

Emotional Coaching Techniques

Recognize Emotions

- Understand and be aware of your own emotions throughout the day. Notice when you're happy, sad, frustrated, disinterested, joyful, etc.
- Tune in to children's emotions. Get to know the children well and recognize their emotional trends and needs at different times of the day. We tend to give the greatest amount of attention to explosive emotions, because they draw the most attention and often alert us to safety and supervision needs. All emotions have value, are a means of communication and deserve our attention – even lower intensity emotions.
- Look for clues to what makes children scared, proud, happy, anxious.
- Observe how children express emotions – watch for changes in body language, facial expressions, posture, and tone of voice.

Identify Teachable Moments and Opportunities for Connection

- Pay close attention to children's emotions-don't dismiss or avoid them.
- Recognize feelings and encourage children to talk about how they feel – a simple way is a feelings-check in poster.
- Think of ways to connect with children– does a child need to be encouraged by connection with you or friends? How can you fill the child's emotional tank? A smile, or hug? Time together? A kind word? What can you do to provide encouragement?
- Be proactive! Provide guidance before emotions escalate.
- Seek emotional outbursts and meltdowns as ways to help children learn social-emotional skills. Think of it as a chance to use your emotional coaching skills.

Offer Validation & Empathy

- Validate their emotions Instead of telling a child how they feel, validate their emotions. We can see that they are frustrated, sad, upset. Let them know that we see them.
- Take their emotions seriously. Their emotions are important to them, and they are real, just like yours.
- Empathize when children are struggling with emotions-we've all been there! Empathy is recognizing someone's emotions and finding that emotional memory within ourselves.
- Show empathy to others – often empathy is something that is modeled vs a natural behavior. If a child hurts another child's feelings, instead of forcing and insincere apology that the child doesn't feel...model empathy. "I'm so sorry you were hurt, what can I do to help?"

Label Emotions and Model Responses

- Practice emotion recognition games or identifying feelings with the feeling faces cards or posters. For a poster example, [follow this link](#).
- Recognize others' feelings – use on the job training. Discuss bucket filling and practice identifying empty and full bucket signs. "Look at the smile on your friend's face! You've helped fill his bucket!" Oh, that's sad, your friend's bucket is leaking out of his eyes...let's see if we can help."

- Encourage children to talk about feelings. Avoid interrupting them while they share their story.
- Practice active listening by saying things like, “It sounds like you’re feeling sad, excited, scared, happy...is that right?” Introduce complex vocabulary for more complex feelings – use words like frustrated, disappointed, annoyed, delighted, etc.
- Label your own feelings appropriately. “I’m feeling sad today, my dog is feeling sick and is going to see the veterinarian later.” It labels emotions, gives a point of reference and opens conversations – you’ll now know about everyone else’s pet woes.
- Model your own emotions appropriately. Don’t hide your emotions from children, express them and allow them to see you work through stressful situations. Children often will respond to stressful, upsetting situations the way they see the adults in their lives respond.
- Apologize if you’ve acted out of line - “Hey everyone, I’m feeling really grumpy today. I’m sorry that I was grouchy with you. Will you forgive me?”

Be Consistent with Expectations and Boundaries

- Set reasonable and logical limits for behavior – communicate with children that it’s okay to be mad, sad, frustrated, but it’s not okay to hurt others or be destructive.
- Practice consistent responses to behavioral challenges. Children must be able to count on the adults in their lives to be trustworthy and have integrity. If you’ve set a limit or expectation, follow through each time.
- Know that rules and boundaries will need to be repeated many times in a variety of different ways for each learning style. Children have limited memory and are impulsive. It’s the nature of childhood and learning. Be prepared to repeat yourself and be okay with that.
- Share your calm. Strong emotions are scary. When children share strong emotions, be the calming influence in their lives. The purpose of holding a crying child is not to stop them from crying. It is to be present with the child and be a source of comfort and stability in their sadness. To let them know that you are here for them and won’t leave them because of their strong emotions.
- Be reasonable – remember, they’ve only been on this earth a short time and that’s not long enough to be skilled in social situations. Adults even struggle, and we’ve had many chances to practice! Give healthy doses of understanding and grace as you enforce consistent limits and boundaries.

Teach Problem-Solving Skills

- Make problem-solving a fun challenge – a mystery to solve together. Don’t leave children overwhelmed with a big job. Show them it’s fun and provide a helping hand.
- Teach Love and Logic®’s Problem-Solving to help children own and solve their own problems (for a handout on Love and Logic’s 5 Step Problem Solving for children [follow this link](#)).

Sources: Raising and Emotionally Intelligent Child by John Gottman; Love and Logic® Early Childhood Parenting Made Fun! Curriculum