

10 Ways to Foster Healthy Emotion Regulation

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Emotion regulation is about managing our feelings. Just as children need to learn to read and write, they need to learn to regulate their emotions too. When children are very little, we help them to manage their emotions by 'co-regulating'. We do this by helping them understand what they are feeling, and telling them what to do to help themselves feel better. Older children need some of this too.



The most important people for teaching emotion regulation are parents. Parents can help their children to make sense of how they feel, understand why they are feeling that way, and help them to work out what to do about it.

Sometimes we manage feelings in way which are not very healthy. For example if we shut our feelings away and never talk about them. Children benefit from parents who show them how to manage their emotions in positive ways.

Here are 10 ways to parents can help children learn healthy emotional regulation.

1. Label emotions, and say what caused them:

Yours,

theirs,

everybody's...

I'm so excited about going to the pool with you today

I know you are feeling sad because the play date is over

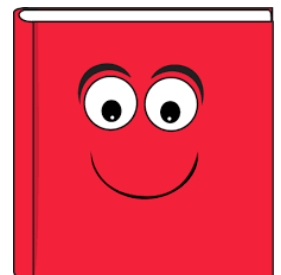
The good news made them really happy

The dog is feeling frustrated because she's lost her ball

(...but share your adult sized worries with adults, not children)

2. Choose books that will help expand your child's emotional vocabulary

- Stories are a really helpful way to explain emotions to children. If the story doesn't say what the feelings are, parents can say how the characters are feeling.



3. Act like a tour guide



- When we have new experiences on holiday, a tour guide tells us where we are going and what to expect. Children are having new experiences all the time, and just like us, it helps them to know what to expect. Some children only need telling once or twice, but other children need lots of friendly reminders.

4. Do your best to stay calm when your child is feeling overwhelmed

- If your child sees that their feelings are making you feel overwhelmed, they may feel more overwhelmed, and less safe and secure.

5. Model good coping

- Children learn best from watching other people. If they see their parents coping well, they will see how to do it. It's best to talk about what you are going to do to improve how you are feeling.

I'm a bit nervous about going to this party, because there are a lot of people I don't know... I might feel a bit awkward when I get there, but when I get chatting to people I won't feel so nervous.

6. Help your child work out what they've been feeling during the day...

- Once your child has a good emotional vocabulary, help your child imagine that you have two invisible containers with you all day, one for positive feelings, and one for more uncomfortable ones (the muddy bucket).



7. Notice when your child's 'muddy bucket' is getting too full

- If their muddy bucket is getting full, people find it harder to cope with even smaller challenges. Help your child empty their 'muddy bucket' by letting them tell you about their day.

8. If the 'muddy bucket' is overflowing, be prepared to 'sit in the mud' with your child

- When your child is overwhelmed, let them know you understand how they are feeling, and show that you are listening to them.
- Suggest activities which might help them to feel a bit better, like jumping on their trampoline, reading a comic... ever works for your child.



9. Bring attention to good coping by your child



- It's easy to spot when things have gone wrong, but really helpful to notice when your child has managed a difficult situation better than usual. Let your child know what you noticed...

Well done, I could see you were frustrated with your sister there, you managed that really well, thank you for stepping away.

10. Look after yourself

- When parents feel stressed, children find it harder to regulate their feelings too. If you are feeling overwhelmed, is there someone else who can help your child at that moment...?