



Emotion Coaching

At Chapel End Primary school we are committed to helping children understand and manage their feelings and emotions. We have recently undertaken whole staff training on using 'emotion coaching' to help us to address children's emotions and behaviour more effectively. We wanted to share this as it may also be helpful for you at home.

It can be difficult to know how to approach behavioural concerns, especially when, as adults, we are also coping with our own emotions and workload. However, there are several ways that we can help children to explore and understand their anxieties and learn how to regulate themselves.

Research shows that using emotion coaching helps adults to address children's emotions and their behaviour more effectively. All behaviour is a form of communication and a way of expressing how we feel. However, when we feel scared or overwhelmed, our brains move more into a fight, flight or freeze mode, where logical reasoning is far more difficult.

When a child is dysregulated there are steps that we can take to help them to gain more control over how they feel and allow them to think more logically.





Helping children with their emotions

Emotion coaching essentially comprises of two elements – empathy and guidance. When we can see that a child is distressed, we empathise with them: 'I can see that you are feeling worried right now. Sometimes I feel worried, too.'

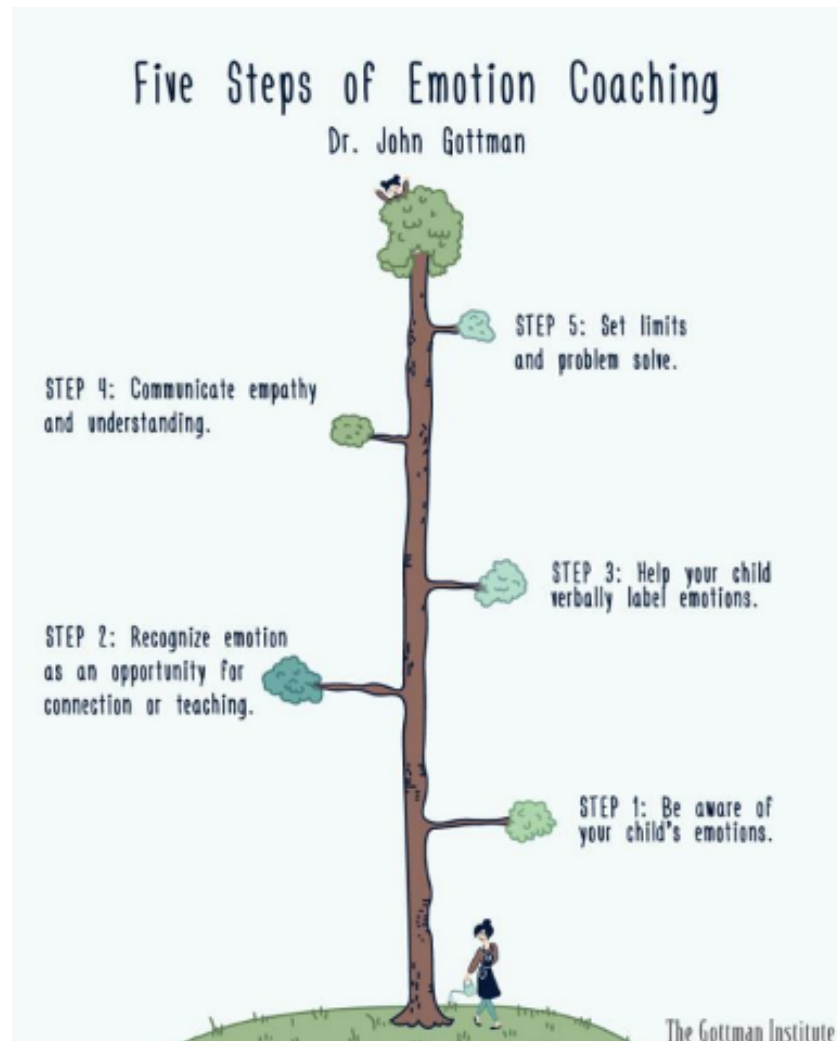
By recognising, validating and labelling emotions, we can help children to see an abstract feeling as something that they can understand and regulate. We can also help them to feel seen, understood and supported, which can calm them down so they are more receptive to problem solving. Only when they are calm can we talk with them about their emotions, how they feel physically, and what they might be able to do next time to help keep them regulated. You may feel that you are validating poor behaviour but remember that you are only empathising with the feeling, not the behaviour.

Once you have established what your child is feeling, you can then guide them in developing different and more positive ways of expressing that emotion in the future.





Five steps of emotion coaching



Step 1: Be aware of your child's emotions.

Step 2: See emotions as an opportunity for connection and teaching.

Step 3: Listen to and validate their feelings

Step 4: Label their emotions

Step 5: Help your child problem-solve with limits





Step 1: Be aware of your child's emotions. Do you notice any signs that they are becoming emotionally dysregulated e.g. talking a lot, going red, whining – just notice and be aware.

Step 2: See emotions as an opportunity for connection and teaching. Although the child's behaviour can be challenging it will be an indication of feeling over-whelmed and stressed. This is a time to connect and problem solve and coach them through a difficult feeling.

Step 3: Listen to and validate their feelings. E.g. Really listen to what they are saying (no matter how unreasonable it sounds) or have a guess at what's going on. For example, 'So, have I got this right? You really don't want to go to bed right now and you feel let down by me and dad? Reflect back what you hear, telling your child that you understand what they're seeing and experiencing.

Step 4: Label their emotions. E.g. 'I can tell you're feeling really frustrated and angry.' After you have fully listened, help your child develop an awareness of and vocabulary for their emotional expression.

Step 5: Help your child problem-solve with limits. E.g. 'I know you feel really angry and let down but it is bedtime now. I'm going to give you a few minutes and see if you're ready for me to help you calm down with a story / snuggle / hot drink.' All emotions are acceptable and valid but all behaviours are not. Help your child cope with his or her emotions by developing problem-solving skills and generating solutions to reach those goals.

Sometimes the steps of emotion coaching happen quickly. Other times, these steps may take a great deal of time. Patience is key. If the problem is a big one, all five steps don't have to be completed in one interaction.





Building empathy

Emotion coaching your child can not only help them to regulate their own emotions, but it also teaches them empathy for others. Once they can recognise the moments when they feel angry or scared or worried themselves, they can begin to understand how others might feel as well.

As children grow up, there are many emotions that they are likely to feeling which could provide a space for you and your child to explore empathy. Asking your child what they think their friends are worried about will help build a more empathic character.

And don't forget that doing emotion coaching with your child models empathic behaviour - children see, children do! Encouraging kindness and empathy will help your child to strengthen their relationships with adults and children around them.



Emotion Coaching Phrases For Parents



1. It's okay to be upset -- it's good to let it out.



2. I hear you -- I'm here for you -- I'll stay with you.



3. It's okay to feel how you feel. It is not okay to _____."



4. How you feel right now won't last forever. It's okay to feel how you are feeling. It will pass and you will feel better again soon.



5. Let's take a breath, take a break, sit down, pause for a minute...

