



Family Centre Information Package

Emotion Coaching



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WHAT IS EMOTION COACHING?

- Emotion coaching is a research-based five-step process developed by Dr. John Gottman designed to teach children basic emotional skills and competence.
- “Emotion Coaches” accept emotions, even those seen as negative, as a fact of life and use emotional moments to teach kids life lessons and build closer relationships.
- Along with acceptance of emotions, Emotion Coaches set limits on inappropriate behavior, teach kids how to regulate feelings, find appropriate outlets and solve problems.
- Emotion coaches have a strong awareness of their own emotions and the emotions of others. They recognize that all emotions serve a purpose.

HOW IS IT USED?

- Emotion coaching can be used on anyone, from toddlers to adults.
- Emotion coaching can improve communication in many different types of relationships and can be tailored to fit any age group.
- Parents, teachers, coaches, or relatives can all emotion coach the children in their lives.
- Mothers and fathers in particular can have a major influence on the emotional health of their children. In the past, mothers were the primary caregivers, whereas fathers took on more of a protective and financial role. This is no longer the case in most family situations. Research indicates that a positive father figure who is emotionally involved is just as important as a mother and has a pivotal role in a child’s life. If at all possible, both parents should be involved in the emotion coaching process.

HOW DO I EMOTION COACH?

Emotion coaching consists of five basic steps:

1. **Be aware of emotions—your own and your child’s.**

- Emotional awareness means you recognize when you are feeling an emotion, you can identify your feelings and you are sensitive to emotions in other people.
- Children’s emotions are not always easy to read and might be puzzling to adults. Children may have difficulties stating their feelings. Clues to feelings might be shown through play or behaviors such as overeating, loss of appetite, nightmares and complaints of headaches or stomachaches.

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- Pay attention to lower intensity, and not just high intensity, emotions. It is beneficial to be aware of all emotions, and not to ignore or dismiss the “negative” emotions such as anger or sadness.
 - Remember emotions and behaviours are not the same thing. For example, it is okay to feel angry, but it is not okay to hit others when you are angry. It is important to set boundaries on behaviour, but not on which emotions your child feels.
 - **Remember, there are no “bad” emotions!**
2. **Recognize emotion as an opportunity for intimacy and teaching.**
- Do not reject your child’s emotions, even difficult ones such as anger or jealousy.
 - Don’t take your child’s (or anyone else’s) emotions personally—their feelings are their own.
 - Instead, accept the emotions and encourage your child to discuss these emotions with you. These moments are opportunities to build a connection and to teach your child skills to soothe themselves.
3. **Listen with empathy and validate feelings.**
- Use your heart to listen to words and to **see** what is going on for your child or someone else.
 - Pay attention to body language, facial expressions and gestures.
 - Take what your child is saying seriously and try not to judge or criticize him/her. [Active listening](#) may be an important skill to use.
4. **Help your child name the emotion.**
- Labelling emotions and helping your child recognize what they are feeling can help reduce frustration and have a soothing effect on their nervous system.
 - Remember, help your child name the feelings they are experiencing rather than telling your child what they should be feeling. This [list of emotions](#) or this [emotion chart](#) may be helpful.
5. **Set limits and help problem-solve.**
- This process can include the following steps.
 1. Limit setting.
 - Set limits on inappropriate behavior. The problem is the behavior, not the feeling.
 - Set limits based on parent values.
 - Consider zones of behavior:
 - Green=the way we want children to act



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- Yellow=tolerated behavior (leeway for learners and leeway for hard times)
 - Red=behavior that cannot be tolerated.
 - Be clear on consequences for following or breaking the rules. Positive consequences can include praise, privileges or rewards. Negative consequences might be denial of attention, loss of privilege or the absence of rewards.
2. Identifying goals.
 - Be sure to let your child finish expressing their feelings first.
 - Ask your child to identify a goal around problem-solving.
 - Some problems cannot be solved and your child may just need your support.
 3. Thinking of possible solutions.
 - Encourage your child to come up with options for solving the problem.
 - Use role play or fantasy to play out alternative solutions.
 - Brainstorm with older children.
 - Remind them of past successes.
 4. Evaluating proposed solutions based on family values.
 - Decide which to try, which to eliminate.
 - Use the following questions:
 - Is this solution fair?
 - Will this solution work?
 - Is it safe?
 - How am I likely to feel? How are other people likely to feel?
 5. Help your child choose a solution.
 - Encourage your child to think for themselves, but offer opinions and guidance as needed. You could share how you handled a similar situation when you were young.
 - Keep in mind that children learn from their mistakes as well.
 - Once your child chooses a solution, come up with a concrete plan.
 - If the plan doesn't work, start problem-solving again.

Emotion coaching requires practice. Sometimes you may only be able to reach step two, while other times you may get all the way to step five. Every child is different and you will have to decide the best way to apply the emotion coaching process to your child.

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It is also not something you do all the time. Times when emotion coaching may not be appropriate:

- When you're pressed for time
- When you have an audience
- When you're too upset or too tired for coaching to be productive
- When you need to address serious misbehaviour
- When your child is "faking" an emotion to manipulate you

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF EMOTION COACHING?

Dr. Gottman suggests that the children of parents who emotion coach:

- Are more resilient
- Have better physical health
- Do better in school
- Get along better with peers
- Have fewer behavioural problems, including violent behaviour
- Overall have more emotional stability

Adapted from Gottman, J. (1997) **Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child**. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks.

FAMILY CENTRE SERVICES

[Building Families that Thrive](#) is a 6-week group is designed for all families looking to create more meaningful and connected relationships. Parents will learn the research behind emotion-coaching and how to put it into practice in your family. You will also learn about the importance of attachment in relation to parenting, as well as other relationships and how this shapes our brains. The format of this group allows either one or both parents to attend with or without their children. Grandparents, step-parents, guardians and other parental figures are also welcome to attend. Along with the parent group, their children ages 7-12 have an opportunity to participate in an interactive, creative arts group with a focus on feeling literacy with an experienced facilitator. Childcare is available for children under the age of 7. Parents of teens are welcome to attend as well.

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[Triple P](#) (Positive Parenting Program), an internationally used program that helps to develop positive behaviours in children and teens, and to build confidence in parenting. Although not specifically addressing emotion coaching, Triple P offers a variety of tools and techniques to improve communication and relations between parents and children. Check out our [website](#) for groups, seminars and discussion groups connected to Parent Education. Triple P can also be taken [online](#). If you are interested in more information on the Positive Parenting Program, please call our Triple P Coordinator at (403) 320-4232 ext. 226.

[Parent Support](#) offers an opportunity for parents and caregivers to consult with a parenting professional at Family Centre. Sessions are confidential and will provide parenting strategies, resources, referrals and support. If you are interested in parent support, call our Intake Worker at (403) 320-4232 ext. 240 to schedule an appointment.

[Supporting Father Involvement](#) (SFI) teaches parents various tools and skills that can be used to help strengthen the parent-child relationship, as well as the couple relationship. To register or for more information, contact our SFI Case Manager at (403) 320-4232 ext. 221.

[Counselling](#) is available for adults, couples, families and children (ages 7+) who are struggling with their emotions, relationships and other life challenges. Family Centre counsellors are experienced with helping individuals increase awareness and acceptance of their emotions, along with choosing behaviours to achieve more positive outcomes. If you are interested in scheduling a counselling session, please call Family Centre (403) 320-4232 extension 240, to speak to an intake counsellor.

[Kin Family Resource Library](#) provides access to books, videos, DVDs, and magazines that cover a variety of topics, including parenting. There is no cost for accessing the library; all that is required is a Family Centre library card, which is available from the reception desk.

RESOURCES

WEBSITES

- <http://www.parentingcounts.org/professionals/parenting-handouts/information-for-parents-emotion-coaching.pdf>
- http://www.emosocial.com/BackgroundInfo_2.aspx
- http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/raising_happiness/post/emotion_coaching_one_of_the_most_important_parenting_practices_in_the_histo



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VIDEO

- *Emotion Coaching: The Heart of Parenting Video Program*: This video series teaches parents how to effectively emotion coach their children. This video series is available for purchase [here](#).
- *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child* by John Gottman: Gottman teaches parents how to emotion coach their children. Available in the Kin Family Resource Library.
- *Emotion Coaching for You and Your Child*:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6efCU2Jw5tE>
- *Raising Kids' Emotional Intelligence*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PmIngzwipCY>

BOOKS

- *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child* by John Gottman: In this book, Gottman guides parents through the five-step process of emotion coaching. The book is written for parents of children of all ages.
- *The Go-To Mom's Parents' Guide to Emotion Coaching Young Children* by Kimberley Clayton Blaine: In this book, Blaine provides readers with emotion coaching skills in order to solve day-to-day problems such as tantrums and hitting.
- *What Am I Feeling?* by John Gottman: Readers of this book will learn how to identify his/her parenting style, as well as how to implement emotion coaching into the parent-child relationship. Available in the Kin Family Resource Library.



OTHER

- Kimochis are tools that parents can use to teach their children about emotions. Kimochis are stuffed toys that each has a different personality and story. For more information on Kimochis, please watch this [video](#).
- Additional videos on how to use Kimochis can be found on YouTube. ©ableplay.org
- Kimochis can be purchased online [here](#) or from other retailers such as [Learning Toys](#). Kimochis can also be purchased locally at the University of Lethbridge Bookstore.