Coping with Feelings

Managing your feelings is an essential task of growing up. In order to cope with and understand feelings—good and bad—children need to be able to recognize and talk about them. When parents and other caretakers invite children to express themselves and discuss their experiences, emotions, and thoughts, they are helping children gain self-awareness and social skills.

The ARTHUR interactive comic “So Funny I Forgot to Laugh!” has been specifically designed to help children develop the important social skills of empathy, forgiveness, and communication. Using humor and everyday situations, the ARTHUR characters demonstrate these skills as they learn about respecting and understanding others, solving problems, making good decisions, communicating with each other, and enjoying friendships.

This brief guide offers suggestions on how to share the comic together. Talking about the challenges the ARTHUR characters face offers children a comfortable way to think about similar issues in their own lives and allows them to more easily put their feelings into words. The interactivity of the comic encourages asking and answering questions, and gives you a chance to reflect on what is happening in the story.

What Is an Interactive Comic?

The format of “So Funny I Forgot to Laugh!” is like a comic book, but it has special features that make it interactive:

- The story is read aloud, so children don’t have to be expert readers to enjoy it.
- Once the arrow stops pulsing, you click on it to go to the next screen (children love doing this!)
- Within certain frames, you can click on each character to hear what they are thinking and feeling.
- There are pause points throughout the story. Children are asked about their thoughts and reactions to the characters and to the characters’ motivations and actions. They are also asked to predict what might happen next.
- There are different endings to choose. The story will change depending on what your child chooses. (You can revisit the endings and choose new endings as many times as you like.)
What Is Empathy?

Empathy is a skill that children can develop. It involves understanding one’s own feelings and the feelings of others. When children are empathetic, they can see things from another person’s point of view. (This is often called perspective-taking.) Using empathy helps children recognize what other people are thinking and feeling. They are then better able to treat others with kindness and compassion. And when you are able to feel empathy you are less likely to take part in bullying and more likely to resist bullying behaviors.

(Note: Empathy and sympathy are not the same thing, although the two words are often used interchangeably. Sympathy is similar to empathy in that you may feel concern for someone who is having a hard time, but it doesn’t extend to being able to put yourself in someone else’s shoes.)

Understanding Forgiveness

Being able to say “I’m sorry” to someone whose feelings you have hurt, and mean it, is crucial to building good relationships. Being able to forgive someone is equally important. When you are able to forgive someone, you can stop feeling angry or hurt and move on. This is sometimes a difficult skill to learn, but recognizing and understanding the value of forgiveness can help your child resolve problems and conflicts.

“So Funny I Forgot to Laugh!”

In the story (which is based on an ARTHUR episode), Arthur makes fun of his friend Sue Ellen and the sweater she is wearing. At first, Sue Ellen doesn’t mind his teasing, but then Arthur doesn’t stop. Even when his teacher, Mr. Ratburn, talks to him, Arthur can’t seem to understand that his actions were hurtful. His other friends—Francine, Buster, and Muffy—tell Arthur that he needs to apologize, but will Sue Ellen be able to forgive him?

The story explores what it means to have empathy, how to apologize and forgive, and the importance of communication. There are no right or wrong answers, just plenty of issues to explore with your child.

Talk About It

Here are some tips on how to use “So Funny I Forgot to Laugh!” with your child. Be sure to leave plenty of time to go through the story, click on all of the buttons and arrows, and explore the different endings. Try not to prompt your child to give the “right” answer, but let him or her talk through his or her thoughts and ideas.

★ Go through the story more than once. This will give your child a chance to get to know the characters and situations. Explain any vocabulary words that may be unfamiliar (see below).
★ Ask your child about the story. Check for understanding with questions such as:

- What happened in the story? (If this is too hard to answer, be more specific):
  - What did Arthur do that made Sue Ellen mad?
  - How did Sue Ellen feel when Arthur wouldn’t stop teasing her?
  - What did Buster think about Arthur’s jokes? (and so on)
- Did you like the story? Why or why not?

★ Help your child talk about the story by naming and defining the feelings of the characters. (Encourage older children to do this themselves.) Labeling feelings helps to build children’s vocabulary so that they are better able to express themselves and, in turn, work through their emotions. Here are some suggestions to get started:

- When Arthur kept making jokes about Sue Ellen, he was teasing her.
- Arthur continued to tease Sue Ellen, even when she told him to stop. When someone keeps hurting your feelings or your body, it’s called bullying.
- What are some words to describe how Sue Ellen felt (for example, upset, hurt, annoyed, sad, angry)? Show me a (fill in emotion here) face. Very good!
- When you say “I’m sorry” to someone, like Arthur does to Sue Ellen, what are you doing? Why does Arthur need to apologize more than once?
- When you forgive someone, you can let go of your hurt feelings and move on.

★ Encourage your child to connect to his or her own experiences. Allow plenty of time for your child to explain what happened, and be patient as he or she recalls the events and people involved. (Repeating what your child has just said often helps him or her focus and keep on track. It also reinforces that you are listening.) For example, you can ask:

- Do you remember a time when something similar happened to you? What happened? How did it make you feel?
- Which character in this ARTHUR story seems the most like you? Why?
- Do you think you would have acted the same way that character did? Why or why not?

★ Expand on the topics. Depending on your child, you may want to focus on a particular aspect of the story.

- Have you ever been able to see something from another person’s point of view—to put yourself in that person’s shoes? What happened?
- Everyone makes mistakes sometimes and hurts other people’s feelings. What can you do when you want to let a friend know you’re sorry? How does it feel when someone apologizes to you? How do you feel when you apologize to someone?

★ Discuss the various endings. (You can go back to choose a different ending by clicking on “Menu” and then “Choose Your Ending.”) Ask your child which ending he or she liked best and why.

★ Talk about your own childhood experiences with teasing, bullying, apologizing, or forgiveness. What happened? How did you feel? What did you learn? (Be careful not to let your own reminiscences take over the discussion.)
★ Read books with similar themes (see below). Books are a wonderful way to start or keep the conversation going, to learn new vocabulary, and to understand relationships and concepts.

★ Revisit the themes of the story as needed. You can refer to the story when a situation arises or just check in with your child about any new ideas or thoughts he or she might have.

Try This!

To further explore the skills of empathy, forgiveness, and communication, here are some additional activities you can do with your child.

Role-Play

Recreate the “So Funny I Forgot to Laugh!” story by acting it out. (You may want to enlist the help of siblings and other caretakers for some of the roles.) If your child can read, use this short script. If not, just recall what happened in the story and encourage your child to role-play one of the characters, using as much dialogue and actions as he or she can remember. After the role-play is over, congratulate yourselves on your fine acting and take a bow!

Someone Else’s Shoes

Gather the family’s shoes and line up several pairs. (If possible, include extended family members such as grandparents.) Choose a situation that your family has recently experienced, such as having dinner, watching television together, or getting ready to go to school. Take turns standing in one of the pairs of shoes and role-playing the situation from that person’s perspective.

Choose-and-Chat

Download and print out the Choose-and-Chat cards. Cut them into individual cards and put them facedown in a basket or box. Take turns choosing a card and then answering the question. (You’ll need to read the question for younger children.) Afterward, talk about which question and answer you liked the best or thought was the most interesting.

Comic Creator

Create your own Arthur comic by using this online game. You can retell the “So Funny I Forgot to Laugh!” story or make one up! As you and your child create the story, talk about the characters, what they are saying and doing, and how they feel. If possible, connect the story back to your child’s own experiences.

Draw Your Feelings

This activity is a great way to invite children to express themselves. You can vary the “prompt” questions as needed.
**Tic-Tac-Feelings**

Download and print out this game board. You can play the game by pointing to a feeling. (You can also use game board pieces, such as pennies or buttons, to “land” on a feeling.) Then have your child describe the feeling and talk about a situation that made him or her feel that way.

**Friendship Recipe**

What makes a successful friendship? With your child, fill out the Friendship Recipe. How do understanding other people’s feelings, saying I’m sorry, and forgiving others help us make and keep friends—and be a good friend to others?

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**Vocabulary**

- **apology**: telling someone that you are sorry for something that you did
- **appreciation**: a feeling of thanks
- **Capri di Vapida**: a famous fashion model (in the ARTHUR show)
- **genuine**: real
- **overreacting**: responding or reacting to something too strongly
- **oversensitive**: very sensitive; having one’s feelings easily hurt
- **pen pal**: a friend who lives in a different place (usually far away) with whom you send and receive letters or emails
- **silent treatment**: not talking to a person because you’re angry with him or her
- **Tenzin**: the name of Sue Ellen’s friend from Tibet
- **Tibetan**: someone or something from Tibet, an area in Asia
- **très chic**: a French term meaning very cool or fashionable
- **yak**: a large animal with long hair that lives in Tibet
Books to read

*Alfie Gives a Hand* by Shirley Hughes
*Bear Feels Sick* by Karma Wilson
*Bully* by Laura Vaccaro Seeger
*Crow Boy* by Taro Yashima
*Each Kindness* by Jacqueline Woodson
*Feelings* by Aliki
*The Hundred Dresses* by Eleanor Estes
*The Invisible Boy* by Trudy Ludwig
*Jamaica Tag-Along* by Juanita Havill
*Matthew and Tilly* by Rebecca C. Jones
*Mrs. Katz and Tush* by Patricia Polacco
*Stick and Stone* by Beth Ferry
*The Way I Feel* by Janan Cain
*A Weekend with Wendell* by Kevin Henkes