

Emotion Coaching for Families

Introduction

What is emotion coaching?

Emotion coaching is a helpful way for parents and carers to support their child's emotional well-being. It involves paying attention to signs of a range of emotions, like when your child has a behavioural outburst or shows it through their body language. Instead of ignoring or downplaying these emotions, emotion coaching encourages you to understand and acknowledge them. By doing this, you can help your child navigate their emotions in a positive way, rather than just focusing on consequences for their behaviour.

What are the benefits of emotion coaching?

- Supports parent/carer-child relationships by promoting open communication and understanding.
- Helps children develop emotional intelligence and awareness.
- Teaches children how to identify and manage their emotions in a healthy way.
- Encourages empathy and compassion in both parents/carers and children.
- Provides a supportive and nurturing environment for emotional expression.
- Fosters resilience and coping skills in children.
- Promotes positive behaviour.
- Strengthens problem-solving skills and decision-making abilities.
- Supports overall emotional well-being and mental health for both parents and children.

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What are the key stages of the emotion coaching approach?

1) Empathy

Watch and listen
Try to 'tune into' how your child is feeling.
Notice your own emotions.

2) Labelling and Validation

Listen carefully
Respect and acknowledge the child's feeling.
Model labelling the emotion.

3) Setting Limits

State boundaries and acceptable behaviour clearly.
Accept emotions but redirect behaviours.

4) Problem solving

Explore next steps together.
Talk about alternative behaviours for next time.
Empower your child to believe they can manage their feelings.

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Example questions and scripts



There's no single way to have an emotion coaching conversation; it will be specific to your child's needs in the moment. However, some of the scripts and reflection points in this table might give you some ideas and prompts for each stage of the process.



Stage 1: Empathy

- Have you noticed any changes in your child's behaviour, communication, body language etc. What might these be telling you?
- What am I feeling? How is that shown in my face/body language/voice?
- How can I show my child that I have noticed them and their feelings?

Stage 2: Labelling and Validation

I noticed that you've moved under the table. I'm wondering if the noise of the other people was too loud for you and you felt a bit overwhelmed?

I can see that you felt sad when you didn't get to press the button. I sometimes feel sad when I can't do the things I want to. That's a normal way to feel.

I can see that you're frowning and kicking the sofa. I'm thinking that it made you angry when you had to put the iPad away. Have I got that right?

Emotion Coaching Questions and Scripts

Stage 3: Setting Limits

I can't let you climb on the bookshelf. I need to keep you safe.

You can either sit on the chair here or go for a run around outside. Which one would you like to do?

This isn't a safe place to be lying on the floor. Let's go inside where it is safer and we can have a talk.

It's ok to feel angry but it's not ok to hit people.

Stage 4: Problem Solving

What could we do next time you are feeling angry?

What do you think you will do next time you are feeling like this?

How can I help you when you are feeling frustrated?

It seemed like it helped you to have some space when you were feeling overwhelmed. Maybe next time you feel like this you could tell me you need to go outside.

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Emotion Coaching across Childhood and Adolescence

Emotion Coaching is an approach which can be helpful for all of us from childhood to adolescence and even into adulthood. Although the way you speak to your child might change as they grow, the principles of emotion coaching remain the same. We all experience emotions daily and experiencing empathy and validation from others helps us to feel understood and to manage our feelings.

Babies and Young Children

For very young children, the principles of attunement are particularly relevant. Attunement is a way of connecting and interacting with your child in a highly responsive way. This involves recognising how your child is feeling, noticing changes in behaviour or expression and adapting your response.

At the simplest level this might include mirroring or repeating words and actions, taking turns, working together, using eye contact, smiles and nodding to show that you are interested and invested. Showing your child that you are emotionally available and responsive can help their development.

Teenagers

Teenagers' brains are still developing. This means that adolescents are still learning, including from their social experiences with friends and family. The adolescent brain is very adaptable and emotion coaching approaches can help to develop effective strategies for managing emotions. Because their brains are not yet developed, teenagers can experience difficulties managing emotions and stresses. For example, the prefrontal cortex involved in rational decision making and planning is still developing. Teenagers may still need help in understanding their feelings and boundaries and also solving problems as guided by the emotion coaching stages.