

FAMILY LITERACY GUIDE

ALEXANDER AND THE TERRIBLE, HORRIBLE, NO GOOD, VERY BAD DAY

ABOUT THE BOOK

Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day/Alexander y el dia terrible, horrible, espantoso, horroroso

Judith Viorst, author and Ray Cruz, Illustrator

Alexander woke up with gum in his hair, tripped over his skateboard and accidentally dropped his sweater in the sink. That was just the beginning! Poor Alexander has one of the worst days ever. Judith Viorst tells an amusing story of a young boy whose day just keeps getting worse. The story is told from Alexander's point of view, giving the reader insight into what makes such a terrible, horrible, no good and very bad day.

The Language/Literacy Connection

Using the Many Modes of Communication to Work Through Problems and to Express Your Emotions

Most everyone has had one of those days, a day when everything that seemingly can go wrong does! You wake up in a bad mood and have a difficult time getting out of it. Daily challenges frustrate and anger you. It may be hard to get out of the rut of feeling like everything around you is bad and horrible. Children also have these kinds of days. The challenge is to teach children appropriate ways to communicate their frustrations and negative feelings. Expressing feelings through speaking and writing is an appropriate way for children, as well as adults, to work out problems. Preventive strategies and humor are among the many modes of communication that can lead to positive end results.



Learning Objectives

Students will listen and speak for social interaction. Students will use oral language for effective communication with a variety of people. They will use the social communications of others to enrich their understanding of people.

Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day
JUDITH VIORST

Illustrated by RAY CRUZ



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Early Childhood Education – Infant/Toddler Level

Let's Take a Look at the Problem

Auditory Comprehension

1. Responds to no-no
2. Understands inhibitory words

Expressive Communication

1. Uses five to ten words
2. Uses vocalizations and gestures to request toys or food.

BEFORE YOUR VISIT:

GATHER NEEDED MATERIALS:

- small, child-safe mirror

PREPARE LESSON PROPS

- none

DURING YOUR VISIT:

- With the parent and infant sitting together read or look at *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* / *Alexander y el dia terrible, horrible, espantoso, horroroso*. The concept of this book is rather mature for young children, but toddlers may be amused by Alexander's facial expressions. Point to pictures that show Alexander looking upset to help illustrate how grumpy he feels.
- Say: "(Child's name), look at Alexander, he looks so grumpy! This is the face I make when I'm grumpy." Make a grumpy face. If the child is a toddler, ask to see his/her grumpy face. Ask the parent to show his/her grumpy face. Make and label other facial expressions.

Learning Appropriate Behavior

- Say: "When (child's name) is upset, what does he/she do?" After the parent responds, let him/her know that (most likely) his/her child's actions are typical.
- Say: "Many children who do not yet have the language to communicate use physical means such as hitting and biting to express anger. There are strategies you can use to avoid or change these behaviors. Thinking ahead to prevent a conflict is one of them. For example, when a playmate is coming for a visit put away (child's name) favorite toys to avoid an argument."
- Say: "Think of a situation that is frustrating to (child's name). What can you do to help (child's name) cope in a positive way?"
- Discuss a specific situation and specific strategies the parent can use.
- Say: "An important strategy is to teach (child's name) to use words to express anger and frustration. He/she can say, 'I'm mad!' or 'No' to another child or in a situation that is frustrating. A good way to teach (child's name) to use words to express feelings is to model using words when you are angry. Another technique is to consistently tell (child's name) every time he/she does a specific thing that is against your rules and to tell him/her "no" sooner rather than later."

Early Childhood Education – Preschool/School Age Levels

Think About This...

DURING THE VISIT: With parent and child sitting together, read *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* / *Alexander y el día terrible, horrible, espantoso, horroroso*. If the parent is a reader, ask him/her to read the book to the child. While reading, encourage the child to look at Alexander's expressions. Ask leading questions to engage the parent and child in a discussion about the book. What do you think was the worst thing that happened to Alexander? Where did he want to move? What do you do when you're mad at someone?

Brainstorm

Let's figure out other ways to solve some of Alexander's problems. How could Alexander, his mother, or his teacher handle things differently? How could some of Alexander's problems be prevented? Focus on a few problems. For each problem, discuss what happened in the book, then discuss a way the problem might have been prevented or handled differently. For preschoolers, choose two or three situations. For school-age children, choose four or five situations. If the child and parent are writers, have them write out their ideas.

1. What could Alexander have done so he wouldn't have tripped on his skateboard?
2. What could have made Alexander feel better at breakfast?
3. What could have been done or said to make Alexander feel better during the ride to school?
4. What else could Alexander have done when his friend, Paul, said that Alexander was only his third best friend?
5. What else could Alexander have done when his brother called him a crybaby?
6. What could have been done so that Alexander might not have gotten into so much trouble at his father's office?

Make an Emotions Collage

1. Look at the cut out pictures and separate them into categories: happy, sad, and angry.
2. Use a marker to draw lines that separate the paper into three sections.
3. Label the top of each section: HAPPY, SAD, ANGRY.
4. Glue the pictures in the appropriate categories.

Some Suggestions for Problem Solving

- Be preventative! Plan ahead to avoid problems.
- Use words rather than physical means to express anger! Say "I'm mad" and explain why.
- Use humor to lighten the situation.
- Ask an adult to help in certain situations.

Auditory Comprehension

1. Makes inferences.

Expressive Communication

1. Uses words to describe a physical state.
2. Completes analogies.

Before the Visit

1. Gather needed materials:

- Paper to write responses
- Pen, pencil, or colored markers
- Child-safe scissors
- Glue stick
- Large piece of construction paper
- Magazine pictures of people with different expressions

2. Prepare lesson props:

- Consider possible answers to the questions below
- Cut out the magazine pictures

Parenting Education Activity

How We Can Help

All children experience times of frustration and anger. How they behave at these times and how people around them react can lead to a worse situation or can make the situation better. The focus of this lesson is to discuss techniques for parents to utilize when a child is upset.

INFANTS

Babies cry to express displeasure of one kind or another; they may be hungry, sleepy, bored, have a wet diaper, or be in pain. Their cries let parents know something is needed. It's important to respond to his/her cries and try different ways to satisfy his/her needs.

Change his/her diaper. Give a bottle. Rock and cuddle. Give an interesting toy to play with. If your older baby becomes focused on one thing that seems to frustrate or anger him/her, distract his/her attention away from the problem to something new.

Chances are, he/she will forget about whatever was causing him/her all the trouble.

TODDLERS

Be preventative!

Do something ahead of time to avoid the possibility of a conflict. This is a great way to keep things going smoothly. Help your child use his/her words. Rather than letting your child use physical means to solve frustrating situations, give him/her words to use to express feelings. Say to your child, You can say "I'm mad!"

SCHOOL-AGE

School-aged children are capable of listening to reasoning and of reasoning through some problems on their own. Reasoning is when you explain why. Why you have certain rules, why you make certain decisions, why you feel the way you feel, etc. If a child understands the reason behind a decision, he/she may be better able to cope with the situation.

PRESCHOOL-AGE

Continue to use preventative strategies and have your child use words to express feelings. Teach your child to make choices. Offer choices that you can live with such as: Do you want juice or milk? Do you want to ride your bike or play on the swing? Do you want Mom or Dad to read a bedtime story? Offering acceptable choices lets your child be in control of the final decision, but lets you be in control of the possible alternatives. Teach your child different ways to express feelings such as singing, dancing, and drawing how he/she feels. A different activity can change a bad mood to a good mood quickly!

PRACTICE PROBLEM-SOLVING TECHNIQUES

Use the above techniques, and suggestions to discuss the following scenarios:

- 1. Mary was catching up on her laundry while her six-month old baby daughter, Janie, was taking her morning nap. Suddenly Janie began to cry. Why might Janie be crying? What should Mary do?*
- 2. Ten-year old Lucinda came home from school very excited that her new friend, Terisita, had invited her to spend the night this Friday. Lucinda's mother had never met Terisita or Terisita's parents and did not feel comfortable letting Lucinda spend the night. What could Lucinda's mother say to her daughter to lessen her daughter's disappointment of not being able to spend the night?*
- 3. José's best friend, Samuel, was coming over to play for the afternoon. José's dad knew that his four-year old son had one new game that he really wanted to play with Samuel. When Samuel came over, Samuel had no interest in playing the game. José was very sad and wanted Samuel to go home. What could José's dad do to help the situation?*
- 4. Vicky's two-year-old birthday party was last week, and Vicky had received a new doll she loved. Her cousin, Lisa, is coming over to play. Lisa loves to play dolls. What can Vicky's mother do ahead of time to prevent a squabble between the cousins over Vicky's new doll?*

Interactive Literacy Between Parents and their Children

Express Yourself

There are many different ways to express yourself: talking, singing, making faces, even drawing and dancing.

Here are some activities for you and your child to express emotions in many different ways.

Rewrite the Title

Write a new title for Alexander when he has a great, happy day. Use many adjectives.

Draw It

When your child is feeling angry or is in a bad mood, give him/her crayons or markers and paper to draw a picture about how he/she is feeling. The first picture may actually "look" angry, but if your child enjoys art activities, this may quickly change his/her mood around!

Act It Out

Sit in front of a mirror with your child. See how many different faces you can make. Make happy faces, sad faces, mad faces, surprised faces, sleepy faces, scared faces, silly faces, etc.

Dance Your Grumpies Out

Music has a magical effect. It can change a mood very quickly. Play music your child enjoys and dance your grumpies out!

Write It

If your child is a writer, encourage him/her to write in a "diary." This gives your child an opportunity to express emotions privately through writing.

Sing a Song About Feelings

Sing *If You're Happy and You Know It* in a new way by substituting your own words:

- *If you're mad and you know it, stomp your feet.*
- *If you're mad and you know it, say, "I'm mad!"*
- *If you're mad and you know it, say, "Boo hoo!"*
- *If you're sleepy and you know it, stretch and yawn.*

Make Faces

Sit in front of a mirror with your child. See how many different faces you can make. Make happy faces, sad faces, mad faces, surprised faces, sleepy faces, scared faces, silly faces, etc.

Write a letter with your child to a family member or friend. Write about how you feel about the season, an upcoming holiday or celebration, what's going on in the world, etc. Younger children can draw pictures to include with the letter.