

## ... Exploring the New Frontier in Parenting ...



The limits of many parents' emotional vocabularies are matched by the limitations in method as well. Most parents when asked can provide plenty of ways to raise a well-behaved child but I suspect many would struggle if asked to name three or more ways to build their children's emotional smarts. This is not a criticism but an acknowledgement of lack of training in the area.

Ask yourself, "Who taught you how to recognise, manage and regulate your emotions?" If you answered your parents then lucky you. They've given you the tools you need to have successful relationships, to maximise your earning potential (I kid you not) and to behave like a champ, not a chump, when playing sport and participating in other competitive or high performance activities. If you were able to identify any adult who taught you emotional intelligence then I suspect you are in rare company. My guess is you probably couldn't identify anyone, so your emotional intelligence (if you've read this far you have the emotional smarts needed for focus, self control and concentration) is unconscious, rather than conscious, making it hard to teach or pass on emotional intelligence skills to kids. So where do we start?

**Here are five ideas to help you explore the alien landscape of kids' emotions, the new frontier of parenting:**

### 1 Listen first

When your child fusses and fumes about some wrong-doing or hurt they've experienced clear your mind and listen.

Avoid trying to fix the situation just show understanding and compassion. There is no better feeling than being understood.

### 2 Contain rather than manage (let your kids do the managing)

Children's behaviour can become tangled up in upsets and disappointments. It's hard to separate their behaviour from their feelings. Sometimes as a loving, caring adult you just have to soak up their feelings, and give them the time and space to soothe their own souls. We don't have to do that for them.

### 3 Know that emotions can be pleasant and unpleasant

We often place value judgements on emotions by saying some emotions are good or positive (happy, motivated, energised) while some are bad or negative (sad, worried, sullen). Avoid passing judgement in such ways. Recognise that emotions are pleasant or unpleasant and that all emotions are acceptable, whereas some behaviours (such as hurting someone when you are angry) are unacceptable.

### 4 Build a vocabulary around emotions

Just as feelings have names, there are terms for the emotional intelligent parenting method. For instance, I-messages\* are a type of communication used by parents and adults who take an emotions-first approach.

### 5 Help your kids recognise, then regulate emotions

Ever told a child to calm down only to

see their emotions escalate? Kids, like adults, need to recognise their feelings before they can regulate their emotional state, and that's not easy. Emotional recognition is a complex process that takes practice. Even when we are good at it we don't always get it right. Learning to recognise your feelings is a continuous process that's best started when young, before the ups and downs of adolescence becomes a reality.

Emotional intelligence is best learned when it becomes part of your family's culture, or way of doing things. When it becomes part of your family's DNA then emotional intelligence will be passed down from generation to generation. You'll know it's had generational impact when your children identify you as the person who trained them in the skills of emotional intelligence. How cool is that!

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Michael Grose



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