

Emotion Coaching

Are you concerned that your child is unable to express his/her emotions in ways which are proportionate to their feelings and to the situation? Learning to EMOTION COACH might really help you.

Everything we do and everything we learn is shaped in some way by the way we feel? As parents, you are your child's most important feedback loop for dealing with emotions in age appropriate and situation appropriate ways. It would be fair to assume that as your child grows from toddlerhood, you want him/her to exhibit their emotions in effective and proportionate ways – not to let all the feelings hang out as he/she pleases.

How do children learn about emotions and what is appropriate behaviour when they are feeling a strong emotion? As parents we spend a lot of time teaching our children how to do things such as reading, using cutlery, tying laces and taking time to help children learn to understand and express their feelings is vitally important too.

Children who understand their feelings and express them in respectful ways form stronger friendships, calm themselves down more quickly when they become upset and handle their moods better than those who do not have these skills. When you help your child to name their feelings, express how they are feeling and react to those feelings in healthy ways, you are using the technique of emotion coaching. As adults we do this quite readily with our friends. It is an easy skill to transfer when parenting but perhaps does not come to us as readily when helping our children. You can set a good example by naming your own emotions and talking about them.

Emotion Coaching starts by recognising and naming your child's feelings. Many parents are able to 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, that they are normal, they serve to bring you closer to your child and allow him/her to decide what to do with the feeling. If you pitch the naming of the emotion 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 or she should feel

Emotion coaching helps your child build a vocabulary for different feelings – most young children can name sad, happy, angry, frustrated but do they know ashamed, proud, jealous, overwhelmed, confident, confused, betrayed, cautious, hopeful, 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 life can bring when they can name and regulate their emotions and this will help to lead them to being able to self soothe as well.

Try this technique the next time your child exhibits strong emotions, understanding all you are 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 life can bring as they learn to regulate their emotions.

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