 minutes)

Invite students to finish one sentence.

- Today I noticed...
- My body told me...
- One feeling I learned about was...
- I can remember...

Finish together by saying:

"All feelings are welcome."

"Feelings come and go."

"I can sit with my feelings."

Extension Activities

Feelings Journal

Invite students to complete a daily emotional check-in.

- Draw or write one feeling you experienced today.
- Notice where you feel that emotion in your body.

Class Feelings Bench

Create a classroom bulletin board featuring a large feelings bench.

- Provide emotion cards for students.
- Throughout the week, students add the feeling that is "visiting" them.
- Reflect together on the different feelings that visited the class.

Emotion Role Play

Invite students to act out different emotions.

Ask:

- What feeling is visiting?
- What body clues helped us figure it out?

Feelings Through Art

Invite students to create artwork that represents an emotion.

- Use colors, shapes, lines, and patterns to show different feelings.
- Share artwork and discuss how art can help express emotions.

Partner Talk

Invite students to turn and talk with a partner.

Discussion prompts:

- What helps you when your feelings feel big?
- Who is someone you can talk to when you need help?
- What is your favorite way to help your body feel calm?

Differentiation

English Language Learners

- Use picture cards.
- Model vocabulary with facial expressions.
- Pair with supportive peers.

Students with Communication Differences

Allow responses through:

- Pointing
- Drawing
- AAC devices
- Emotion cards
- Gestures

Students Needing Additional Regulation

Offer:

- Flexible seating
- Sensory tools
- Quiet drawing
- Individual check-in

Assessment

Observe whether students can:

- ✓ Identify emotions
- ✓ Name body sensations
- ✓ Participate in discussion
- ✓ Demonstrate regulation strategies
- ✓ Recognize multiple emotions
- ✓ Show empathy toward others

Teacher Reflection

After the lesson, consider:

- Which discussion prompts generated the richest conversations?
- Were students able to identify body sensations?
- Which regulation strategy was most successful?
- Did students begin using feeling vocabulary independently?
- What additional support might students need in future lessons?

SEL Classroom Language

Use these phrases consistently throughout the year.

- All feelings are welcome.
- Every feeling belongs.
- Feelings are visitors.
- Some feelings feel comfortable.
- Some feelings feel uncomfortable.
- Both are okay.
- My body is giving me a message.
- I can notice my feelings.
- I can breathe.
- I can sit with this feeling.
- Feelings come and go.
- This feeling won't last forever.

CASEL Alignment

Self-Awareness

- Identifies emotions
- Recognizes body sensations
- Builds emotional vocabulary

Self-Management

- Practices calming strategies
- Builds tolerance for uncomfortable emotions
- Develops emotional regulation skills

Social Awareness

- Recognizes others experience emotions
- Builds empathy
- Practices respectful listening