**Information on Emotion Coaching**

**Key Principles of Emotion Coaching**

‘Connection before Correction’

‘All feelings are OK’

‘Not all behaviour is OK’

Emotion coaching emphasizes emotional regulation rather than behaviour modification. It views all behaviour as a form of communication, making an important distinction between children’s behaviour and the feelings that underlie their actions. It is about helping children to understand their varying emotions as they experience them, why they occur, and how to handle them.

The system is comprised of two key elements – **empathy and guidance**. The empathy part involves recognizing and labelling a child’s emotions, regardless of the behaviour, in order to promote emotional self-awareness. The circumstances might also require setting limits on appropriate behaviour and even consequences, but key to this process is the guidance, helping a child to recognize and label certain emotions and feelings, such as “angry” or “sad”.

This comes from engagement with the child in problem solving to support their ability to self-regulate and adopt alternative behaviours, and prevent future transgressions. But only when their brains are in a receptive state for such problem solving.

When managing behaviour, adults usually rely on reason to distract or dissuade a child. But when a child is in an emotional state, particularly an intense one, they are unable to engage with the more rational [parts of their brain](http://activebabiessmartkids.com.au/articles/young-children-emotional-explosions/). Their minds and bodies are “locked” in a survival state of flight or flight, even when the response has been triggered by something such as thwarted desire.

Children in an emotional state need to be returned to a relaxed, calm state before we can reason with them. If we propose solutions before we empathize, it’s like trying to build a house before a firm foundation has been laid. Empathy helps the child to calm down so they are more open and able to reason, helping to create neural connections in the rational brain to become an [efficient manager of emotion](http://www.danielgoleman.info/topics/emotional-intelligence/).

You may think that empathizing with children will lead to an endorsement of bad behaviour. But emotion coaching also involves establishing the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and setting limits. You can condone the feeling underlying the behaviour, but not the behaviour itself.

It is a way of telling a child that they are supported, cared about, understood and respected. It also communicates that not all behaviours are acceptable, that they cannot always get what they want and that they need to moderate how to express feelings and desires.

**4 Steps to Emotion Coaching**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Empathy – ‘All feelings are Ok’** | **Steps** | **Sample Questions/Scripts** |
| 1. Recognising the child’s feelings and empathising with them | What is/are Child feeling (s)?  When have you felt something similar?  Check out this YouTube clip of I.18 minutes of a good example of empathy [*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QT6FdhKriB8*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QT6FdhKriB8) |
| 1. Labelling and validating the feelings | Labelling   * ‘You seem angry to me’ * ‘I can see you’re feeling angry’ * ‘I can tell you are angry…’ * ‘The way you are feeling is making you angry…’ ‘ * You’re angry about…..’   Validating   * ‘I’m sorry that happened to you, you must feel very….’ * ‘I can see that you get angry when that happens/ when I do this’ * ‘I would feel angry if that happened to me’ * ‘I would feel angry too’ * ‘I understand why you are angry’ * ‘It’s normal to feel angry about that’ * ‘It’s OK to feel angry about that’ |
| **Guidance – ‘Not all behavour is Ok’** | 1. Set limits on behaviour (if needed) | * ‘…..it’s not OK to behave like that’ * ‘…..that behaviour is not acceptable’ * ‘…..the rules are that we do not…’ * ‘…..these are the rules that we have to follow’ * ‘….. doing that is not OK….’ * …..behaving like that is not helpful’ |
| 1. Problem-solve with the child | * ‘What were you trying to achieve by………’ * ‘Let’s look together at why we have this rule’ * ‘Let’s think of what you could have done instead’ * ‘Can you think of a different way to deal with your feelings?’ * ‘I can help you to think of a different way to cope’ * ‘Can you remember feeling this way before and what you did’ * ‘Have you thought about doing this instead?’ * ‘Try and do this next time you feel like this’ * ‘Let’s decide what you will do next time you feel like this’ * ‘Do you think doing that would be more helpful for you and others?’ |

**Summary Emotion Coaching Card**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Step 1 | **Recognize** the child’s feelings and **empathize** with them |
| Step 2 | **Validate** the feelings and **label** them |
| Step 3 | Set **limits** on behaviour  **(if needed)** |
| Step 4 | **Problem-solve** with the child |