



# Family Centre Information Package

## Emotion Coaching



The following information has been adapted from Gottman, J. (1997) **Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child**. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks. ©parentingcounts.org

### 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, or caregivers 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. If at all possible, both parents should be involved in the emotion coaching process.

### 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 and form stronger friendships
- Have fewer behavioural problems, including violent behaviour
- Overall have more emotional stability



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### 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 being able to recognize your own emotions and the emotions of others.
- 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 stomach-aches.
- 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 and that emotions are a natural and valuable part of life!**

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**2. Recognize emotion as an opportunity for intimacy and teaching.**

- Pay attention to your child’s emotions and try not to avoid or dismiss them, even difficult ones such as anger or jealousy.
- Do not 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 provide guidance before emotions escalate.

**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 your child’s emotions. [Active listening](#) may be an important skill to use.



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#### 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. Try setting a good example by naming your own emotions and talking about them.
- Help your child build a vocabulary for different emotions. Here is a [List of Emotions and Feelings](#) that may be helpful.

#### 5. Set limits and find good solutions

- This process can include the following steps.
  1. Limit setting.
    - Set limits on inappropriate behavior and explain why the behavior was inappropriate. 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
      - 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.



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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 does not 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.

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

- When you are pressed for time
- When you are 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 a situation



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### FAMILY CENTRE SERVICES

Be sure to check out our [current programs](#) on our website.

Family Centre can help you connect to resources in our community through our Family Connector. They are knowledgeable about the agencies and resources available in Lethbridge and surrounding area and can help get you to the right service.

We also offer parent support, where parent educators support you in supporting your children.

Please leave a message for our Family Connector at (403) 320-4232 extension 240 and you will receive a call back within 1 business day.

Family Centre offers the Kin Family Resource Library. Visitors to the library have access to books, videos, DVDs, and magazines that cover a variety of topics, including abuse. There is no cost for accessing the library; all that is required is a library card, which is available at reception.

### RESOURCES

#### WEBSITES

- [Helpseeker: https://helpseeker.org/](https://helpseeker.org/)
- <http://www.parentingcounts.org/parent-handouts/information-for-parents-emotion-coaching.pdf>
- [http://www.emosocial.com/BackgroundInfo\\_2.aspx](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](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/raising_happiness/post/emotion_coaching_one_of_the_most_important_parenting_practices_in_the_histo)

#### 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=PmlngzwpCY>

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### 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.
- Kimochis can be purchased online [here](#) or from other retailers such as [Amazon](#) Kimochis.



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