

Talking to your child about their emotions.

When you talk calmly to your child about emotions, this shows you value their feelings while guiding their behaviours. It takes time and patience, it's not necessarily easy, but worth the effort if you persevere.

Five steps to talking to your child about their emotions.

1. **Be aware of your child's emotions:** This can be difficult sometimes but try and see the world through their eyes and uncover the emotion. Use their body language as a guide.
 - a. **Developing emotional awareness:**
 - i. Recognise when your child is upset, sad, angry, afraid, happy etc.
 - ii. Stand in your child's shoes when they are struggling with an emotion and see things from their perspective.
 - iii. Listen during their play to find clues about what makes them anxious, scared, proud or happy etc.
 - iv. Share your emotions, when it's appropriate.
 - v. Remember, your child is learning about emotions from watching adults and how they handle them.
2. **Recognise that emotions are an opportunity to connect:** The best time to teach your child about emotions is during the experience when the feelings are real. This means sharing the moment with them before those emotions grow to a high level, as talking about them helps reduce the intensity. This teaches children that issues can be sorted out when they are small.
 - a. **Connecting:**
 - i. Pay close attention to your child's emotions – don't dismiss them or avoid them.
 - ii. See emotional moments as opportunities to connect with your child.
 - iii. Encourage your child to talk about emotions and try and share in their feeling.
 - iv. Share your own feeling, when appropriate.
 - v. Tell your child that it is ok.....then offer guidance in sorting out the feeling, by using words like "Tell me how you feel" "I have felt like that once" "You can't hit somebody when you feel that way" "What else could you do?". This makes the child feel safe and accepted.
3. **Listen with empathy:** Listening and empathy are 2 very important steps when helping your child deal with an emotion. This reassures them that they are not alone and lets them know that feelings are ok. Reflecting children's feeling back to them is comforting ("I see that made you really sad"), and puts the parent in a better position to help.
 - a. **Listening:**
 - i. Encourage your child to share what they feel ("Tell me what happened" / "Tell me how you feel")
 - ii. Reflect back your child's feelings by saying "It sounds like you are feeling....."
 - iii. Don't dismiss emotions as silly or unimportant.
 - iv. Listen in a way that helps your child and pay attention to what they say and reflect back, "You didn't like it when you heard that. That made you angry".
 - v. Find a way to show your child that you understand what they are feeling.

4. **Help your child name emotions:** Children will not always know the name of the emotion they are feeling, they don't know how to make sense of complicated emotions like jealousy, hurt, fear or worry. Research shows that when you can name a feeling, you can handle them better. Naming emotions is tricky, children can feel mixed emotions, just like adults, so you need to look for clues.
- a. **Naming emotions:**
 - i. Start to name emotions early-even before your child can talk. ("Oh you look really mad")
 - ii. Work hard to identify the emotions your child is feeling, instead of telling them what they should be feeling.
 - iii. Listening is a way that helps your child know you are paying attention.
 - iv. Find a way to show your child that you understand how they feel, don't judge or criticise the emotion.
5. **Set limits and find good solution:** Learning positive ways to express emotions is important. It is challenging to accept children's emotions while setting limits on inappropriate behaviour, but setting limits is the first step to good problem solving.
- a. **Problem solving:** This takes practice. First help your child to figure out what their needs are or what they want next. Then help them generate their own ideas about how the problem could be solved. ("What do you think you could do?"). Try not to judge their ideas at this point. Lastly talk about how these ideas will work ("How do you think that will work?"), help them pick an acceptable solution.
 - b. **Finding good solution:**
 - i. Discipline misbehaving children for what they do, not for how they feel.
 - ii. Use this time as 'teaching time' to help your child understand emotions, give them a name and explain why their behaviour is unacceptable.
 - iii. When you child has a problem, help them (a) think about what they want to see / happen (b) think of several ideas for doing this and (c) pick a solution.

Remember:

- Be patient (It is important that you are able to regulate your own emotions before you can help your child. Getting angry when talking to them about their response to anger will not help. If you feel you are not fully in control of your own emotion at the time, seek support).
- Be honest with you child.
- Avoid making critical comments.
- Build on small successes to boost your child's confidence.
- Be aware of your child's needs, both physically and emotionally.
- Identify what your child enjoys and what they don't.
- Avoid siding with the enemy when your child feels mistreated, even if they brought the action on themselves. Just support them calmly through recognising their own emotions and actions at the time.
- Empower your child by giving them options and respecting their wishes.

Tips taken from Emotion Coaching Model.