Chapter One

Key Topics

How Kids Turn Out
Emotion Dismissing Parents
Emotion Coaching Parents
What is Emotion Coaching?

The first step to becoming an Emotion Coach is to understand how you were parented.
Emotional Intelligence is a much better predictor of how children will turn out than IQ or achievement test scores.

How do you predict how your children are going to turn out?

It’s actually an old idea, but applying it to parenting is what’s new. Many parents think that the key to helping a child have future success is to focus on their intellect. However, many studies, including our own, have shown that Emotional Intelligence Quotient (EQ) is a much better predictor of how children will turn out than Intelligence Quotient (IQ) or achievement test scores. When parents help children develop their Emotional intelligence, kids succeed.

What is Emotional Intelligence?

Emotional Intelligence means being able to: identify and understand your own emotions, understand and empathize with another person’s feelings, and respond to emotions with appropriate behaviors in a cooperative, functional, and empathetic manner. To be emotionally intelligent requires knowing who you are, your own feelings, and your own needs. It also means being able to compromise your needs in complex social situations. Developing Emotional Intelligence in children is a critical, but often overlooked, task for parents.

When kids have a higher EQ, their academic work and relationships are both stronger and more stable.

Key indicators of how children turn out:

Emotional Regulation: The ability to understand feelings and manage them. Children are required to regulate their emotions all the time. For instance, when they are at school and playing hard at recess and the bell rings to come in, they must switch gears, down-regulate their excitement and focus their attention.

Social Relationships: How children get along with adults and other children. Our research looked at children’s friendships from age three through the college years, and we found that how children make friends, maintain friendships, and why they choose certain friends are all important indicators of how well they will do in life.

These dimensions have been called Emotional Intelligence Quotient. This EQ is the best predictor of how children will turn out.

Many parents believe that emotions are just a child’s way of “acting out” or trying to get their way. They believe that if the child would just be reasonable about what they are reacting to, then they wouldn’t have as many outbursts or emotional responses to things. Years of research now show us this view is wrong. From cross-cultural studies, we know that almost every person on the planet has the same 7
basic emotions and these emotions serve an important purpose. They guide us as we create our path through life. What many parents don’t understand is that emotion processing and reasoning are tightly integrated in the brain. It is impossible for a person to be reasonable or rational without emotions, because it is actually the frontal lobes of the brain (part of the cerebral cortex) that process both reason and emotions. Reason cannot exist without emotions; the two work in tandem. Reasoning and problem solving require intuition to distinguish what is important from what isn’t, and intuition requires emotion. This means that emotions are necessary. They are the body’s compass. Emotions can guide, instruct and are the engine of learning and change. The regulation of emotion comes only through the understanding of emotions, not by suppressing them.

One of our most important jobs as parents is to give our kids the skills they need to be emotionally intelligent. These abilities are not inherited; they are learned. The people best suited to help kids learn them are not school teachers, friends, or other adults, but parents.

Magic Moments = Emotion + Connection

These moments give you the opportunity to influence the way your children feel about themselves and about the world.

A Look at Emotion Dismissing or Emotion Disapproving Parents

Example of Emotion Dismissing:

Avery drew a sketch of a tidal wave crashing over a little girl. She made the sky black and ominous. Then, she showed the drawing to her mom, who was concerned and wanted to help Avery with her feelings. She could see in Avery’s drawing that she was sad, and her response was to try to cheer Avery up. So she said, “Let’s work with this. Put a yellow sun up there, brighten it up, and make it much more cheerful.” Avery said, “But that’s not how I feel.” Her mom said, “That’s OK. Just try to make it more cheerful.” She wanted Avery’s negative feelings to simply melt away.

The mom’s response to Avery’s drawing is an example of the Emotion Dismissing style, in which she is subtly suggesting that some emotions are “destructive” or unacceptable, while other emotions - the more cheerful, optimistic emotions - are “constructive.” This attitude suggests to children that unhappy emotions should go away or be minimized. Many parents frequently use this approach with their kids, not realizing that there is a better way to manage emotions.

In our research, Emotion Dismissing Parents saw difficult emotions, like sadness or anger, as if they were harmful to the child. They didn’t have a well-developed language for emotions. They didn’t notice lower intensity emotions in their child or in themselves.

Think back to how you were raised. Were you raised by Emotion Dismissing parents? If so, you may find it most comfortable to be Emotion Dismissing with your own children. And it’s no wonder, since most of us practice with our kids the same methods we learned from our parents. What does this mean? It means that you have the best intentions, but are missing opportunities for guidance and connection with your children. Many Emotion Dismissing parents are uncomfortable with their children’s expression of certain emotions, especially “negative” ones. These parents may ignore, minimize, or discourage their kids from expressing these more difficult emotions. They often dislike it when their child expresses sadness, fear or anger,
so they respond to these feelings with words like, “Cheer up, it’s not so bad”, or “Stop being so moody.” To an angry child, they might say, “Knock it off,” or “Be reasonable.” A fearful child may hear “Stop being such a wimp. Just go do it.” Advice like this forces the child to suppress rather than express their emotions.

One Emotion Dismissing dad acknowledged his discomfort with negative emotions. He said, “When my daughter is sad, I try to tend to her needs. I ask her, ‘What do you need? Do you need to eat something? Are you thirsty? Are you cold?’” Note that he is tending to her physical needs, like hunger, thirst or temperature – not to her emotional needs. This can confuse his daughter and make it difficult for her to read her own emotions.

Emotion Dismissing parents are usually not cruel or mean spirited people. They are often loving, warm and concerned, but are uncomfortable with intense emotions. They prefer the neutral state and like others to be calm and reasonable. They dislike anger, rage, sadness, despair, fear or anxiety. They are also uncomfortable with intense positive emotions, like affection, pride, excitement, and exuberant joy. As positive as this parenting method may seem, our research has revealed that it simply doesn’t work as well as Emotion Coaching.

Emotion Coaching Parents recognize a child’s expressions of emotion as an opportunity for connection. They notice lower intensity emotions, encourage the expression of emotion, explore why the child is feeling a certain emotion, and help the child figure out what to do about the reaction they are having.

A Look at Emotion Coaching Parents

Parents often ask: what is the best way to help my child be successful in life? With our research and data, we found that it isn’t race, gender, athletic ability, genetics, good looks, or money that contributed to a child’s success. It was Emotion Coaching, a remarkable parenting style that uses a variety of parenting behaviors to influence positive effects on the behavior and health of children. This process places the child’s emotions front and center, whether they are age 2 or 20. For many parents, the challenge of becoming an Emotion Coach is to recognize its value; to believe that Emotion Coaching makes a difference and to know that children who are Emotion Coached turn out better.
Some parents worry that they can't learn the skills because of the problems they had in their own childhood. You may feel you can't be "that" kind of parent. But you can. Even if you struggled with great difficulties in your childhood, the Emotion Coaching parenting style is easy to learn. It isn't magic. It just requires your commitment, a little knowledge about the process, and practice. Emotion Coaching is a lifelong process. You can start when your child is young and modify your skills and techniques through the teen years and beyond. To begin using Emotion Coaching skills, you simply need to focus your attention on how your child feels in a given situation. Emotion Coaching gives you the chance to recognize your child's expression of emotion as an opportunity for connection.

When Emotion Coaching, the goal is not to ignore your child's emotions. Instead, it is to respond with empathy and understanding while setting limits on negative behaviors.

A father who was Emotion Coaching his son said: “If a kid is mean to my boy, I try to understand what he’s feeling and why. Some kid may have hit him or made fun of him. I stop everything then. My heart just goes out to him and I feel like a father. I just empathize with his bad feelings. Later we figure out what to do to handle it.”

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**Emotion Coaching parents understand that all feelings and emotions are acceptable, but not all behaviors are acceptable.**

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**What happens to kids when parents Emotion Coach?**

Sometimes parents rely on techniques like grounding, spanking, or using other negative consequences because they think it will make their child respond quickly. But those techniques may have adverse effects. With Emotion Coaching, both the parent and child benefit. In our research, we followed parents and children for over a decade to learn which kids were developing successfully and which were not. We measured how well the children performed in school, observed how well they related to their peers, and interviewed them to see how appropriately they behaved socially and how they related to their parents. After 30 years of research and reviewing thousands of studies, we kept finding the same results: adults who were Emotion Coached as kids excelled and were more successful on measures like peer friendships, getting a job and academic performance than children who were parented in other ways.

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**When compared to kids raised with Emotion Dismissing parents, children who are raised with Emotion Coaching parents have greater academic achievement, higher test scores, and better focus of attention.**

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**A Quick Overview: What is Emotion Coaching?**

Emotion Coaching is a research-based parenting skill that is divided into 5 Steps:

1. Be aware of your child's emotions
2. Recognize emotions as an opportunity for connection or teaching
3. Help your child verbally label the emotions
4. Communicate empathy and understanding
5. Set limits and problem solve

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Why does Emotion Coaching work? Emotion Coaching creates a neurological change in the child's body that allows the child to self-soothe and better focus his attention.

Research Findings
What Happens to Kids When Their Parents Emotion Coach?

1. The children had higher reading and math scores at age 8 than all the other kids, even when IQ was controlled for.
2. These kids demonstrated self-regulation. They soothed and calmed themselves more quickly and easily when they were upset, and had better impulse control, including during child-parent interactions.
3. The kids had fewer infectious illnesses. We speculated that this was because they could calm their heart rates more quickly. (When heart rates remain high during stress, the immune system is weakened and renders the child more vulnerable to infectious illnesses.)
4. They could better focus their attention.
5. They were better at delaying gratification. This ability, in other research, is related later to higher SAT scores, better college performance, and better adult relationships.
6. They were better at motivating themselves.
7. They could cope better with life’s ups and downs.
8. They required less discipline.
9. They had healthier peer relationships.

When parents are trying to observe their child's emotions, it is important for them to reflect on their own emotional world.

The Reality of Childhood Today

If you think back to how you were raised, how well do you think you were parented? We know we won’t be perfect parents to our kids. Our parents weren’t perfect either. But the first step towards being the type of parent you want to be is to understand the world in which your kids are living. Your kids are growing up in a very different world from the one in which you were probably raised. The world is faster paced, more dependent on technology, and full of opportunities and distractions. The days of playing outside alone until dark have passed. It’s normal for kids to turn towards their television, computers or phones for interpersonal connection. Some kids turn addictedly towards video games or drugs. Meanwhile, parents are busier than ever, working and balancing family life. Schools are financially struggling, so kids often find themselves in larger classrooms with fewer teachers. Divorce rates are still high, which means that many kids today shuttle between two homes, while others are raised by a single parent. There are many challenges when raising kids today. However, with the right tools, you can navigate past these challenges with the confidence that you are parenting your kids “well enough,” which is all any of us can ask of ourselves.
“The magic moments for accomplishing what you want for your children happen through your positive interactions with them when they are emotional. It’s during these times that you have the opportunity to influence how your child feels about himself and the world around him.”
- Dr. John Gottman

**Did You Learn How to be a Parent from Your Own Parents?**

Take a moment and think about what your parents were like when you were a child. Were they usually available for you when you needed affection, comfort, emotional support, or guidance? When you felt left out at school, did your mom or dad help you to feel better about yourself? When you got a bad grade, did your parents give you encouragement or did they just express disappointment? When you accidentally broke something, did they blame you, or did they help you to see that everyone has accidents now and then? As a teenager, what happened when you made a bad choice? Did they punish you or did your parents help you understand why you made the bad choice and what your options could be next time? How about discipline? Were limits set that helped you learn, or was the discipline method too harsh and painful? Perhaps, there were there no limits set at all, as if no one cared.

We bring all of these experiences with us into our adult life. We can choose what rituals and experiences we want to incorporate into our parenting and we can make the choice not to repeat some of what we experienced. You will make some mistakes on your parenting journey, but you have the chance to become at least as good as or better at it than your parents were for you. And isn’t that ultimately what you want? To do the best parenting job you can for your kids?

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**Characteristics of Emotion Coaching Parents:**

1. They notice lower intensity emotions in their kids, so that kids don’t have to escalate to get noticed.
2. They see emotional moments as an opportunity for connection or teaching, and a healthy part of normal development.
3. They are not impatient with their kid’s negative emotions.
4. They help their children to verbally label the emotions they are feeling.
5. They communicate understanding and empathy about their kids’ emotions, even when accompanied by misbehavior.
6. They communicate that while all feelings and wishes are acceptable, not all behavior is acceptable.