

## Emotion Coaching - Role of the School Counsellor and a Relationship Strategy



Welcome to the 2019 school year at St Mary's College. We look forward to continuing to work together to assist your children, and you, in our capacity as school counsellors.

Well-being is one of our main focuses, and as we know, a student will learn best when feeling free of sadness and worry, happiness, optimistic, valued and able to manage their emotions; and to also have the strength to persevere. If your child is suffering emotionally or socially and you feel that these feelings are not passing as they should, please do not hesitate to contact us on the school number or by email.

Beginning at a new school or returning to school can be exciting and challenging all at once. Be an open-ear to your children and to tune-in to their body language. Be wary that sometimes what is being said is code for something else e.g. 'I have a tummy ache,' could well be code for 'I am really worried about something that has happened or something I think might happen.' Rather than relying on questioning, try emotion coaching your child to keep conversations flowing.

Emotion coaching starts by recognising and naming your child's feelings. Many parents see the positive emotions a child expresses; but staying calm whilst drawing close to a child who is angry, feeling disappointed or sad can take some practice.

### How to emotion coach:

- Observe, listen, and learn how your child expresses different emotions.
- Watch for changes in facial expressions, body language, posture and tone of voice.
- Use emotional moments as opportunities to connect by stating - rather than questioning - how your child is feeling.
- Naming emotions helps to soothe. When naming the emotion/s, your child is feeling you act as a mirror to them. Helping to calm your child, you might say: 'You are feeling frustrated about that', 'you are feeling disappointed with yourself', 'you felt as if your friends didn't care', 'you feel as if you are the only one not allowed to do that', 'I would feel like that if it happened to me.'
- These statements demonstrate - loudly and clearly - that you understand their feelings and that they are normal. These statements serve to bring you closer to your child and allow him/her to decide what to do with the feeling.
- If you pitch the emotion's name incorrectly, your son or daughter will quickly correct you. It is not your task, when emotion coaching, to remove the feeling or do anything but to create a resonance - an understanding. Negative feelings are not to be ashamed of; they are valid.

- Ensure that you identify the emotions your child is experiencing, rather than telling your child how he/she should feel.

Emotion coaching helps your child build a vocabulary for different feelings. Most young children can name sad, happy, angry, scared and frustrated - but do they know ashamed, proud, jealous, overwhelmed, confident, confused, betrayed, cautious, hopeful or enraged?

Emotion coaching your child, particularly when they are experiencing a negative feeling, will help to strengthen your relationship with him/her.

Your child will be more prepared for the challenges that life can bring when they can name and regulate their emotions, a skill that will help them self soothe.

Try this technique the next time your child exhibits strong emotions; understanding what you are really doing is being a mirror to those feelings through language.

After three or four feelings statements, it is likely your child will feel increasingly understood, and should calm with each statement. The technique will build the strength of your relationship and your child will be more prepared for the challenges that life can bring as they learn to regulate their emotions.

In our role as school counsellors we provide emotional and social support to students who are facing challenges or stressors in their daily lives. We do not have magic wands, but we are trained to listen and provide support for students who are struggling.

We do not diagnose or treat illness, but we do work with, and advise parents with next-steps - if a referral to a health professional is appropriate.

We do, however, assist students with coping skills; sometimes providing strategies and education around the issues they are experiencing. For example, we might help a child to know what is normal to feel and to experience, if they are perhaps grieving or feeling anxious; and we help them to understand and process these feelings.

We work to help students build and maintain stronger relationships with their friends and family members.

Of course, the list of issues that young people may face today is endless. It can include everything from study worries and friendship issues, to personal and family tragedies, and death. We see all issues as important to the person experiencing them. We aim to provide support and strategies, but our primary goal is to help and empower students to tap into their own strengths and resources, assisting them to come up with their own realistic and achievable goals and solutions, and to have hope and a positive view of their future.

Under most circumstances the conversations we have with students are held in total confidence. There are exceptions, of course, and when we have serious concerns about a student's safety or health, parents will always be contacted.

Working with children in the Junior School is always done in consultation, and with the expressed permission of parents. In the Senior School, students may approach the counsellor for a confidential appointment without their parents knowing, but the same proviso exists; that a parent or guardian is contacted if there are concerns for a student's safety or health.

Parents regularly call or email us to seek advice and to discuss their concerns about their child. We are very happy to be contacted this way. We are also very happy and willing to meet with parents here at school and to liaise with teachers around best strategies to assist students who are struggling at school.

We can be contacted on the following email addresses or by phoning the Business Office

If there are topics you would like us to cover in our regular newsletter column your suggestions are most welcome.

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