

Five steps for teaching children about emotions

1. Be aware of your child's emotion and decipher the cause and function that underlies their behaviour

Emotional awareness simply means that you recognise when you are feeling an emotion, you can identify your feelings and are sensitive to the presence of emotions in other people.

Observe you child's:

- Body Language
- Facial Expression
- Tone of Voice
- Gestures



Ask yourself, what has just happened that may have made them react?

Sometimes your child's emotions may not be expressed externally. For some, emotions are experienced as internal changes. Communication is key!

As a parent, you need to recognise that it's okay to express negative emotions, such as anger when your child has done something to make you mad. The key is to express your own feelings in ways that are not destructive to your relationship. By doing so, you are demonstrating two things:

1. Strong feelings can be expressed and managed
2. Your child's behaviour really matters to you

2. Recognise the opportunity to teach your child about emotions

Identify the opportunities that you have, as a parent to teach the child about why they may be feeling this way and how they can make themselves feel better.

3. Listen to your child empathetically and acknowledge and validate their feelings

Let your children experience the emotion and let them know that it's okay to feel all emotions; but also let them know that you understand how they're feeling.

4. Teach your child how to verbally label and describe their emotions

Teach them what the emotion is so that it doesn't feel so overwhelming for them. For example, "I know you're disappointed that I took the toy away" or "it's very sad that you lost your action figure".

5. Continue to set limits on any inappropriate behaviours while helping your child problem-solve

For example, quiet time for aggressive behaviours; consequences for other inappropriate behaviours whilst helping the child to problem-solve the best way to manage their feelings.

Other Strategies for Emotion Coaching

- Be patient
- Be honest with your child
- Avoid excessive criticism, humiliating comments or mocking your child
- Avoid calling your child names that label them negatively, for example, lazy, selfish or thoughtless
- Point out your child's small successes to boost confidence
- Identify what she enjoys – and what he/she doesn't enjoy
- Be aware of your child's needs, both physically and emotionally
- Avoid agreeing with the 'enemy' when a child feels mistreated
- Empower your child by giving them choices and respecting their wishes.

When it comes to dealing with the up-and-down world of emotions, your kids naturally take their cues from you.

Your attitude toward emotions, especially negative ones like sadness or anger, can shape how your kids learn to handle their own feelings. We all have different approaches to emotional experiences, but some are more helpful in nurturing emotional development than others.

It is unreasonable to expect your child to always be happy, cheerful and calm. Sadness and anger are not signs of failure but should be accepted as basic, normal signs of emotion.

A bad mood is not the sign of a bad child.

It is important to encourage your child to express their emotions, to be open and honest about their feelings. You need to keep the line of communication open between you and your child. If your child feels as though they cannot express their frustrations and negative moods, this may build up and trigger problematic behaviours.

