



# Emotion Coaching

## A parent/carer's guide

**An Introduction to  
Emotion Coaching**

For parents with children aged 3-10

# What is Emotion Coaching?

- Emotion Coaching is a communication tool that uses moments of emotion to guide and teach a child or young person about more effective responses.
- Accepts all emotions as normal and healthy (but not all behaviours), and considers what the feelings, needs and emotions are behind the behaviour.
- It enables us to potentially diffuse and de-escalate situations by activating changes in the child's neurological system and allowing the child to calm down, physiologically and psychologically.
- Emotion Coaching helps children to feel seen, appreciated and cared for.
- Whilst the research is grounded in parenting, the principles hold true for any interaction (it can be used with your partner, friend, colleague etc)



Emotion Coaching was developed using psychologist John Gottman's research on emotional intelligence, using a five-step method that builds emotional intelligence and creates positive, long lasting effects for children.

## Why Emotion Coach?

Emotion Coached children and young people:

- Achieve more academically in school
- Are more popular
- Have fewer behavioural problems
- Have fewer infectious illnesses
- Are more emotionally stable
- Are more resilient

(Gottman 1997)

THE COLOR MONSTER FEELS



Jump and clap! Cry lots of tears! Growl and stomp around!



Hide behind your hands! Close your eyes and breathe deep! Hug yourself and say "I LOVE YOU!"

## Why Emotion Coaching improves children's behaviour

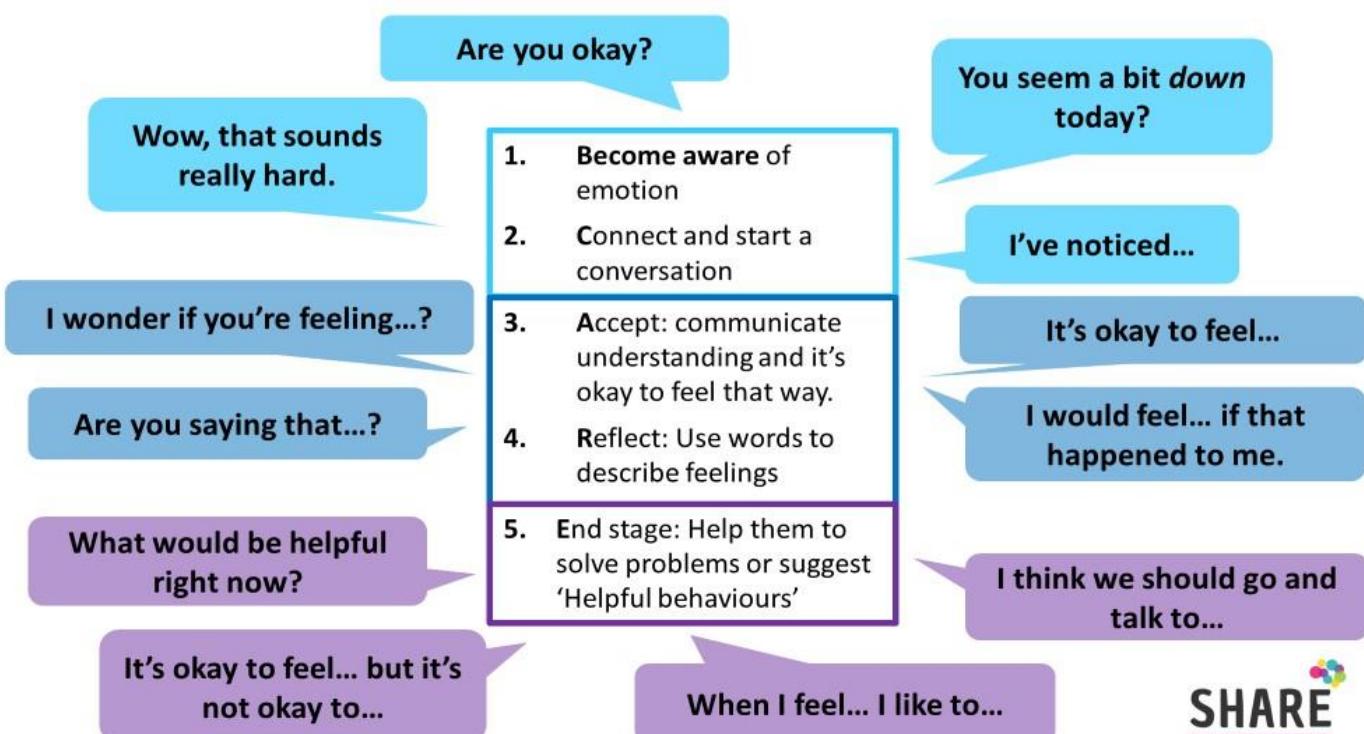
When parents begin to Emotion Coach, they find that discipline problems often decrease. This might be because:

1. Emotion Coaching parents respond to their children when their feelings are still at a low level of intensity, which means that they get attention sooner and don't (unconsciously or consciously) need to escalate their behaviour or start to feel more intense emotions.
2. If children are Emotion Coached from an early age, they become well practiced at self-soothing. They are more likely to stay calm, even when they are experiencing strong emotions.
3. Emotion Coaching parents don't disapprove of their children's emotions, so there are fewer points of conflict. At the same time, they set clear limits about inappropriate behaviour - they ensure that children know the rules and the consequences for breaking them.
4. Emotion Coaching creates a **strong emotional bond** between parents and children, so children are more responsive to their parents' requests.

# How do we Emotion Coach?

To Emotion Coach your child you:

- 1. Become aware of emotion.** Especially if it is low intensity (such as **disappointment** or frustration).
- 2. Connect.** View their emotions as opportunities for connection and teaching.
- 3. Accept.** Listen and accept their emotions: avoid judgement.
- 4. Reflect.** Help them use words to describe what they feel.
- 5. End stage.** If appropriate, help them to problem solve. You may also communicate that all wishes and feelings are acceptable, but some behaviours are not.



Emotion Coaching is something that you can adapt to your style of parenting. If these sentence starters don't feel natural to you, add some of your own.

# Which communication style do you use?

Emotion coaching is a style of communication. Most people use a mix of styles, and most are well intentioned, but one is usually more dominant than the others, having a greater impact.

## Dismissing

- **Avoids** emotions/wants to **get over** emotion quickly
- Uses **distraction**
- Jumps straight to **problem solving**

## Laissez Faire

- Shows lots of empathy but does not set limits
- Have a 'hands off' idea about handling emotions
- Shows own emotions but unable to resolve them

## Emotion coaching

- Uses **empathy** to connect
- All emotions are **okay and healthy** (but not all behaviours)
- Remains **calm** and helps the child solve the problem
- Are **aware** of his/her own emotions

## Disapproving

- Judges and **criticises** emotions
- Viewed as sign of **weakness**
- May see emotional display as **manipulation**

To see the difference between a Dismissive and Emotion Coaching approach please watch this clip from 'Inside Out'.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdhjztWMnVw>

# HAND MODEL OF THE BRAIN



At the base of your brain, represented here by your wrist, is the brain stem. It's responsible for basic things like breathing and keeping your heart pumping.



Your thumb, folded in, sits in the middle, just like the amygdala in the brain. The amygdala is responsible for sensing danger and telling the brain + body.



Your fingers are like your pre-frontal cortex- that's the part of the brain that helps us manage emotions and make complex decisions.



When fear, danger, or intense emotion overwhelm our amygdala our prefrontal cortex goes offline and we "flip our lid." That's why sometimes it is so hard to make thoughtful decisions when we are very upset.

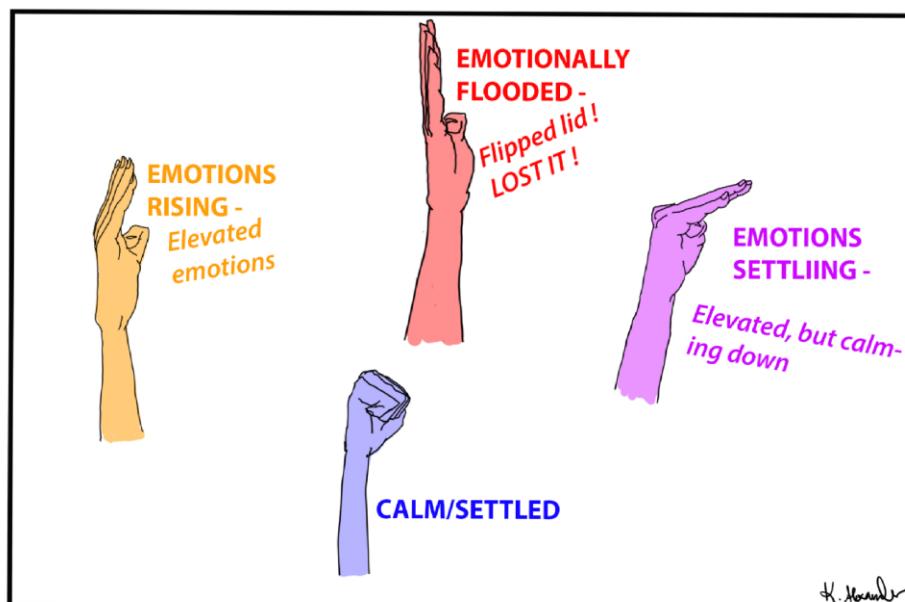
When brains are overwhelmed like this, they need a break to reflect and reconnect.

**Watch: Dr Daniel Siegel presenting a Hand Model of the Brain and see another great explanation by Amy Harper**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qm9CIJ74Oxw&feature=youtu.be>

<https://vimeo.com/222637418>

## EMOTIONAL AROUSAL and the HAND MODEL OF THE BRAIN





## Flipping our lid

- Both children and adults can use this tool to recognise and if needed communicate when our emotions are rising **before** we flip our lid. This is the **perfect** time to Emotion Coach and build connections.
- Often emotions which are hard for children to identify such as jealousy, tiredness, boredom aren't always visible and often hard to communicate and understand. These can build up causing our lids to flip.
- We often regret the way we behave when we flip our lid.
- Remember flipping our lid from time to time is completely normal.

## Looking after our own emotions

It's important to look after your own emotions and wellbeing, as you will be better equipped to respond to your child's emotions.

Consider a time you've flipped your lid, and complete the table below.

Why did I 'flip my lid'?	How did I behave?	What could I do next time?
I had too much to do. I became stressed.	I was short tempered and shouted at my children.	Deep breathing away from room for a minute or two.

## What do I do for self-care?

2015-03-18a

	Get plenty of sleep		Tidy
	Enjoy sunshine		Read
	Cook		Read about people whose lives are more complicated
	Write or draw ( <sup>think</sup> out loud)		Garden
	Talk to myself		Get a hug
	Cuddle cats		Talk to select people
	Walk or bike (esp. in a park)		

## Dismissive vs Emotion Coaching Example

### Being dismissive: Mum and Cody

Mum: Cody, it's time for school.

Cody: I don't want to go.

Mum: Come on, it's time to go. I've got to drop you there and take Michael to the doctors. (In a matter-of-fact tone)

Cody: Noooo. I hate school (whimpers)

Mum: No you don't. You love going to school. You've never not wanted to go before. What's happened now?

Cody: I just don't want to (starts to cry)

Mum: (starting to get irritated) Come on Cody, I haven't got time right now. Get your shoes and your bag. You're going to make me late! (Annoyed)

Cody: (Kicks his bag and starts to wail)

Mum: Stop it Cody!! Will you get in the car?! (Exasperated)

The situation continues...

## Emotion Coaching: Mum and Cody

An Emotion Coaching approach might go like this.

Mum: Cody, it's time for school.

Cody: I don't want to go.

Mum: Come on, it's time to go. I've got to drop you there and take Michael to the doctors.

Cody: Nooooo. I hate school. Mum: Oh, you don't like school? That not what you usually say. Has something happened?

Cody: No. (*Starts to look tearful*)

Mum: Oh, sweetheart (*giving a cuddle*). Something's made you feel sad and stopped you wanting to go to school. Cody: (*hugging mum*) I want to stay home.

Mum: You're feeling sad and you want to say home? Cody: Yeah. I hate Jordon.

Mum: Did something happen with him yesterday?

Cody: Yeah, he pushed me over in the hall and told the others I couldn't hang out.

Mum: Oh, that's a bit rough. No wonder you're feeling sad. Maybe you're a bit angry with him too saying that in front of your friends?

Cody: Yeah. I'm not playing with him anymore. I'd rather play with Adam.

Mum: Oh, so you think you might play with someone else. That sounds like a good idea. I bet you'll have fun with Adam. Maybe you can just ignore Jordan.

Cody: Yeah. The others don't really like him anyway...

And off they go to school...

Taken from TUNING IN TO KIDS™ Emotionally Intelligent Parenting

## Being an Emotion Coach

Complete the following examples. For each example there might be a number of different feelings. Emotion Coaching responses could include asking questions about what happened, reflecting your child's feelings and conveying acceptance and empathy.

**Example: Your child says that they like a boy or girl at school, but then comes home and says that they hate this person.**

What is your child feeling?	Anger
How could you Emotion Coach?	Sounds like you're feeling angry with him!

**Your child has not done their homework on time.**

What is your child feeling?	
How could you Emotion Coach?	

**Your child does not want to go to school on sports day.**

What is your child feeling?	
How could you Emotion Coach?	

Taken from TUNING IN TO KIDS™ Emotionally Intelligent Parenting

## A conversation with your child:

“Things that make you feel good”.

Talk to your child and brainstorm a list of things that they do that make them feel good or help them when they are feeling a bit down.

Try not to suggest anything yourself, but be guided by them. If they don't come up with anything right away, ask them to think about it for the next day and you can chat about it again.

Taken from TUNING IN TO KIDS™ Emotionally Intelligent Parenting

To find out more about Emotion Coaching please visit:



<https://www.emotioncoachinguk.com/>

## Additional Emotion Coaching Scripts

# EMOTION COACHING Scripts

helping children understand their feelings and manage their emotions by co-regulation

