

About Emotion Coaching:

Emotion Coaching happens when adults can be compassionate and accepting of a child's big feelings while at the same time teaching the child how to appropriately express those emotions in a way that allows others to understand and help them.

Imagine if your child came home from school really upset, yelling, slammed the door and threw their shoes across the room. Often, our first reaction would be to address the behaviors we don't like instead of focusing on the emotion underneath. We might be tempted to say something like, *"Do not slam the door and throw your shoes! Go to your room if you can't act right!"* This type of response is likely to result in more negative behavior because the child may feel misunderstood and still not know how to handle their frustration.

An example of an emotion coaching response could be something like, *"Wow! You seem really upset! Let's have a snack and you can tell me what happened and then we can practice shutting the door softly and put your shoes where they need to be."* With the emotion coaching response, you are giving the message that you can handle their big feelings and show them how to express them in safe, appropriate ways.

"When little people are overwhelmed by big emotions, it's our job to share our calm, not join their chaos." – L.R. Knost

Parent/Caregiver Tips:

- *"It is okay to feel mad. It is not okay to kick people."* Communicate that ALL feelings are okay. There are ways of communicating those feelings that are not okay but ALL feelings are allowed. Notice we didn't say, *"It's okay to feel mad but it's not okay to kick people."* When we use a "but," we discount what we've said before in favor of what's said after.
- Practice making and guessing facial expressions that are associated with different emotions. Make it fun and playful and kids learn and incorporate this information much more quickly!
- *"I see that you are sad and I'm going to sit with you so you aren't alone."* Let kids know that you can sit with them in their big feelings without trying to fix or change things. Sometimes we all just need someone to recognize how hard things are and not run away.
- *"You feel really angry about this right now. Let's talk about it again tomorrow and see how you feel then."* Sometimes feelings seem like they will never change. Help kids understand that feelings change and they may feel very differently about an issue tomorrow, next week, or next month. When you have a big emotion, this can be a great time to model for kids that you can have a big feeling one day and see the situation differently later. Don't be afraid to talk about how feelings can change over time.
- *"When I feel that upset, I go for a walk and practice taking deep breaths. Do you want to try one of those things?"* Helping kids understand that having big feelings is a part of life and normalizing the need to actively manage our emotions can be really helpful. Teach and model using calming strategies and self care.



Next Steps:

If you start to notice that your child continuously struggles to manage their big emotions in appropriate ways, it may be helpful to contact your pediatrician, a local therapist or talk to the counselor at your child's school.



Additional Resources:

21 Awesome Kids Books Exploring Feelings and Emotions: <https://childhood101.com/books-about-emotions/>

Books to Help Kids Develop Emotional Intelligence: <https://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/emotional-intelligence/books>

An Introduction to Emotion Coaching: <https://www.gottman.com/blog/an-introduction-to-emotion-coaching/>

The Power of Showing Up: How Parental Presence Shapes Who Our Kids Become and How Their Brains Get Wired by Daniel J. Siegel, MD, and Tina Payne Bryson, PhD