



The NESTING CUPS

When My Feelings Overflow

Sometimes our feelings become bigger than what we can hold by ourselves. Just like a small cup can only hold so much water before it spills over, children sometimes need a safe adult to help hold their big feelings until they are ready to manage them again. Over time, with love, support, and practice, our "cup" grows bigger!



1 Understanding My Feeling Cup

Draw or color your cup.

Today my cup feels...

- Empty
- Calm
- Half Full
- Almost Full
- Overflowing

2 What is filling my cup today?

Draw or write inside your cup.

Examples:

- School
- Loud noises
- Fighting
- Missing someone
- Feeling left out
- Homework
- Feeling scared
- Feeling excited
- Feeling angry

3 When My Cup Overflows...

Sometimes my feelings become so big that I might:

- ☐ Cry
- ☐ Yell
- ☐ Shut down
- ☐ Hide
- ☐ Feel scared
- ☐ Get angry
- ☐ Have a tummy ache
- ☐ Worry a lot
- ☐ Other: _____

4 My Safe Big Cup

When my little cup overflows... Who helps hold my feelings? Draw your safe people inside the large cup.

- Mom
- Dad
- Grandma
- Grandpa
- Foster Parent
- Teacher
- Therapist
- Coach
- Friend
- Other _____



5 What can my safe grown-up say?

Circle the words that help.

- I've got you.
- You're safe.
- You don't have to carry this alone.
- We'll get through this together.
- I'm here until your feelings get smaller.
- I can help hold this.
- I love you.
- It makes sense that you're feeling this way.



6 What Helps My Cup Empty?

Draw or check all that help.

- ☐ Swinging
- ☐ Reading
- ☐ Music
- ☐ Drawing
- ☐ Hug
- ☐ Blanket
- ☐ Prayer
- ☐ My pet
- ☐ Deep breathing
- ☐ Walking
- ☐ Talking
- ☐ Water
- ☐ Fidget
- ☐ Quiet space
- ☐ Other _____

7 My Cup Can Grow!

Every time...

Draw how your cup will look one day.

- someone helps me
- I practice calming down
- I solve a problem
- I ask for help
- I feel safe
- someone believes me
- I know I am loved

...my cup gets a little bigger.



For Parents, Caregivers, and Professionals



Children often have a smaller capacity to regulate overwhelming emotions because the parts of the brain responsible for emotional regulation are still developing. During periods of stress, fear, trauma, or significant change, their "cup" can overflow quickly.

Our role is not to **stop** children from having big emotions—it is to become their **safe bigger cup**. Instead of trying to fix or minimize feelings, we can **communicate**:

"Your feelings are safe with me."
"If your cup overflows, mine is big enough to help hold it."

As children repeatedly experience calm, regulated adults responding with safety, connection, and co-regulation, they begin to internalize those experiences. Over time, the child develops a larger emotional "cup" and eventually becomes their own "safe other"—able to recognize, tolerate, and regulate emotions independently while also seeking healthy support when needed.



8 Reflection Together

What filled your cup today?

What helped your cup feel lighter?

Who helped hold your feelings?

What are you proud of today?

Tomorrow, how can we help your cup stay balanced?

My feelings matter. It's okay to need help. I am not alone.

