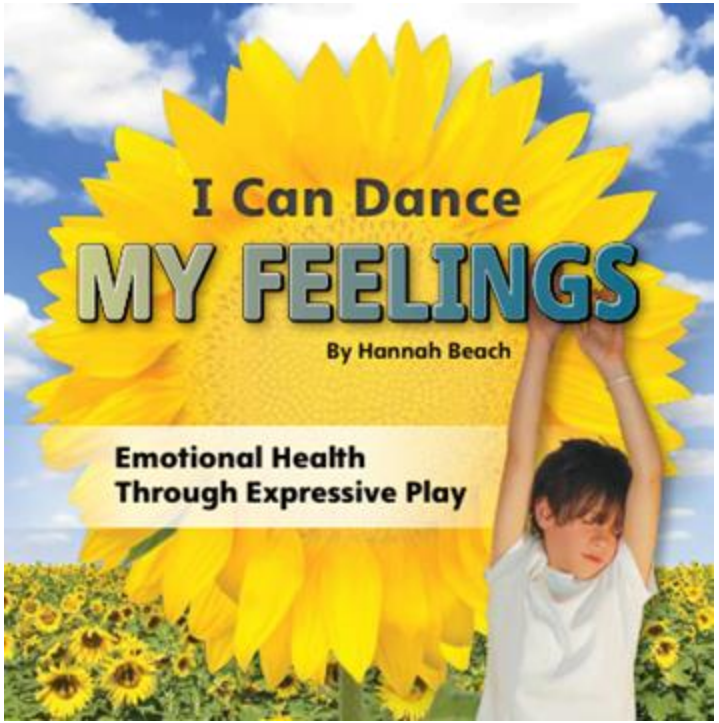
Rubicon | A SAVVAS Company

I Can Dance Series Sample Lesson:

I Can Dance MY FEELINGS

K–6



Let's not just talk about emotional health ... let's experience it together!

Dear Educator,

In today's classrooms, we know children arrive with a diverse range of needs and challenges, including those related to mental health, and social and emotional well-being. As an educator, you play a pivotal role in helping students navigate their emotions, and we want to support you in this important work.

We are thrilled to provide access to a specially designed lesson and a digital book that explore emotional health through expressive play and movement. Expressive play offers a powerful way to help students communicate experiences, ideas, feelings, or activities, express and release emotions, and support connection and relationship building all in a safe and creative environment.

We recognize that supporting students' emotional health and well-being is an integral part of fostering a positive learning experience. By integrating these resources into your classroom, you can create meaningful opportunities for students to better understand and regulate their emotions, all while enhancing their overall mental health.

Your dedication to nurturing the whole child inspires us, and we are committed to being your partner in this journey. We hope this resource helps you to engage your students in playful experiences that bring meaningful support to your students.

Thank you for all that you do to empower your learners every day.

Sincerely,
Howie Bender
Head of Growth and Partnerships
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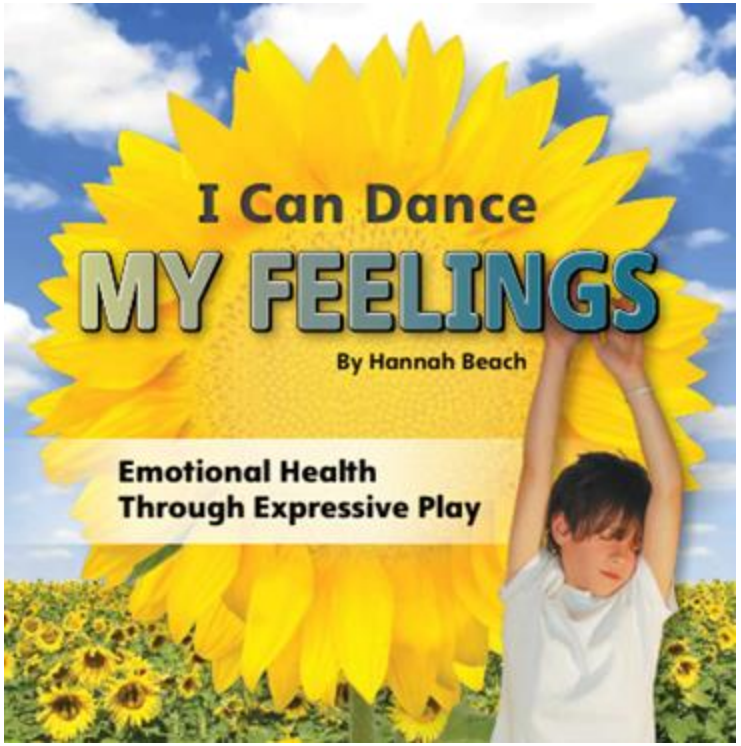
Expressive Play: The Key to supporting Emotional Health

Teacher's Notes

Let's not just talk about emotional health ...
let's experience it together!



Introduction

We are seeing an increase in anxiety and aggression in children.

Many cultural changes have contributed to this negative shift in children's well-being. There are two key factors that have had a negative impact on children's emotional health.

1) **A decline in free play is coinciding with a surge in childhood anxiety.** In a world dominated by screens and structured, outcome-based activities, children's access to free play is being edged out. Children are spending more of their free time indoors on screens than playing outside. We have replaced play with entertainment. It might help to think of it like this: Entertainment is the in breath. Play is the out breath. And we have kids who are breathing in and in and in and in … and then are not coping.

1) **Living in a culture of disconnection means we have more attachment-hungry kids.** Many kids are "free-floating" in their own universes, absorbed in their devices and not getting their relational needs met. When our attachment needs are not met, challenging behaviours surface. In this culture of disconnection, it make sense that we are seeing an increase in negative attention-seeking behaviours.

In order to create change, we need to stop simply talking to kids about their emotional health and instead provide them with opportunities to experience emotional health. Let's turn social and emotional learning into social and emotional DOING. What kids really need is not simply to talk about emotional health — they need to experience emotional health. If we want children to thrive, we need to present them with experiences that offer them a chance to breathe out, provide them a warm sense of connection with others, and give them the room to express themselves.

Expressive play is one of these experiences.

Dance as Expressive Play

I Can Dance

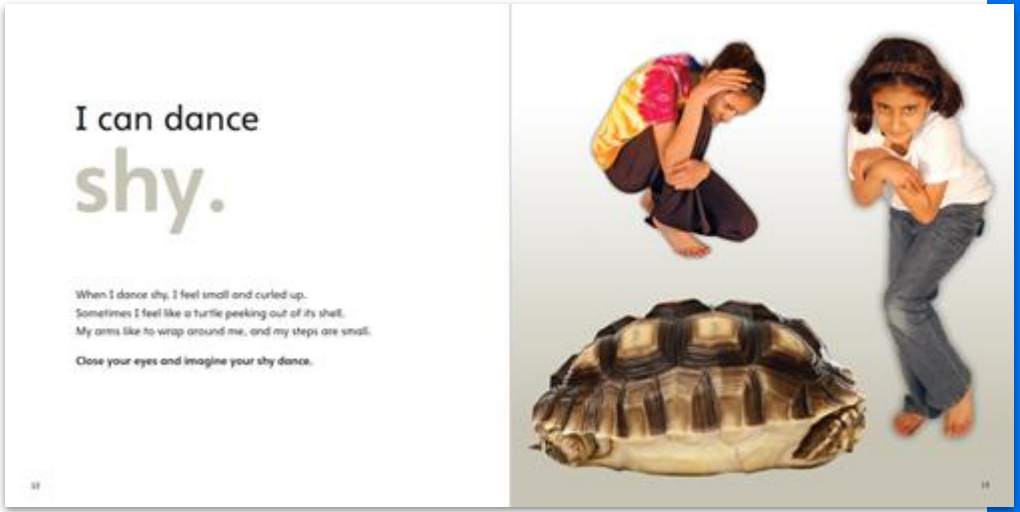
Dance transcends oral language and allows children, even those with limited verbal skills, to be able to connect and “speak” as strongly as those who communicate with words.

Having a medium that can support children in engaging together and creating a sense of connection is extremely important if we are to create a caring community among different groups of children.

If we can create a safe space to hold inclusive movement experiences for our students, the vulnerability that may arise within can create a softness that becomes the fertile ground for caring and connection.

Anyone can facilitate dance as expressive play!

Facilitating dance as expressive play does not require any expertise. It is about exploration, creative freedom, and engagement.



How to Use This Resource

First Time facilitation:
Read the book to the children, and then engage in the expressive play experiences together.
Read the Getting Started Section.

Done it once or twice already?
If you've already read the book and explored the concepts together, you can simply dive directly into the expressive play activities without having to read the book aloud each time.

Modified Starting Point:
If you feel that the children are having some difficulty navigating the space together or feel that your children would benefit from starting with a modified version with more scaffolded support, go to slide 12 to see the Helpful Tips section. This section will guide you with tips or ways to modify the experience.

What's the difference between the voice-over and non-voice-over options on the tracks?
The voice-over tracks are provided to make it as simple as possible for you to lead this activity. You will hear Hannah's voice (in the English version) leading the experience for you and the children to follow. You will need to set up how to start and end the expressive play activity (see page 6), but she will guide you through the entire activity itself; you simply have to follow her words. If you wish to guide the children yourself through the experience, you can use the tracks that are music only and have fun leading the expressive play experience your own way!

What's the best way to engage in the experience?

1. Explore the book's theme as one continuous experience:

Play the track called "Whole book with facilitation"; the activity should take about 6 minutes to complete.

2. One-minute emotional health break:

You can use this resource to provide a one-minute body break for your students. You select one track with facilitation and have fun playing with that single concept for one minute.

- **Take the lead — you pick the theme:** You may wish to take the lead in deciding what concept the children engage in for the one-minute emotional health break. For example, if you see that the children have a lot of pent-up energy in class and need to stomp a bit, you may wish to have them dance like hot peppers or become the texture spiky for one minute so that they can find some release through moving their bodies in this energetically playful way.

- **Make it part of your class routine:** One-minute emotional health breaks can be integrated into your class routine (e.g., "Every day before lunch, we do this ..." or "Every Friday afternoon, we ...").

- **Spontaneous emotional health breaks:** There may be times when you can feel that the children need to have a moment to get out some agitation or emotion and move their bodies or simply experience some joy together. These breaks can be introduced spontaneously as you see fit.

- **Make an I Can Dance surprise box:** If engaging in this experience in this way, you can create an I Can Dance box of ideas for concepts to be pulled from, in this case, a box of feelings. Write down each concept separately, and place the concepts in the box. Have students pick one concept out of the box for the class to explore.

Getting Started

Before Instruction:

Prepare the space you are going to use.

Creating a Safe Physical Environment

Ideally the space should be:

- Modest in size; smaller spaces can encourage children to use their imaginations to find creative ways to physically express themselves, as opposed to large spaces where children tend to want to run. If working in a gym, partition off half of the gym with cones, dividers, and so on. A classroom with desks pushed aside also works well.
- Free of clutter or objects children could bump into or trip on.

Although WE know that expressive play is good for the children's emotional health, it is best not to call the activity "an emotional health break" as it sounds less like fun and more like work. So, when you introduce the experience to children, just call it a dance activity or body break time. This will make it more likely the children will feel comfortable simply engaging, having fun, and not worrying if they are good at it.

Tips for Creating a Safe Space

1. **Join in!**

   Your engagement with the children during the activity is a key component to them developing the comfort to enter fully into the experience. Dancing with the children helps them to build a sense of connection with you. It also models movement for the children.

1. **Facilitate the activity in a private space**

   Choose a private space rather than one that can be viewed by people passing by. This can help children (and you!) feel less self-conscious. It can also support children in exploring in a more process-based way rather than performing, which is more likely to occur when being watched by others. A dimly lit room helps to create a relaxed, calm atmosphere.

During Instruction

- Read the book to the children
- Let the children know that they will be dancing by themselves, not with others. This means that they will not be touching the other children. It can help them to do this if they pretend they have a bubble around them that separates them from others.
- Let the children know that when the music starts, it's time for them to get up and start moving. When the music stops, wherever they are, they freeze and get right back into a ball on the floor. This will give you a way to control when they stop and start moving without having to them vocally to stop – which can be hard over the music, especially when children are full of enthusiasm. For the first while, almost all children will need reminders to return to the floor and curl into a ball when the music stops.
- Have the children spread out, find their own space, and curl up into a ball on the floor with their eyes closed. (As able – alternative possibilities can be suggested for those with different physical needs and abilities. See the helpful tips for more ideas.)
- Now you are ready to begin!

Modifications to support the needs of your students

Helpful Tips:

But the kids are running around everywhere! And they won't stop pushing and bumping into one another!

If the children are having a hard time navigating the space together:

- Have each child do the activity in their own zoned space. Place hula hoops or non-slip individual carpets or mats across the space.
- If you can't separate the workspaces, you can all pretend to glue your feet down! Pretend to put glue on your hands and then rub the soles of your feet. Select a magic cue that unglues the feet at the end (e.g., "*When I clap three times, the glue will magically disappear*").

You may wonder if the experience is creatively hindered since the children cannot move their bodies as fully as when in a larger space. Ironically, many children will express themselves even more when the space is very small or their feet are "glued" down as they need to get very creative with how they will express the theme being danced.

But the kids won't dance! They are too self-conscious!

Some ways to help reluctant kids (or the whole group) to engage in the experience:

Make a ribbon or scarf dance instead. Transferring the experience to an object can make the child less self-conscious. For example, instead of saying, "Let's all be noodles twisting around," say, "How can you make your *ribbon* look like a spaghetti noodle twisting around and around?" Most children are very comfortable making the ribbon express the various themes. And as they are getting their ribbon to "dance," their bodies are often also expressing themselves.

Have them use just their fingers to engage in the activity if whole body movement feels too much. This is a gentle entry point for shy or more reluctant children and can often lead to them quite quickly bringing in their arms, then shoulders, and then the rest of their bodies.

Do a check-in on the emotional safety tips. Did you join in? Is the room dimly lit? Are people watching?

Give it time. Sometimes it takes a few tries when bringing in new activities to explore. Children may need a few short, gentle entry points to become comfortable engaging in a new experience.

I Can Dance

You may wish to start with this modified version if you feel it would work best for your students.
As the educator, you know the children in your class best, and you can "read the need and take the lead" to facilitate in whatever way you think is best.
You can choose your starting point based on your students' needs.

I can Dance MY FEELINGS Soundtrack

I Can Dance

Track 1 - Introduction

Track 2 - Whole book as one continuous dance experience with facilitation.

Track 3 - Whole book as one continuous dance experience without facilitation.

Track 4 - HAPPY music with facilitation

Track 5 - SAD music with facilitation

Track 6 - SHY music with facilitation

Track 7 - SILLY music with facilitation

Track 8 - ANGRY music with facilitation

Track 9 - PEACEFUL music with facilitation

Track 10 - HAPPY music

Track 11 - SAD music

Track 12 - SHY music

Track 13 - SILLY music

Track 14 - ANGRY music

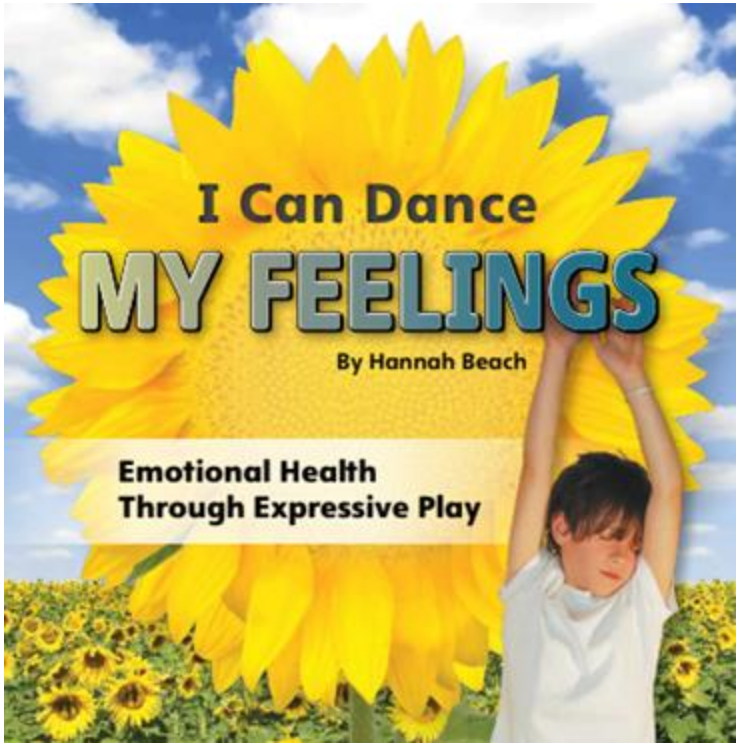
Track 15 - PEACEFUL music

click for music

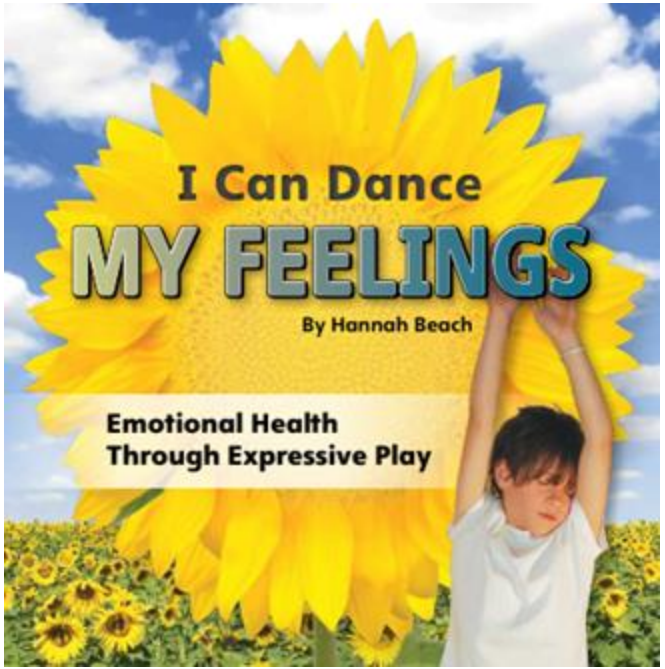
password: icdfeelings61

Lesson Slides

Let's not just talk about emotional health ...
let's experience it together!



I Can Dance MY FEELINGS



read the book

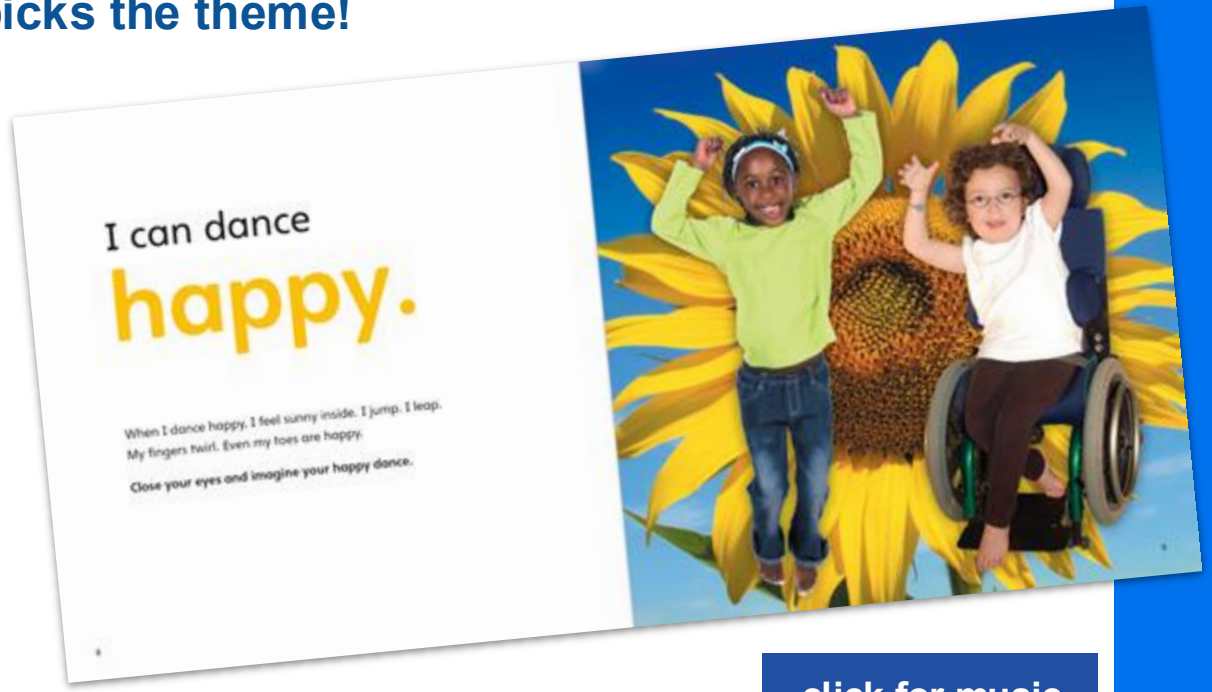
click for music

password: icdfeelings61

One-Minute Body Break

Take the lead — Teacher picks the theme!

happy	sad
shy	silly
angry	peaceful



click for music

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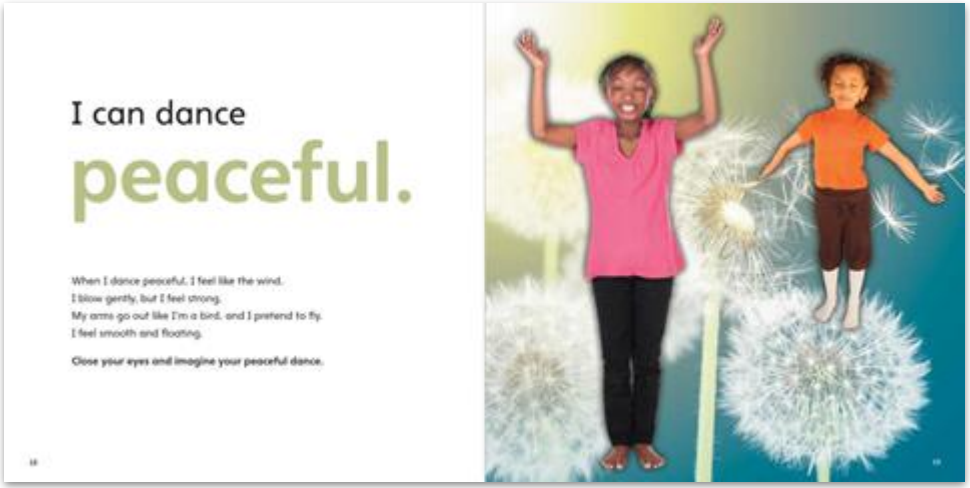
Scheduled One-Minute Body Break!

I Can Dance
MY FEELINGS



click for music

password: icdfeelings61

I Can Dance Surprise Box

Choose one of the feelings from the box to explore together!

happy	sad
shy	silly
angry	peaceful

click for music

password: icdfeelings61

I Can Dance Spin the Wheel

Spin the wheel and explore the feeling that that it lands on!

click for music

password: icdfeelings61

About the Author

Hannah Beach is an award-winning educator, author, emotional health consultant, and keynote speaker. She is the co-author, with Tamara Neufeld Strijack, of the bestselling book *Reclaiming Our Students: Why Children Are More Anxious, Aggressive, and Shut-Down than Ever—and What We Can Do About It,* a trauma-informed resource for educators and parents, now being translated into multiple languages internationally.

She was recognized by the Canadian Human Rights Commission in 2017 as one of five featured changemakers in Canada. Her bestselling **I Can Dance** book series supporting the emotional health of children through movement, play, and expression won a gold medal at the 2017 Moonbeam Children's Book Awards, an international awards contest.

Hannah delivers professional development services across the globe and provides emotional health and play-based learning consulting to schools and community-based programs. She speaks at conferences about the power of relationship and play.

Find her at hannahbeach.ca.

I Can Dance Series

Inclusive resources that use expressive play to build emotional health in the classroom

The **I Can Dance series** is a six book series designed to support children with emotional release and a sense of connection.

Using these books consistently can help to lower the anxiety and aggression educators are seeing in their classrooms.

Each book in this series is accompanied by audio recordings that contain music as well as guided audio facilitation to make their use super easy! The play experience is led by Hannah.

The books assist educators and instructors at any skill level in using expressive play as a way to support emotional health.

Learn More About I Can Dance

Visit our **webpage** to stay informed, learn more about the series, upcoming events, and to order the books!

I Can Dance Webinar Series

Upcoming Sessions:

Thursday, February 27, 2025 from 4–5pm ET

Wednesday, March 12, 2025 from 4–5pm MT