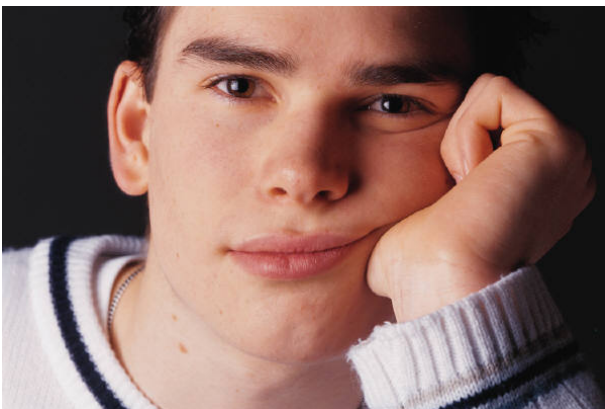




LISTEN FOR EMOTIONS: IT'S A WAY TO BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

Emotions are a very important part of being human. People used to think of emotions as being basic responses to events -- something we needed to control. People were taught to hold in their emotions and to perhaps ignore them so that they could think rationally about a situation.

Now we know that emotions are designed to help us deal effectively with our life and those around us. People who are able to manage their emotions are better able to handle stress and have better relationships with



others. It is never too early or too late to learn how to identify and handle our emotions.

Children often feel their emotions very strongly. They can fluctuate quickly from one emotion to the next. They can quickly change from being happy to extremely mad when they become frustrated.

Children need help to deal with their emotions. This means teaching them how to respond when feelings arise. To handle their emotions, children first need words to express what they are feeling. This means teaching your child words for her many emotions. When your child falls down you could say, "It makes you mad when you fall down" or "It can be embarrassing to fall down in front of others."

By teaching your child words to express his feelings you are:

- Letting him know you are trying to see things from his point of view.
- Acknowledging that his feelings are OK.

- Connecting his feeling to a word that he can use to express himself.
- Helping him to handle stress.

All feelings are OK.

It is not what we feel that is the problem -- it is what we do with that feeling that can cause a problem. Children need to know that all their feelings are OK, but that there are limits to how feelings can be expressed. It is OK to be angry, but it is *not* OK to hit others or call them names.

Denying a child's feelings brings confusion.

When we deny our children's feelings ("That didn't hurt" or "Stop crying, there is nothing to cry about") we create a confusing situation for them. What we are telling them does not match what their bodies and minds are telling them. Children who are shut off from their emotions have a harder time controlling themselves and getting along with others.

Children need to be taught how to handle their emotions.

- Establish clear rules about how emotions can be expressed. Telling our child that "we do not hit" is half of the work. We also have to tell them what they should do, "I can see that you are angry, but we do not hit. Take a few minutes to cool down and then I would like you to tell me what is making you so angry."
- Actions speak louder than words. If our children see us flying off the handle when we are angry, this will influence them more than our words. We need to model for our children how we want them to behave.

Use every day activities to talk about feelings with your child.

One way to teach your child about emotions is to read to her. Talk about the feelings that arise in the story and how they are handled. You can point out when feelings are handled well and when they are not. You can also talk about feelings in videos, TV shows, and real life situations that your child sees. The more we talk about emotions and how to handle them, the better children handle stress and get along with others.



Books can be a spring-board to talking about emotions.

Don't Pop Your Cork on Monday, by Adolph Moser

Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day, by Judith Viorst

The Baby Uggs Are Hatching, by Jack Prelutsky

I Was So Mad, by Norma Simon

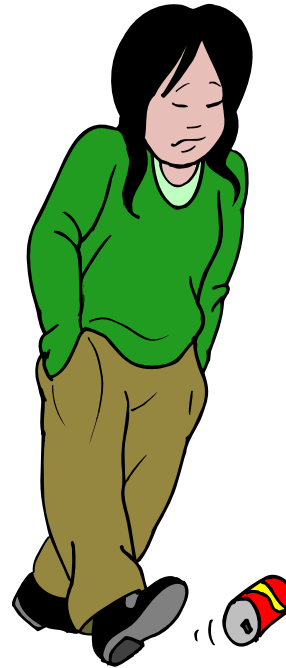
Children learn about feelings in their families.

One of the first places children learn about their feelings is in families. Families have many different styles of expressing emotions, some talk little about feelings and others are very open about their feelings. No matter what your family's style is, it is important to set aside time where feelings can be shared safely. Feelings that are left buried or allowed to get out of control can be hurtful to everyone.

As a parent, you set the tone for how emotions will be expressed in your family. Children are always watching us and learning from us about how to act. How we handle our emotions strongly affects how our children handle their own.

Children's feelings can be difficult for parents.

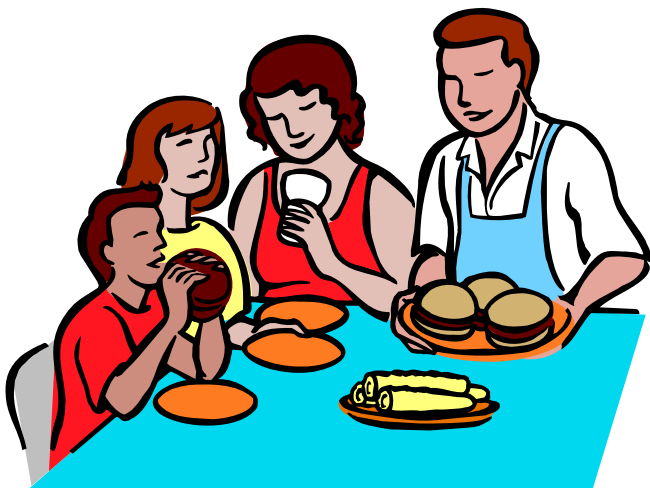
We want our children to be happy and this can make it hard for us when they are sad or angry. Sometimes we even tell our children that they are not feeling a certain way. "You have nothing to be sad about; you don't know how good you have it!"



This statement denies the child's reality and denies the child and parent a chance to become closer through the sharing of an emotion. When families can openly share their emotions with each other they create an environment where everyone can feel respected and heard and where intimacy can develop. When we say things that deny a child's emotions, we are shutting them off from their feelings and losing a chance to become closer to them. If you catch yourself doing this, try instead describing how you think your child is feeling. "It really makes you sad when I can't spend time with you." You may not be able to protect your child from sad and angry feelings, but you can help them learn to deal with them.

Hold a family meeting.

One way to increase your family's ability to share feelings with one another is to have a family meeting. A family meeting is a time where each member, no matter how small or young, is allowed to express feelings or thoughts and where family problems can be discussed.



Getting started.

- Pick a time for everyone to get together, perhaps after dinner or on Saturday afternoon.
- Establish some rules. For example no name calling, and no interrupting when someone is talking.
- Allow everyone some time to express himself (including small children).
- As a family, develop solutions to any problems.
- When you include your children in the problem solving, they are more likely to

follow the plan. For example, if there has been a lot of sibling fighting, you could express your thoughts and feelings about this at the meeting and then ask the children to come up with some solutions to the problem.

Hold family meetings often.

It is a good idea to hold family meetings every week. This way children and parents know that their thoughts and issues will be heard. Sometimes children only need time to say what is on their mind in order to work through it. Other times they need more help.

Family time can relieve family stress.

Many parents today are stressed and have less time to talk with their children. A family meeting can offer your family a time to connect and to hear what is going on in each other's lives. If your child knows that she will be listened too, even if it's not until Sunday night, this can help her manage her feelings and emotions. Family meetings also help your child to see problems from other people's point of view and teach her how to express herself in a clear and appropriate manner.



Solving a problem in 4 steps

Here are 4 steps you and your children can use to solve problems.

1. Identify the Problem.

Clearly define what the problem is. There is often a conflict because the family members are viewing the situation from different viewpoints. Allowing each person to define the problem in their own way helps them to see that different people view things differently and that this is OK. Simple questions may be needed to help a child verbalize the problem. Be sure not to offer your definition of the problem to them. Instead help them to define the problem.



2. Brainstorm and evaluate possible solutions.

Ask for ideas on how to solve the problem. Come up with as many solutions

as possible without any censoring. Once the list is completed, review the possible solutions and ask what the results would be.

3. Choose a solution and try it.

Pick a solution. Give it a try. If it doesn't work, try another solution.

4. Evaluate the outcome. Did it work?

Check out whether the solution worked. What are the signs/clues that it worked? If the solution did not work, try another of the solutions from step two -- or perhaps you now see the problem differently and need to go back to step one.

I hope you find this information helpful. Best wishes for a good month ahead!

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