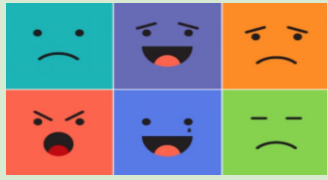


When Feelings (and Behaviour) Get Tricky: Harnessing the Power of Emotion

Emotional Regulation Demystified:

*We need to teach our children how to have emotion,
rather than the emotion have them.*

Emotion 101

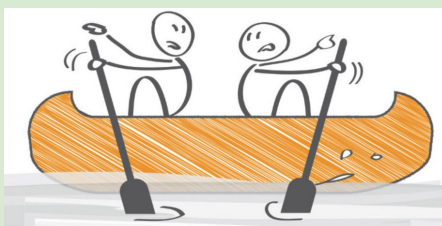


Emotion has neural speed and
connectedness
(we feel before we think)!

When a child is dysregulated emotionally (e.g., feeling too much emotion), it is very difficult or impossible for the child to access cognition, logic, problem solving, or *empathy*.

- **Emotions that fire together, wire together.** Children who frequently become overwhelmed with emotion (e.g. anger, sadness) and show subsequent behaviours do not have an adaptive emotion neural pathway developed yet in their brains; which they require in order to react in a more emotionally adaptive way. Their current emotion neural pathway (and way of reacting) is the only one they have!
- **Emotion can only be changed with emotion** (in the moment, logic does not work). In the moment of emotion *IS* the time to teach adaptive ways of *having* emotion.
- **Emotions are fundamentally adaptive** (they act as a guidance system and aid in our survival).
- **Emotions are not always logical, but they are ALWAYS valid.**
- Emotional development is about learning how to **have the emotion**, rather than the emotion *have me*. It is not 'down'-regulating' the feeling or stopping the feeling.

Motivation 101



**There is no such thing as an
unmotivated child!**

There is only a child who is trying to avoid something worse from happening or trying to get something more desirable. (We can apply this to adults as well!)

It is only when we understand the primary (or strongest) motivation, that we can acknowledge it, validate it, work with it and shift it.

Connection = Cooperation

Children need boundaries for a sense of safety and security. Parents need boundaries for well-being. Use Emotion Coaching (or Validation) before setting a limit or boundary with a child to:

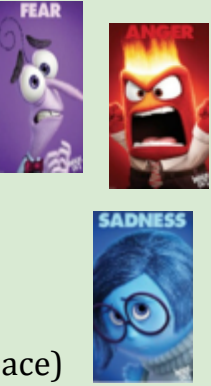
- 1) **enhance the cooperation** and...
- 2) to **convey non-judgement**.

Basic Emotions

(think "Inside Out" movie characters)

Every core emotion (i.e., sad, angry, scared) has:

- A **bodily felt sense** (sad = heavy; angry = strong)
- A **label** ("Sad"; "Angry"/"Frustrated")
- A **need** (sad = comfort; angry = set a boundary/space)
- An **action tendency** (sad = seek a hug; angry = assert boundary by using an assertive voice)



In the 'moment' with an upset child, we can use *Emotion Coaching* (or *Validation*) to help bring the child back to a place where reason and logic (problem solving) can be accessed.

Emotion Coaching Basics

1. Ensure all children/adults are physically **safe**.
2. **Attend** (notice the feeling). Do not ignore it.
3. **Validate the emotion** (even when it does not seem to 'make sense' or reflect the reality). Convey understanding and compassion.
4. **Meet the need** (Sad = provide comforting tone and gestures; Angry = validate in an assertive voice, help the child express frustration and boundaries; Fear = provide safety).

A few tips ...

Change 'But' to "Because" (e.g., "I can understand you were frustrated but..." becomes "I can understand you were frustrated because ..."). Remember, you are acknowledging and validating the emotion, you are not saying the behaviour is okay.

"No Wonder" is a powerful phrase. "No wonder you felt that way because ...".

Tone of voice is everything. Anger does not want a hug! Anger needs an assertive tone in validation to have the need met and the emotion be regulated. On the contrary, sadness needs a soothing tone to be regulated.

Validating another persons' experience is not always easy. We need to be able to access our own feelings of empathy, which can be difficult in the moment of our child's emotional reaction and when managing multiple demands at once.

Research has shown us that Emotion Coaching is very effective in:

- 1) helping the child navigate BIG feelings successfully,
- 2) developing 'in the moment' emotion regulation skills,
- 3) reducing stress level within the parent,
- 4) improving behavioural outcomes.

Validating the emotion in the moment provides the child with a corrective experience and literally builds a new, adaptive, neural pathway with that emotion. Over time, the child develops his or her own capacity to express emotion in an adaptive manner.

Emotion Coaching the emotion **is not** permitting unacceptable behaviour or telling the child that maladaptive behaviour is ok.

Emotion Coaching **is** providing a child with an adaptive emotional response, changing the way s/he feels in the moment, and conveying to the child "I get you and I am going to help you through this feeling". Emotion Coaching also supports the child to move towards solving the problem.

