

# Coaching emotional literacy to children

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## News

Parents expend considerable effort preparing children for the challenges ahead but little attention is typically paid to helping them communicate in emotionally meaningful ways. Emotional literacy empowers children to identify feelings within themselves, draw distinctions, understand subtleties, and verbalize their emotions with sincerity and consideration of others. This capacity to translate feelings into precise language can be nurtured at even young ages but opportunities abound throughout childhood. Benefits include greater self-control, enriched relationships, and pronounced self-awareness. Those who lack the skills to correctly read and respond to their emotions face greater challenges in adulthood due to the enormous role emotions play in all aspects of life.

## Consider the following coaching tips to advance your child's emotional literacy

### Capture the chance to provide “emotional captions” to life events

Kids' countless questions and observations open the door to a deeper dialogue that goes beyond the exchange of information. When parents ask, “What do you think she was feeling?” or “How did his emotions lead to action?” children are prompted to establish an “emotional vocabulary” that goes beyond simply labeling feelings. Parents help by highlighting clues, emphasizing context, and building a bridge between what children perceive and how they process emotional experiences.

### Supply and replenish an “emotional word bank” that grows in sophistication as children mature

While youngsters need help distinguishing jealousy from frustration, or sincerity from sarcasm, older kids are guided toward unraveling more complex emotional puzzles. Examples include the state of ambivalence when opposing feelings tug for dominance, the mixture effect when several feelings converge at once, or the flashback feeling state when earlier ego wounds or painful memories suddenly resurface due to a current stimulus. These and many other emotional scenarios require prompt reading of oneself and the presence of mind to process, and not react to emotional experience. Challenge your child to review scenarios, offer revisions when necessary, and discuss their discoveries about themselves.

### Plant seeds for the growth of emotional literacy

Building a fluent emotional vocabulary requires penetrating interactions with your child. It is not done in haste but in the patient

security of the parent-child bond. Parents lead the way by sharing their own emotional scenarios and decoding the feelings, expectations, revelations, attributions, and other structures that underlay processing. When scenarios erupt between parent and child, grab the opportunity to tag the structures. For example, when a parent admits, “I almost reacted with sharp anger when I thought you had broken a promise but then I considered other explanations,” they model how to process, and not react.

## Discussion

### Discuss how emotional literacy enhances the quality of life

Children who project emotional depth are considered confident, secure, and unpretentious. They are seen as leaders and avoid the superficial contests of childhood. Friendships take on a more meaningful and satisfying quality. Such a solid foundation in self-awareness and self-control paves the way for fulfilling relationships and future decision-making borne out of self-definition.

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