

UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONS

We all experience a range of emotions in our day-to-day lives. Whether it be frustration, anger or excitement, strong feelings are inevitable, even for adults!

Children experience emotions before they can use words to describe those emotions. They also understand language before they can use it themselves. Because of this, children's emotions are often expressed through behaviours which can be difficult to manage.

As parents, we can help children to understand what they are feeling by giving them a safe space to express their emotions and ultimately developing an emotional language for them to use. Children who can understand and manage their emotions are more likely to express themselves calmly and appropriately, control their impulses and bounce back after experiencing strong emotions, such as disappointment, frustration or excitement.

Emotion-coaching is an approach to helping your child manage their emotions that involves accepting their emotions (positive AND negative!) and using them as an opportunity to help your child identify and learn from their experiences. You may not always understand the feelings that your child is experiencing, and that's OK. Showing your child that you know they are having a hard time, and are making an effort to try to understand what they are going through, shows them that you care. This has the potential to strengthen the connection you have with your child and, in turn, build their resilience.

Top tip

→ **Accepting big emotions during difficult behaviours can help you to stay calm. This supports connection with your child and helps to calm the behaviours.**

6 STEPS TO HELP YOUR CHILD MANAGE THEIR EMOTIONS



1) LISTEN

If it is safe to do so, let your child express whatever they are feeling and resist the urge to interrupt unnecessarily. Show them you are actively listening by using facial expressions and body language. Try to stay calm and be aware of your own emotions.

2) ACKNOWLEDGE

Accept your child's feelings – positive and negative. Reassure them that it's OK to feel that way and show them that you understand their feelings.

Key points



- Everybody needs help regulating their emotions sometimes.
- Most adults regulate their emotions with the support of other people (for example, when coming home from a stressful day, you may talk it through with your partner or housemate).
- Kids won't be able to self-regulate all the time. It's a natural human need to share our emotions with the people who are close to us and have our feelings understood.
- We can help our kids through the process of co-regulating.



Did you know? Many of the games on the *Birdie's Tree* website are designed to help young children to identify and name their big feelings. Scan the code to start playing!



HOW STRONG ARE MY FEELINGS? An activity you can do at home

When everything has calmed down and you feel like you can problem solve with your child and discuss what's happened, this is a nice activity to do together. It can help support a conversation so they can show you how they were feeling.

You can measure their feelings, just like a thermometer measures temperature. Follow these easy steps to make your own emotion-metre at home!

- Collect materials – you'll need a paddle pop stick and a paper clip
- Mark 1 – 10 on the paddle pop stick
- Ask yourself 'what emotion are you feeling, and how strong is it?'
- Use the paperclip to show how strong the emotion is on the scale

HOW STRONG ARE MY FEELINGS?



3) NAME THE FEELING

Try to describe the feeling that they are experiencing. It's OK to guess what they are feeling, even if you get it wrong they will appreciate the effort. For example, 'I can see by your stomping feet and clenched hands that you're feeling really angry about that'.

4) IDENTIFY

Make a statement about the cause of those feelings. For example, 'It sounds like you're frustrated because your brother took your toy'.

5) SET BOUNDARIES

All feelings are OK but some behaviours are not. Let your child know it is the behaviour not the feeling that is the problem. For example, 'I can see how angry you are with your brother. It's OK to be angry but it's not OK to hit'.

6) PROBLEM SOLVE

When you and your child are feeling calm enough, work together to brainstorm a solution that's realistic and acceptable. For example, 'What are some other ways you could tell your brother what you want?'.