

Parenting Tool: Emotion Coaching

Emotionally intelligent children will enjoy increased self-confidence, greater physical health, better performance in school, and healthier social relationships.

What is emotion coaching?

Emotion coaching is a parenting tool that can help prevent and lower your child's strong negative emotions and reactions (such as anger, yelling, saying mean things and throwing things) during times of distress. Here are some of the key parts of emotion coaching:

- Be aware of your child's emotions
 - Recognize that when your child shows emotion it is a chance for closeness and teaching
 - Listen thoughtfully and let your child know you understand and accept (validate) their feelings
 - Label emotions (angry, sad, frustrated, etc.) in words your child can understand
 - Help your child find better ways to solve a problem or deal with an upsetting situation
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Emotion coaching steps

Step 1: Label and validate your child's feelings

Often when children show negative emotions or are being oppositional (arguing, refusing to do what they are told, or talking back) they may really be upset about something else. Instead of dealing with the oppositional behavior right away, it can be helpful to:

- Label the feeling, such as "you seem really frustrated right now." This shows empathy – that you understand what your child is feeling – and may help them better recognize their feelings.
 - Then, validate their emotional experience: "It makes sense that you are frustrated."
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Step 2: Deal with the problem behavior (if needed)

- Set limits so your child learns how to manage their behavior, even when they have strong, negative emotions.
 - If your child has become very upset (escalated), have them take a brief time-out or "chill-out" to calm down first.
 - Help your child see that it is OK to have the emotion but that they are still responsible for their behavior. For example: "It is OK to feel angry and frustrated, but you still have to be safe with others. After you take some time to cool off, you can apologize to your brother and then we can talk about what happened."
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1 of 2

To Learn More

- Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine Unit
206-987-2195
- Outpatient Psychiatry Program
206-987-2164
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.



Step 3: Problem solve

- Find out what caused (triggered) your child to be upset. For example, you could ask, “Did something happen today at school to make you upset?” or “Is there anything I can do to help?”
 - Empathize and validate your child’s feelings again. It is important not to tell your child that they should feel a different way but to help them understand what they are feeling – whether the emotions are positive or negative or some of both.
 - Work with your child to come up with solutions to deal with or prevent problems next time.
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