

Parenting Tips for Supporting Emotional Growth

Relationships between children and the adults who care for them are essential for healthy emotional development and resilience. This means that as parents and key adults we are in the best position to help our children to:

- Feel good about themselves
- Manage their feelings
- Form positive relationships;
- Make good decisions;
- Take responsibility for themselves;
- Develop independence.

Plan for the Challenges

Finding opportunities to support emotional development within everyday life events creates relevant and concrete learning experiences and supports emotional growth to occur naturally.

Challenging times however can be the best opportunities to support emotional development – even if they don't feel like it at the time!

Think about how to plan for difficult times. Talk about them with your child beforehand and find opportunities to talk about what happened afterwards, when everyone is calm.

Suggested Questions and Comments

Things that you can say include:

You know when happens, - is there anything you can think of that I /anyone can do that will help you?

I wonder if when x happens, it makes you feel worried/anxious etc? Is there anything that you can do at those times that will help you feel safe?

If they don't know what might help make suggestions eg do you think it would help if, e.g. I held your hand?, You had something special of mine to hold on to?

Talk about the issues in a matter of fact way. Challenges are uncomfortable and can seem completely devastating, but you can and will get through them together.

Managing the Challenging Times

A calm reassuring presence at times of distress is the fertilizer for growth – just being there and understanding how hard it is, is often enough, you probably don't even need to talk much. Don't be too tempted to avoid, distract or take over and protect your child from distress and discomfort. These are perfectly normal human experiences and sometimes we just need to be able to know that we can cope, with the help of someone close. Practicing these times (and surviving them!) creates resilience.

Find time to talk about difficult incidents after the event, when things are calm. The aim is to check out your child's understanding, views and feelings about what happened. Remember that their views and experience of happened may be different from yours. You can share your differences but respect that you are separate people with different experiences of life. Talking about this in an unpressurised way lets them know that this is stuff that you're interested in and that you can comfortably talk with them about, even if they are struggling to talk about it. It also lets them know that they are free to develop their own ideas about things.

Suggested Questions and Comments

Things that you can say include:

What did you think about what happened eg yesterday?

I noticed that you

What do you think happened? Why do you think that happened?

Do you think there is anything you could have done differently?

Is there anything that anyone else could do to help you, if that happens again?

The conversation will help them over time become more familiar with what happens to them when they are overwhelmed and overpowered by emotions that may seem out of control.

Remember that you are trying to support your child to grow emotionally and manage their feelings for themselves and this takes time and patience. In some ways it's like learning to walk or talk and doesn't happen overnight. Do not expect that incidents will stop immediately and instead view them as opportunities for your child to learn how to deal with challenge and difficulty. This will set them up for the challenges they will face later on in life.

Look out for small signs of change – they will come but you need to notice them and show support for the small steps and modest progress.

Your child is trying to develop confidence in their own ideas about how to manage difficult situations so allow them opportunities to put their own ideas into practice, even when you are doubtful about whether their ideas will work well. The learning that comes from making their own mistakes is often greater than simply following someone else's good advice. This

is especially true when they have you there as a calm, non-critical and supportive partner in you.

Using Everyday Life Events to Support Emotional Growth

Practice noticing how your child is feeling. This may mean that you need to get in touch with your feelings too. Using words that match their emotional experiences is very powerful for your child. It lets them know that you have those feelings too and that there are ways of communicating about these powerful things. This reduces the need for them to communicate their feelings through acting out inappropriately. Even when you may guess wrong about what they are feeling you are still letting your child know that their feelings are important and that you are trying to understand and empathise with them. Providing this experience of empathy for them is the way in which they will then be able to learn about their own feelings and empathise with others.

Suggested Questions and Comments

Things that you can say include:

You like you're happy, sad, excited?

I wonder if you're feeling about that?

Sometimes when things like that happen to me, I feel?

Don't expect an answer, just offering those questions and comments over time encourages them to tune into their feelings, match them with words and have confidence to put their feelings into words too.

Finally remember to ask them what they think about things. At first they may just say 'I don't know'. Over time however they will start to offer ideas. Responding to them in a way that lets them know you have heard their thoughts and ideas and are listening to what they think will help all aspects of emotional development.