

STRONG FEELINGS: EMOTION COACHING

Emotion coaching helps children understand and manage their feelings. Learning to talk about emotions is an important lifelong skill. It adds to “emotional intelligence,” which can lead to better relationships, fewer behavior problems, and more success in school. Emotion Coaching is easy with some practice. Remember: LEAPS.



LEAPS—LABEL, EMPATHIZE AND PROBLEM-SOLVE



1. Label: Notice and Name Feelings

Children don’t always know the words they need to talk about emotions. Research shows that when kids can name their feelings, they can handle them better. You can help children identify emotions they are feeling, instead of telling them how they *should* feel. Children feel reassured when they know their feelings are normal and they have the words to talk about them.



- “Sounds like you feel _____.” or “That must have felt _____.”
- “The frown on your face makes me wonder if you are feeling mad.”
- “You look really proud today.”

2. Empathize: Validate Feelings

Empathizing with your child’s feelings shows that you understand. If children don’t think you understand what they are experiencing, they may try to show you (loudly) just how upset they are. This can sometimes lead to negative behaviors. Children need to know you understand before they can move on to problem-solving.

- “I would feel _____ if that happened to me.” Or “It’s normal to feel _____ when _____.”
- “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 _____ too.”

EMOTION COACHING WITH LEAPS (CONTINUED)

3. Problem-Solve: Help Your Child Think of Ideas

If there's a problem that needs addressing, encourage your child to think of suggestions. This sends the message that your child is capable of solving problems, which builds confidence! When your child comes up with a solution, it is more likely to work for them—and you. If your child can't think of a good solution, you can suggest an option or two (one at a time) and let them choose. Emotion coaching doesn't mean all behaviors are acceptable. We still need to guide children toward positive actions.

- “What do you think would help you feel better right now?”
- “It's ok to feel _____, but it's not ok to _____. Can you think of something to do or say next time you feel this way?”
- “You and your sister both want _____. Do you have ideas about how we can solve this?”

Books can help us to talk with kids about feelings!

Here are some books to read and share. (These are available at most libraries.)

The Boy with Big, Big Feelings by Britney Winn Lee—*Big feelings matter!*

How Do You Feel? by Lizzy Rockwell—*All sorts of feelings. They all look different.*

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.*

B is for Breathe by Dr. Melissa Boyd—*ABC's of Coping with Feelings*

You Weren't with Me by Chandra Ghosh Ippen—*When a loved one is (or was) away.*

*If you have access to the Web and you'd like information, videos, and books on this topic, visit **[Strong Feelings](https://parenting.extension.wisc.edu/strong-feelings/)** at <https://parenting.extension.wisc.edu/strong-feelings/>. Feel free to share this with another parent or caregiver.*

