

Emotion coaching your child

TIP SHEET

Relationships Australia WA's education team has developed a range of tips to help support you during difficult times. As a free resource, we encourage you to share this with your community.

Children are not born with the knowledge of how to manage their emotions. They learn how to handle their emotions through watching and learning from the people most important to them, usually their caregivers.

Dr. John Gottman, a highly-regarded psychologist, believes 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.

1. Remember, children are still learning how to manage their emotions

As children aren't born knowing what emotions are or how to handle them, often 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 and try to see them as learners, rather than being intentionally difficult.

2. Teach your children about emotions and how they work

To do this, you must 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 learn how to calm yourself.

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. Ask open-ended questions, and take time to 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 can help soothe a child and experts say we need to name our emotions before we can begin to tame them. Set a good example by naming your own emotions and talk about how you manage them. A simple way to broaden your child's emotional vocabulary is to google 'feeling faces' and print off a worksheet 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 stay at the park, reflect: "*I can see you feel frustrated that we have to leave the park right now*". Remember to try to listen to your child and their emotions without judgement or telling them how they should feel.

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

Once your child has calmed down, you can help them to identify and consider a range of solutions to determine if there is a way they can achieve their goals.

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 feel safe with you and that they trust you to keep loving them, regardless of how they act. So 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 are continuing to facilitate Relationship Australia WA's seminars, workshops and courses face-to-face and online.

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