



## When a Parent is Away: Helping Children Manage Strong Feelings

When a child is separated from a parent, they will have many different emotions. They might feel confused, sad, angry, disappointed, or scared.

Parents can use Emotion Coaching to help children understand and manage their feelings. This leads 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."*

*"When I was young, I didn't see my dad for a long time. I remember feeling really sad. It's hard when you can't be with Dad."*

*"It's normal to feel confused when so many things are changing."*

*"I can understand that it's hard when we go to visit your mom. It's scary for you when those serious corrections officers are watching us all the time!"*

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.

### 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?”*

*“It’s ok to be angry. It’s not ok to call me names. What can you do when you’re feeling angry?”*

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!



Your child seems frustrated and tells you:

I hate our new apartment.  
When we lived with Dad, we  
had a lot more space.

Your emotion coaching response:

You sound pretty frustrated. I get it. It has been hard to adjust to this small apartment. Let’s think of what we could do to make your room more comfortable.

Your child looks sad and says:

I wish Mom could  
be here to watch my  
recital.

Your emotion coaching response:

I can tell you are feeling sad that Mom can’t be there tomorrow. I wish she could be there too. It’s normal to feel sad when you can’t be together. Could we video record some of the recital or call her afterward to give her 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.