



Helping Children Manage Strong Feelings: Emotion Coaching

Emotion coaching helps children understand and manage their feelings.¹ Learning to talk about emotions is an important lifelong skill. It builds “emotional intelligence,” which can lead to better relationships, fewer behavior problems, and more success in school.



There are 3 steps to Emotion Coaching:

1. Label the Feeling

Children don't always have the words to talk about feelings. When kids can name their feelings, they can manage them better. You can help! When you notice an emotion in your child, let them know.

“Sounds like you feel angry about that.”

“The frown on your face makes me wonder if you are feeling sad.”

“You look happy today! What happened?”

“You sound disappointed that Dad's not here to watch you play soccer.”

2. Empathize

Empathizing with your child shows them that you understand. It helps to make relationships stronger and can improve behavior.

“It's ok that you are angry with Mom. I know it's hard for you when she's gone.”

“It's normal to feel confused when so many things are changing.”

“I understand. Those shadows in the corner do look scary. Let's check them out.”

“When I was your age and that happened to me, I remember feeling upset too.”

Sometimes parents think that empathizing with a feeling will make the feeling stronger. In fact, when children feel understood, they are better able to cope with difficult feelings.

1. Gottman, J.M., Katz, L.F. & Hooven, C. (1997). *Meta-emotion: How families communicate emotionally*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

3. Problem Solve

Encourage your child to think of solutions. This sends the message that your child is capable of solving problems, which builds confidence.

“What do you think we can do about this?”

“What helps you when you are feeling sad?”

If your child can't think of a solution, or if their solution is not realistic, you can suggest a few options and let them choose.

“I wonder if it would help to listen to some music or take a walk when you are feeling worried.”

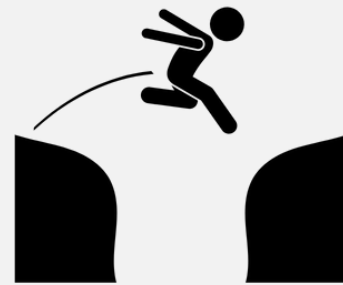
PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Label

Empathize And

Problem Solve

think
LEAPS
to remember
the steps!



Your child is playing with a friend and runs up to you wailing:

Sam knocked down my blocks!
I hate him!

Your LEAPS response:

Wow, you are really mad! I'd be mad too if that happened to me. What do you think we can do about this?

Your child looks sad and says:

I wish Mom could
be here to watch my
recital.

Your LEAPS response:

I can tell you are feeling sad that Mom can't be there tomorrow. I get it – you've really worked hard on your recital piece. Could we video record the recital or call Mom afterward to give a recap?

Books can help us to talk with kids about feelings!

Here are some books to read and share. You can look for or request these at your local library.

The Feelings Book by Todd Parr – We have all sorts of feelings. Let's talk about them.

Mad, Mad Bear by Kimberly Gee—It's normal to feel mad sometimes.

Jabari Jumps by Gaia Cornwall—Doing scary things takes courage. Talking helps.

When I Feel Worried by Cornelia Spelman – Everyone feels worried sometimes.