



“Are You Feeling Big Feelings?”

HELPING KIDS LEARN TO
SELF-REGULATE
OVERWHELMING FEELINGS

In our story, **Big Bad's Big Feelings**, Serena the capybara helps the Big Bad Wolf, Jonathan and Mr. Redge sort through their feelings: <https://jonincharacter.com/big-bads-big-feelings>

Serena is played by Chanel Tsang, host of Peace Out Podcast, mindfulness stories for kids. Here is a summary of her recommendations that were part of our story. Try these techniques to help the kids in your life learn to self-regulate their overwhelming feelings.

Give your feelings a name.

Prompts:

“What does your feeling look like/sound like?”

“Can you think of a name for your feeling?”

Have younger children draw their feelings if they don't have the vocabulary to describe it. A good resource used in many schools are the [Zones of Regulation](#). Here you'll find printables that can help a child identify their emotions.

Recognizing your feelings is one of the first steps towards feeling better and managing stress. Avoid putting your own words in someone's mouth to describe their feelings and don't immediately try to solve their problems. Instead, support the child who is having big feelings by letting them know that it's normal to feel that way. It's okay to experience or feel those big emotions.

In Our Story Example: Serena says, “It appears that all three of you are riding on a giant roller coaster and don’t know how to get off...Why don’t each of you give your feelings a name.”

Another way to have conversations with kids about big emotions is to pause when reading or listening together to point out how characters may be feeling or ask them how they think a character is feeling.

Once calmer, they are ready to figure out their own strategy for coping.

Some people express overwhelming feelings through tears, wanting to be alone for a while, or needing a hug or to talk. Maybe playing with a fidget toy or kicking a soccer ball around in the yard helps them feel calmer. Or they can find a special quiet corner where they can take a break. Some people meditate, finding space to focus on their breathing and their minds.

As grownups, you can model this by talking out your own process when you’re feeling frustrated, anxious, nervous or upset. This way children see how everyone gets upset and how those feelings can be handled appropriately.

Example: “I feel very frustrated right now because I asked you to get ready three times and you are still playing. I’m going to take some deep breaths to calm down right now (deep breathing). Okay, I know you’re having fun playing, that’s why I wanted to give you enough time to finish before tidying up. Next time would you like me to give you more time to finish playing? Yes, okay I can give you a longer reminder time but then you have to be sure to start tidying up right away when it’s time, do you understand? Okay, let’s tidy up now so we can leave. Let’s see if we can do this in one minute!”

Validate the big feelings.

Never dismiss or make fun of someone who is experiencing big feelings. Try to offer your support instead. This can look many different ways: asking directly if someone needs help, simply sitting with them while they work through their feelings, or giving them space to be on their own.

In Our Story Example: Serena tells Mr. Redge, “It’s not a very safe space for Big Bad to seek help if you are making fun of him. One way we can support our friends is to ask them how we can help. When I say ‘ask’ this might mean actually saying, ‘Hey, are you okay?’ or just sitting quietly with them for a while. They might want a moment on their own before they’re ready to accept help.”



Nothing is permanent.

Sometimes people who are overwhelmed are helped by a reminder that they won't feel this way forever. Storm clouds in the sky will eventually pass and the blue sunny skies will return.

In Our Story Example: After learning this from Serena, Jonathan says to Big Bad: “Big Bad, did you hear that? It’s okay. No matter how tough your morning was, it doesn’t mean the entire day has to be like that. We’re here for you, and you’re safe.”

Try a mindfulness exercise.

Leading a mindfulness exercise will help a child get to a place where they are ready to figure out what to do next. Try the exercise Serena the Capybara uses to help Jonathan, Mr. Redge and the Big Bad Wolf calm their worries and anxiety down.

Prompts:

1. Put out your hand with your palm facing up, just like you’re about to receive a gift.
2. Slowly close your hand now, bringing your fingertips together.
3. Pretend this is a flower, about to bloom, and slowly open your hand again.
4. Let’s try that again, but this time we’ll match the movement with our breathing.
5. Our hand is facing up again.
6. Breathe in and slowly close your flower petals, breathe out and slowly let your flower open and bloom.
7. Breathe in and close the petals, breathe out and let it bloom.
8. Breathe in...and out...in...and out.

Afterwards, ask “How do you feel now?”

Chanel Tsang is a Montessori educator, family supports practitioner, and yoga and mindfulness meditation guide. She has worked with children and families for more than 20 years in school and community programs and is currently working in a research centre focused on child development and mental health at the University of Toronto. Chanel created the Peace Out Podcast as a resource for parents and educators to promote social-emotional skills and introduce yoga and mindfulness to children. Find more meditations and mindfulness exercises at Peace Out Podcast: peaceoutpodcast.com

