

Talking about emotions

Emotion Coaching- A 4 step approach to supporting emotional regulation and promoting positive behaviour.

Children often communicate their emotions through their behaviour. Sometimes big feelings can result in tricky behaviours that can be confusing or challenging. To help a child to manage their behaviour, they first need to understand how they feel. This is a skill that takes time to learn and children often need help to understand their emotions. Adults can help children to do this through “emotion coaching”- a simple 4 step approach to promoting better behaviour and supporting emotional regulation.



Step 1- “Connect before you correct”

When we see a tricky behaviour, it’s natural to feel frustrated and to respond straight away. However, when emotion coaching the first thing you should do is connect with the child to understand their feelings

Helpful things to think: “How do they feel?”, “How do I know they are feeling that way?”
“What happened to make them feel like this?”, “What would make me feel this way?”, “How would I feel if this happened to me?”

Step 2- “Validate feelings and name them”

In emotion coaching, there is no such thing as a “bad emotion” all emotions are healthy. Communicating that it’s okay for a child to have this feeling is a very powerful way of defusing a difficult situation. Children don’t always know how they feel and they might not have the language skills to be able to link what has happened to the emotion. This is where you can help. Naming the child’s emotion for them can set them on their way to helping them to understand how they feel, and support them to manage their emotions.



Helpful things to say: “I can see that you are frustrated”, “I think that you are frustrated because...”, “it’s okay to feel frustrated, I get frustrated sometimes too for example, I was frustrated when...”.



Step 3– “Set limits on behaviour”

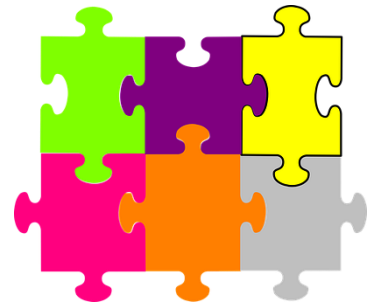
While all emotions are healthy, not all behaviours are acceptable. It is important to guide children away from behaviours that are not okay. This can be done calmly, assertively and with understanding. Sometimes, you don’t need to set limits and you can skip this step.

Helpful things to say: “I understand that you feel angry, but it is not okay to throw things at people”, “We all get nervous, but we don’t push people when we feel like this”

Step 4– “Help them to manage big emotions and solve problems”

Sometimes children need help to manage their big emotions. You can give children skills to do this and encourage positive behaviour at the same time. You can suggest a number of strategies that can help children to manage their big emotions in future and regulate how they feel.

Useful things to suggest to your child: “have a hug”, “self hugs”, hand squeezes (clench your fists as hard as you can”, “deep breaths”, “taking a time out”, “going outside for a walk”, “think of a happy memory”, “smile”.



Things to remember

- You don’t always have to use emotion coaching, sometimes you may not have the time to emotion coach and it may not be practical. Aim to emotion coach around 50% of the time.
- Some times, when children experience very big emotions they may not respond to emotion coaching, this is okay.