

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Emotion coaching your child

TIP SHEET

Relationships Australia WA's education team have developed a range of tips to help support you during the COVID-19 outbreak. As a free resource, we encourage you to share this with your community.

Children are not born knowing how to manage their emotions, but learn how to handle their emotions through watching and learning from the people most important to them, their caregivers.

Dr John Gottman, a well-regarded psychologist who has spent around 30 years researching relationships, believes that emotion coaching is the key to raising resilient, happy and well-adjusted children.

He believes that if we emotion coach our children just 30% of the time, it will have a profound impact on their emotional intelligence and resilience. That's good news – no one has to be a perfect parent, but learning a few new skills might help you become a better one.

Here are some suggestions to help you emotion coach your child during this difficult time:

1. Teach your children about emotions and how they work

To do this, first understand that emotions are a natural and valuable part of life. Take time to observe your child and find out how they express their different emotions and become more aware of your own emotions. Children can pick up on our emotional energy – our worries and anxieties can transfer to them, so take some time to work through your own emotions and calm yourself before talking to your child about COVID-19.

2. Remember that children are still learning how to manage their emotions

Oftentimes they don't know what they are feeling, why they are feeling like that or how to manage their feelings. Their strong emotions might show up as tantrums, emotional outbursts or stomach-aches. Be patient with them, try to see them as learners, rather than being intentionally difficult.

3. Accept all emotions, whether they are happy, sad or angry

Try not to judge, dismiss, or avoid your child's emotions, but use these emotional moments as learning opportunities. Encourage your child to talk about their feelings, and give them your full attention when they do. Try to identify the emotion your child is feeling. Some children might be worried about COVID-19, and some might not care about it at all. Ask open ended questions, and take time to really listen to what they are feeling. Take their emotions seriously – a small thing for you, may be a big thing for them.

4. Help your children learn to label their emotions

Teach them what words go with what they are feeling - naming emotions helps soothe a child. Set a good example by naming your own emotions and talking about how you manage them. A simple way to broaden your child's emotional vocabulary is to google 'feeling faces' and print off one of the worksheets of emoji faces with the relevant emotional label under it. A lot of parents put these pictures on the fridge for their child to refer to, to help them express and label how they are feeling.

5. Teach your child about emotions by reflecting on their behaviour

For example, if your child is getting angry that he can't see his friends, reflect: "I can see you feel really frustrated that you can't visit your friends at the moment". Remember to listen to your child and try to identify the emotion they are feeling without judgement or telling them how they should feel.

6. Help children think through solutions to difficult situations that upset them

If they are desperate to see a friend, is there a creative way you can achieve this goal?

7. Remember - you are your child's safe place

They often save their strongest emotions for you, which can be challenging as a parent. But this is their way of telling you that they trust you to love them regardless of how they act - take a deep breath and try to coach them through it.

As we journey through these challenging times, please reach out for support and connection amongst your community or if you'd like further support from Relationships Australia WA you can call us on 1300 364 277.

Our Education team will continue to facilitate Relationship Australia WA's seminars, workshops and courses face-to-face once government guidelines allow. You might like to like us on Facebook to keep up to date with support information and details of services we can offer during this time.

If you'd like to register your interest in attending a course on ***Emotion Coaching your Child*** once available, or any of our other courses, please email education@relationshipsaustralia.org.au or call 6164 0200.