

# FIRST STEPS AND EXTENDED INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

## 1) FIRST STEPS WITH THE GEFÜHLSMONSTER® CARDS

- Make the cards your own. The best way to achieve this is to use them yourself, with friends, in a seminar or by doing the Gefühlsmonster scan<sup>1</sup> online or with your cards every day for a week.
- If you work with little children, please use the word “monster” only if your child understands that it is meant playfully. Otherwise you might prefer to use a different term such as “characters” or “little guys” - just use your imagination.
- The Gefühlsmonsters “work” on two levels: on the one hand, they remind you of situations that you have experienced, and on the other hand, of your own feelings. It is advisable to let your children speak without intervening, because they can then make the cards their own in their own way.
- The person looking at the pictures decides what he or she sees in the pictures. Instead of discussing whether the card actually shows this or that feeling, try to listen with an open mind to what the other person might want to tell you!

- At the beginning, it is not advisable to try and connect a specific goal to the use of the cards. If your children enjoy



playing with the cards, they will begin themselves to observe their feelings in certain situations. If they then also experience how helpful a card can be as support in a difficult situation, or how their parents suddenly understand them better, this is a good prerequisite for children to discover themselves how the cards can be a useful tool.

- You can use the cards as signals if someone from the family does not want to be disturbed. You should select these signal cards beforehand at a quiet moment and tell all family members what they mean for the person who uses them – for example at his room door.
- Be empathetic in telling stories. Avoid difficult topics at the beginning (for example a bad situation from school, which the children might have experienced, is not suitable for game No. 2...)
- Join the game! Choose a game that you think your children will most likely enjoy and just get started.

<sup>1</sup> <http://scan.gefuehlsmonster.de/> - Explanation on the next page

## 2) GEFÜHLSMONSTER SCAN – A GOOD WAY FOR YOU TO GET ACQUAINTED WITH THE CARDS

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**Exercise: “Test how you feel about a question or situation”**

1. Choose a situation for which you want to clarify your feelings.
  - What is it about?
  - What is your most important question relating to the situation?
  - If you like, make some notes.
2. Now look over the cards with an unfocused look, so that you are open for which cards appeal to you, resonate with you. For this, you can spread your cards out on the table, or use the free online Gefühlsmonster scan.

*Tip: Feelings are contagious. If you succeed in choosing the cards that spontaneously resonate with you, you might encounter surprising additional insights.*

3. Look at the first four cards that you selected, one after the other, and ask yourself the following question:

*“What does this card mean to me?”*

4. Now look at the whole selection of your cards.

- What does it mean with regard to your situation from 1.?
- What does it mean with regard to your question?

5. Consider:

- How would I like to feel in that situation?
- Or which Gefühlsmonster would be helpful for me in that situation?

6. If you are using the online scan, place this card in the box on the far right. If using a deck of cards, place your selection on your dining table or desk as a reminder.

7. Only for the online scan:

If you want to be able to refer back to your selection and think about it in your own time, click “Next”.

If you want, you can have the card selection sent to you by email. Your email address will not be stored by us or used for anything other than sending you your selection.

### 3) WORKING WITH A CHILD

#### Basic exercise: How the monsters are doing

*To play alone or in the family.*

Simply let your children play alone with the monster cards. They will perhaps select individual cards and say something about them – thereby deciding how they would like to deal with them themselves.

You can also ask the following questions. Not all at once, but the one that you regard to be the most suitable for your children.

1. *“Have a look at these cards. Pick out a few and, if you like, maybe you can tell me something about them.” (That is, you let the children tell you how the “monsters” are feeling – see explanation below).*
2. *“See if you find a card for daddy, mummy, your brother, sister, teacher, best friend” etc. realizing that this is a momentary picture of how the children perceive their relatives.*
3. *“See if you find a card for tomorrow’s school trip, the visit to grandpa, the swimming lessons ...” (please add your own situations). Photos are also a good choice here. You can let your children assign monster cards to the photos.*

What is important in this context is to let the children decide how they might want to use the cards and to accept the meaning that they give to the cards. You will see that you will have interesting and deep conversations, quite by themselves.



Explanation: Feelings are contagious, and so are representations of feelings. Children as well as adults are attracted to the cards which have something to do with their current experiences. If you then also talk about “how the monsters are doing”, this will create a welcome distance to their own experiences, while it still allows them to talk about themselves.

Like this, the children get the opportunity to talk about situations that they choose themselves. At the same time, they can also speak “about the monsters” and do not have to directly say something about their own feelings. This makes it easier to talk about them.

If you feel like it, just join the game! For example, you could point to individual monsters and ask how these monsters are probably doing. Or even say what you think how they might be doing.

## 4) GAMES

### 4.1 Creating a monster story together

*At least two players, funnier with more. Can be played sitting down.*

*See if your children like this game – especially imaginative children like it very much. It is important to stick to made-up stories and not to include difficult stories that you experienced yourself.*



Everyone draws a card. One player begins to tell something about his monster, the other players complement and expand the story by telling appropriate stories about the characters drawn by them. It is a good idea to give each monster a (thought-out) name.

**An example:** *(please take this only as a suggestion – do not tell the children, otherwise you will restrict the kind of story that can come out in the game!)*

Monster Pat doesn't want to put on her jacket at all.



Her Mummy says: *"You're not going out without a jacket today! You have just been sick!"*



There comes Monster Nat, with whom Pat really enjoys playing and says: *"Let's go to the playground together, shall we?"*

*"Oh, yes!"*, says Pat, she loves the new swing in the playground.



But Pat still doesn't want to put on her jacket....



Then Daddy comes home and says *"Pat, come on, let's go to the playground together and I'll push you on the swing!"*



*"Oh."*, says Pat, *"Where's my jacket now??"*



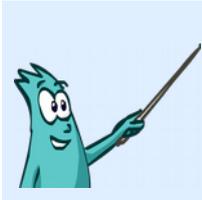
and so on and so on....

## 4) GAMES

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### 4.2 Emotions “the wrong way round”

*A game for the whole family or for a group of children who know each other. Best played in motion.*



First, the Gefühlsmonster cards are laid out on the table face down. Then the group chooses a situation, for example

- going to the playground
- having a pet
- going swimming
- school trip
- being in love
- having a quarrel
- museum
- birthday party
- visiting grandpa etc.

Each player now takes one Gefühlsmonster card and tries to imagine how this monster would behave in this situation, how it would move and talk with the others.

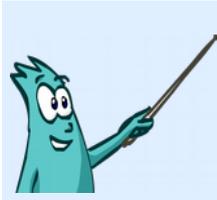
1. As a first step the player can show his card to the others and then play.
2. Once all the players know the Gefühlsmonsters quite well and you have another set of cards or a poster to look at, the card can be kept hidden and the situation is played out to fit the monster’s expression. The other players can then guess which card the acting player might have drawn.

*Very lively game. As soon as the cards are drawn, laughter comes up, because the cards often do not fit the situation. It is all the more fun to play these situations “the wrong way round”.*

## 4) GAMES

### 4.3 Once upon a time

*If possible, play in two groups – for this you will need two Gefühlsmonster sets or one set and a poster.*



One person tells a story, a fairy tale or recites a poem. If everyone feels up to it, you could start by re-enacting the story.

1. All think about and put forward the different roles and figures in the story.
2. Then each group would select one

Gefühlsmonster card for each role, depending on how the individual figures (for example Little Red Riding Hood, the huntsman, the grandma etc.) feel.

Since everybody contributes their own ideas, you may encounter interesting conversations about the different suggestions.

3. Now the groups get together and exchange ideas about which cards were chosen for each character and why.

Again, conversations may emerge about how people can differ in how they experience the same situation.

## 5) MY FEELING – YOUR FEELING

*An exercise for the family. All sit at the table, the cards lay well visible on the table.*

1. A family member suggests a situation for which he might not know how all the other family members feel towards it. For example climbing a mountain or a parachute jump or eating an unusual dish, etc.
2. Now everyone chooses a monster card, without actually touching the cards. When everybody has made their choice, each family member will reveal the number of their chosen card and, if they like, they can also explain why they chose this card.

3. Now it's the next player's turn to suggest a situation, and so on and so forth.

This game is a great way to learn about the fact that we can all have different feelings in the same situation. In the family, we usually know this, but it can be interesting to exchange views about situations which the family has not encountered before.



Make sure that everyone is comfortable with this game and break it off as soon as someone feels uncomfortable.

The idea is more to encourage an exchange about special wishes and ideas.

## 6) IN-DEPTH: SOMATIC MARKER

If you want to help your children better understand their feelings, you can explain to them what somatic markers are.

First of all, an introduction for you – if you are familiar with the concept, you can easily pass it on to your children.

**Somatic markers are body sensations which serve as indicators<sup>2</sup>.** Negative somatic markers are the body sensations that you feel as changes in the body when experiencing difficult feelings and positive somatic markers are accordingly the body sensations you experience with pleasant feelings.

Exercise:

1. Think of a difficult situation from the past week. Alternatively, you can look at Gefühlsmonster card no. 16 or 22. Now focus your attention on your body.

- What is changing there? There may be quite subtle changes, try to approach this exercise with a spirit of exploration.
- How does it feel? If you had to describe it to a friend, what would you say?
- Take the time to make some notes – you are just discovering your very own and personal negative somatic marker. If you write down the sensation in your own words, this will increase the likelihood that you will become aware of emerging difficult feelings in everyday life more easily and earlier. Most of the time, these are feelings of tightness/constriction,

tension, you might even perceive dark colours. As pointed out before, your own words are important here, so that you can memorize your personal marker.



If you have a great aversion to this part of the exercise, it could be that you are experiencing too much stress or are already in a burnout condition. In that case go straight to the second part of the exercise and when you find a moment for yourself give some thought to who might be able to support you so that you will feel better again.

This is especially important if you explain the exercise to your children.

2. Now let's look at pleasant situations. Think about the most beautiful situation you experienced in the past week or that you can think of. Or take a look at Gefühlsmonster card no. 5 or 15, or any other pleasant card for you. Feel into yourself:

- How does it feel physically when you recall this situation once again in your imagination?
- What is changing in your body as opposed to the first part of the exercise?

Again, if you make some notes, it is more likely that, over time, you will find it easier in your everyday life to become aware of pleasant moments and to reach a state where your brain can work optimally.

<sup>2</sup> I would like to recommend a wonderfully brief and illuminating book on somatic markers: "Das Geheimnis kluger Entscheidungen" (*The secret of wise decisions*) by Maja Storch .



Finally, another tip if you cannot shake off a difficult feeling: choose a Gefühlsmonster which you find the most pleasant at the

moment, and place it on your dining table or desk! Any other image which helps you connect with happy and satisfied feelings is also suitable for this purpose.

Once you have familiarized yourself with the concept of somatic markers and feel comfortable with the exercise, you can turn it into a game with your children.



Please be careful in your selection of the difficult situation with your children and make sure to not choose serious ongoing crises such as mobbing at school, but rather a smaller-scale

situation that irritated or upset them.

Important: Always conclude this exercise with the pleasant feelings, let everybody choose a favourite feel-good-card and, together with the children, find a place in your home where the card can be seen easily.

It is also advisable to round off the exercise with a game that you all enjoy playing.

With this exercise you will give your children an important tool which will allow them to learn more about themselves and their feelings. Additionally, it can also be helpful to watch the film "Inside Out" together. The children will then have a good picture of what it is like to have your hand on the "anger button", or to collect "yellow orbs", i.e. joyful experiences.

We hope that these explanations will help you to address the important topic of feelings with your children in a playful way.