

EMOTIONAL COMMUNICATION & CHILDREN

Friday, September 30th, 2011

Kristi Kimberlin, LCSW and Dr. Sheila Kozler, PsyD



INFORMATION FOR PARENTS:

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

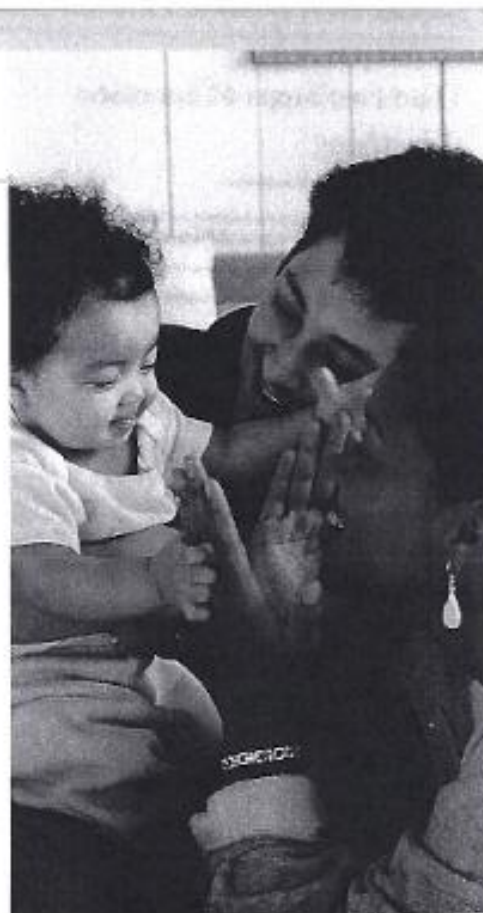
When children have parents who use Emotion Coaching, they learn about emotions in healthy ways. As a result, these children tend to do better in school, make stronger friendships, and may even get sick less often.

Good communication about emotions affects a child'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.

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INFORMATION FOR PARENTS: Emotion Coaching

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 harmful.
- * Encourage emotional expression, but set limits on behavior.
- * Help children think through possible solutions.

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INFORMATION FOR PARENTS:

Parenting Styles

What are Parenting Styles?

Parenting styles, as defined by Dr. John Gottman, describe the way parents react and respond to their child's emotions. Your parenting style is related to how you feel about emotions. ("Feelings about feelings" are often referred to as meta-feelings.) For example, do think emotions are powerful? Messy? Distracting? Important? The way you, as a parent, feel about these questions plays an important role in shaping your parenting style.



* Such parents are not insensitive to their children's emotions. They see them happening and want to be helpful and protective, but they are not sure what to do. Because dismissing parents ignore emotions, they miss the opportunity to connect and to create a closer relationship with their children when their children need them most.

Why Parenting Styles Matter

Parenting styles matter because the way a parent interacts with their child sets the stage for the child's future social and emotional development.

- * One of the primary ways to help your child is to help him learn to manage his emotions. However, for many parents, this is not an easy task. It requires self-awareness about your own management of emotions, an awareness of emotions in others (specifically your child,) and a method for responding.

The Four Parenting Styles

There are four parenting styles. Most parents have a dominant style but use a combination of all four. As you read the descriptions below, consider which style best describes you, as well as how you were parented.

DISMISSING "I know you miss mommy, but let's do something fun like make cookies."

- * Dismissing parents can be very loving and compassionate. They just don't believe it is important to spend time dealing with their child's negative emotions, and tend to ignore the feelings or attempt to distract the child from them.

Children with Dismissing Parents tend to...

- * Learn that negative emotions (especially sadness and anger) can't be trusted.
- * Learn that it is only good to feel happy, even though they have other feelings.
- * Learn that it is better to avoid or "get over" certain emotions rather than to feel them and understand them. They may also learn to hide their emotions.
- * Struggle learning how to self-soothe from escalated emotions like sadness or anger, which can make school and friendship hard later.
- * Learn that some feelings won't be noticed until they escalate into stronger feelings.

DISAPPROVING "There is nothing to be afraid of in your room...just go to bed and go to sleep."

- * Disapproving parents typically don't value emotions and often feel that negative emotions should not be allowed to happen. As a result, children learn that some feelings are "good" and others are "bad" because their parents treat the feeling like a behavior by adding or telling the child to feel differently.

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INFORMATION FOR PARENTS: Parenting Styles

- ✦ When children of disapproving parents feel the "bad" emotions, like sadness, anger, or fear, they often think something is wrong with them or that they are a "bad" person, even though their feelings are normal.
- ✦ What these parents are missing, in part, is the realization that emotions are a natural part of our daily experiences and are not simply a mode of thinking that can be switched on or off at will.

Children with Disapproving Parents tend to ...

- ✦ Learn that certain feelings should be switched off like a light.
- ✦ Have difficulty learning to regulate emotions, which typically has negative long-term effects.
- ✦ Learn that some feelings won't be noticed by displaying subtle cues (such as nonverbal displays of frustration) until they escalate into stronger feelings and behaviors (such as hitting).
- ✦ Be less likely to talk to their parents about how they feel because they worry that they might be punished for those feelings.

LAISSEZ-FAIRE "I'm sorry your brother took your toy away from you."

- ✦ Laissez-faire parents are compassionate, and they recognize and respond to their children's emotions. They practice unconditional love, but they also fear that setting limits on a child's behavior might send the wrong message and show that love is only connected to good behavior.

Children with Laissez-Faire Parents tend to ...

- ✦ Learn that feelings are valued, and they can talk about their feelings with others. This is a very important part of learning what emotions are.
- ✦ Learn that it is ok to act out or misbehave when they have strong feelings, and that almost "anything goes" when it comes to their behavior.
- ✦ Struggle learning skills for how to calm down when they feel excited, angry, or sad.
- ✦ Have difficulty learning ways to act appropriately around others, and can have trouble keeping friends or concentrating in school.

EMOTION COACHING "Come sit with me and we'll talk about how you're feeling right now."

- ✦ Emotion Coaching parents value sharing emotional times with their children.
- ✦ To Emotion Coach, parents need to use empathy. Specifically, these parents try to put themselves into their child's shoes. They show an understanding of their children's emotions and guide them in their behavior. Emotion Coaching creates a foundation for strong, healthy, trusting relationships.

- ✦ Emotion Coaching takes practice. Every emotional event is different and Emotion Coaching needs to be flexible. None of us can do it all the time, but the more we can take the time to help children work through their emotions, the better.

Children with Emotion Coaching Parents tend to ...

- ✦ Learn that feelings are important and can be trusted.
- ✦ Learn how to name certain feelings and begin to understand why they feel the way they do.
- ✦ Learn that they are not alone with their feelings, and that they can bring their wide range of emotions to their parents with confidence they will be loved and comforted.
- ✦ Learn that all feelings they experience are OK, but not all of their behaviors are OK.
- ✦ Learn how to solve the problems life brings.
- ✦ Learn to calm themselves down when they have strong emotions so they can concentrate better at school.
- ✦ Learn about their own feelings and the feelings of others, which helps them form strong friendships.

What Parents Can Do

THE BIG PICTURE:

- ✦ Realize that most parents use a combination of all four parenting styles, and that even the "best" Emotion Coaches only use that style about 30% of the time – and that is enough to make a big difference in the parent-child relationship.
- ✦ Remember that feelings are normal and children can't control how they feel.
- ✦ Teach limits on behavior. Children like to know their boundaries and it's important that you teach them what is acceptable and unacceptable.

IN EVERYDAY MOMENTS:

- ✦ Avoid ignoring or disciplining a child for their emotions. When emotions arise, make an effort to teach your child how to manage them. Doing so will establish a stronger relationship between the two of you.
- ✦ Recognize emotions – this is the first step to helping children learn about them.
- ✦ Remember that every child expresses emotions in her own way.
- ✦ Let your child feel and understand his emotions.
- ✦ Help children figure out what to do when they experience strong emotions.

Baby Expression Exercise



Look at the six different baby pictures. On the lines provided below, write a one-word description of the emotion you think the baby is showing.

Baby A: _____

Baby B: _____

Baby C: _____

Baby D: _____

Baby E: _____

Baby F: _____

Emotions to choose from: Sad, Interested, Overwhelmed, Tired, Angry, and Happy

Our research has found that unhappily married couples are more likely to miss these cues entirely or to compete with their spouse for the child's attention. This causes a repetitive cycle in which the child and parent are uncoordinated. When your baby is overstimulated, the best thing you can do is to back off and give your baby a rest. The baby's attention will come back when he is ready to be with you again.

Tips for Recognizing Overstimulation:

For Babies:

- ❖ Looking away
- ❖ Shielding the face
- ❖ Pushing away
- ❖ Wrinkling the brow
- ❖ Arching the back
- ❖ Fussing and crying
- ❖ Valsalva cry

For Toddlers / Older Children:

- ❖ Fear brow
- ❖ Long eye closures
- ❖ Eye flutters
- ❖ Arms folded across chest
- ❖ Stuttering
- ❖ Can't finish sentences
- ❖ Auto-involvements: playing with hair, twirling pencil



Environment Check

- Do I get that “ahhhh” feeling when I walk into my home at the end of the day?
- Do I feel relaxed when I think about myself at home or do I feel tension or anxiety mounting?
- Do I allow for quietness in my home?
- How would others describe the “feel” of my home? (e.g. peaceful, frantic, calm, noisy)
- Do I structure activities so that I have face time with my family members and only my family members?
- Do I value and create opportunities for reflection and unwinding?
- Do I have rituals established that create the opportunity for regular sharing, learning and experiencing?
- Is it hard to hear one another or communicate because technology has overtaken the home? (e.g. How much is t.v./computer on? Do I answer the phone during meals? Do children witness news/adult content of my interests?)

**Quiet moments are the set up for
emotional communication and relationship
building.**

- Work towards the goals of 1) boredom 2) silence and 3) less
- Pair environment checks with other regularly occurring event (e.g., school breaks, family meetings, doctor appointments, birth-months)

SHARING OUR FEELINGS

Turn Taking with Speaker/Listener Roles

I feel SILLY when.....

I felt SCARED when.....

I get DISAPPOINTED when.....

When I get to.....I feel HAPPY.

One time I felt really SAD when.....

Whenhappens, I get ANGRY.

.....makes me feel really THANKFUL.

I get so FRUSTRATED when.....

I feel SHY when.....

Whenhappens, I feel BORED.

.....makes me feel so EXCITED!

Whenhappens, I get JEALOUS!

I feel very PROUD when.....

Behavior-Focused

Emotion-Focused

Undesirable behavior established

May or may not have established undesirable Behaviors (can start/use anytime)

Solution focused/Consequence focused

Process-focused

Context Specific

With some important exceptions, process can be applied regardless of content and context

Reactive (Child is emotional, you are emotional)

Responsive (emotionally calm-fight or flight response not activated when using)

Relies on parental authority

Highly relies on the power of the parent-child relationship (attachment, warmth) while simultaneously strengthening it

Effective because of fear of consequences- Forced choices-(e.g. choose to behave or parent will choose for child)

Effective because child doesn't want to compromise your relationship

Doesn't typically address the underlying emotional causes of the behavior (just want behavior to stop or start)

Emotions are valued, linked to thoughts/behavior, seen as inroad for improving relationships and decreasing unwanted behaviors (eventually)

Quick yet has limitations (frustration, random application, too many tools in the toolbox, not always effective, children may not be internalizing values, but avoiding punishment)

Takes time and patience

When process is valued, it is modeled and internalized

60-70% usage

30-40% usage

"When a child has that strong emotional connection with a parent, the parent's upset, disappointment, or anger creates enough pain to become a disciplinary event in itself. The child's goal then becomes to repair the relationship and he learns that he must follow a certain code in order to experience that level of emotional comfort." Dr. John Gottman

Steps to Finding Solutions

1. Set Limits
2. Identify Goals
3. Generate Solutions (Uncensored Brainstorming!)
4. Evaluate
 - Is it safe?
 - Is it fair?
 - Will it work?
 - How am I likely to feel?
 - How about the feelings of others?
 - What might happen next?
 - Is it congruent with our other values? We are a family that believes in.....
5. Help Child Choose Solution (by getting out of the way!)