

Emotion Coaching

What is Emotion Coaching?

Emotion Coaching is a research-based tool developed by Dr. John Gottman that can help you learn to value your child's range of emotions, such as happiness about an upcoming birthday party or sadness over a lost toy. It is a five-step method for guiding your child in how to respond to her feelings. Becoming an Emotion Coach for your child will improve your relationship and teach her how to respond to emotions – valuable skills that will last a lifetime.

Why Emotion Coaching Matters

When children have parents who use Emotion Coaching, they learn about emotions in healthy ways. As a result, these children tend to do better in school, make stronger friendships, and may even get sick less often.

Good communication about emotions affects a children's behavior.

- ★ Children develop a set of skills to self-soothe, or calm down.
- ★ Children are allowed to experience the full range of emotions.
- ★ Children learn to understand how their feelings lead to their actions.

Emotion Coaching helps children develop empathy.

- ★ Empathy is the ability to identify and relate to the feelings or thoughts of another person.
- ★ The ability to show empathy is predictive of future success in relationships at home, at school and at work.



What Parents Can Do

As you prepare to use Emotion Coaching, remember these general tips:

- ★ Be a role model. Think about how you handle your own emotions.
- ★ Have empathy for your child. For example, if your child is feeling sad about breaking a favorite toy, tell her how you manage sadness when you break something. Try saying “I understand why you are sad about breaking your new toy. When I broke my new sunglasses, I was sad and wasn't sure how I would be able to enjoy being outside without them.”
- ★ Take your child's emotions seriously.
- ★ Be willing to understand your child's perspective.

The Five Steps of Emotion Coaching

STEP 1: Be Aware of Emotions

- ★ The more aware you are of your own feelings, the better you will understand how your child is feeling.
- ★ When appropriate, share your emotions with your child.
- ★ Children are learning about emotions by watching how you show yours.
- ★ Listen to your child for clues about what she is feeling.



STEP 2: Connect with your Child

- ★ Take your child's emotions seriously.
- ★ Be willing to understand your child's perspective.
- ★ Encourage your child to talk about feelings.

STEP 3: Listen to your Child

- ★ Listen to your child in a way that lets her know you are paying attention.
- ★ Try not to judge or criticize emotions that are different from what you expected.
- ★ Research shows that it is important to understand the emotion before you give advice on the behavior.

STEP 4: Name Emotions

- ★ Start identifying emotions even before a child can talk.
- ★ Talk about emotions like happy, sad, and angry and when people feel them.
- ★ Name a range of emotions. Talk about what these emotions mean and when people feel them.
- ★ Avoid telling children what they *ought* to feel – try to identify the emotions they *are* feeling.
- ★ Model identifying your own emotions – children learn by watching and copying what adults do.

STEP 5: Find Solutions

- ★ When children misbehave, explain why their behavior was inappropriate or hurtful.
- ★ Encourage emotional expression, but set limits on behavior.
- ★ Help children think through possible solutions.