

Introduction

Key Topics

Research Behind Emotion Coaching

Why is Emotion Coaching Important?

What are Meta-Emotions?

The Gottman Institute

Why should you make Emotion Coaching a priority? Because it is truly the Heart of Parenting.

Do you remember what it was like to experience the miracle of gazing into your baby's eyes for the first time, or to watch your child sail happily away on her bike? For most parents, these early memories are priceless and are the beginning of a lifelong special relationship. Parenting brings with it many rewards and positive moments. It also presents challenges, moments of fatigue, confusion, and at times, heartache. This is because children need so much from their parents that occasionally it feels overwhelming. In addition to safety, sustenance, and education, they need guidance, advice, compassion, and emotional connection. It is this last one, emotional connection, that smooths the pathway to a child's future. Children experience big feelings as they move through life. This provides a tremendous opportunity for parents: to help children learn to regulate their emotions so they can manage their behavior. This process is called Emotion Coaching.

Originally trained as a child clinical psychologist, Dr. Gottman studied kids' friendships for 15 years. In 1985 he began to research marital and parental relationships, including the emotions of parents and children. Emotion Coaching came out of this research.

Emotion Coaching: The Heart of Parenting

In this handbook, you will explore the concept of emotion and learn how to incorporate the Five Steps of Emotion Coaching into parenting during the many phases of your child's development.

Emotion Coaching is a research-based method that teaches children how to regulate their behavior and emotions

In infancy, emotional connection creates the foundation of attachment. In the preschool years, Emotion Coaching is used as a tool for helping children learn about emotions and begin to manage their behavior. Parents with children in this phase often see challenges with following directions, sharing, and communicating needs. As school activities become the child's focus in middle childhood, homework, afterschool activities, and friends take center stage. Some parents think children of this age have already learned to regulate emotions. However, adolescence presents an even more challenging parenting environment, in which children push away and assert their independence.

Yet, research is clear that children between the ages of five and fifteen still desperately need their parent's help in learning to manage and regulate their emotions. These are turbulent times for most kids.

Meta-emotion means how you feel about your own as well as others' emotions.

Becoming the parent you want to be...

As you teach your children about emotions, try to make conscious decisions about what type of parent you want to be. In every parent-child interaction, you have a choice. Will you be authoritative or more laid back? Will you acknowledge the emotions your child is feeling or will you ignore them? Obviously, the answer you choose will depend on the situation, but researchers have found that you will also make choices that incorporate how you were parented. We bring our past experiences to our present parenting.

We also have meta-emotions about these experiences, or feelings about feelings

Meta-emotions are simply understanding your own feelings about whether emotions should be expressed or hidden. You can learn your meta-emotions by asking yourself how you feel about sadness, anger, joy and so on. What is your personal philosophy about whether or not it is OK to have particular feelings and what should be done with those feelings?

The way people feel about emotions is very different across cultures.

Children need their parents at every age of development

Some parents feel that the best way to help their child become a confident, well-adjusted adult is to provide for basic needs - such as food, clothes, and transportation - but to back off when it comes to the child's social and emotional needs, figuring that the child will do better if they manage these challenges on their own. Emotion Coaching research shows that the opposite is true. The way to create self-confident, emotionally adjusted kids is to connect emotionally, and often. Children at every age need love, affection, comfort, and guidance. They need safety and protection which, in the early years, may mean that we need to block them from blindly running across the street. But later, they may need techniques for handling a bully at school, or knowing how to say no to friends or what to do when they feel anxiety. They need understanding when they make mistakes and sympathy when they come home hurting. They need tolerance when their hormones make them crazy, and our limit setting when they make poor decisions. Finally, during the launching years, they need to learn how to make good choices and lead fulfilling and meaningful lives, and do their own laundry. It's our job as parents to equip them with all the right tools. Emotion Coaching can do that.

As children grow and develop it is important for parents to find new ways of connecting with their child. What worked at age 4 may not work at age 8, and what worked at age 8 may not work at 12. Whether your parenting focus is infant feeding and bathing, toddler story and bedtime, transition to school, or teenage tasks (or maybe you have children in each stage), the goal is to find time to engage and connect at your child's current level. Never give up. Your child will always need you, even if they don't express their need for you at the moment.

Key to Successful Parenting

Sometimes parenting seems complicated, but the key to successful parenting is not found in complex theories, elaborate family rules, or complicated formulas for managing a child's behavior. The key is based on your feelings of love and affection for your child, and is demonstrated simply through empathy and understanding. Successful parenting begins in your heart, and then continues on a moment-to-moment basis by engaging your children when feelings run high, when they are sad, angry, or scared. The heart of parenting is being there in a particular way when it really counts. (Raising Your Emotionally Intelligent Child, 1997)

Emotions are meant to be felt and expressed

Some parents worry that teaching children about their emotions will make them less strong or independent. Research shows the opposite is true. As humans, we are wired for emotional communication. Every person feels emotions and needs to express them. If you know what to look for in your child during these parenting moments, you can provide support and turn these opportunities into valuable learning experiences.

We know you have dreams for your kids, things you want them to accomplish, values you want them to have, experiences you want them to seek out and appreciate. The ability to have all of these begins with Emotion Coaching, which creates a foundation for emotional expression.

Learning about your meta-emotions from your reactions to your own child's behavior:

Consider this scenario:

Tim is 42 years old and has a 9 year old son who is constantly getting in trouble at school. His son has a hard time paying attention and is easily distracted both at school and at home. Growing up, Tim was exactly the same way. When he sees his son goofing around or not doing what he is told, Tim hears his father's voice telling him not to be so childish and to pay attention. Acting "childish" was not something that was allowed in Tim's house growing up. Tim is finding this behavior in his own child frustrating and often is quick to tell him to stop. On the other hand, he also knows that he was the same way. He feels bad for being frustrated.



A parent's feelings about emotions can significantly affect the way they parent and how they help manage their child's emotions.

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