

# Four Tips for Raising Emotionally Healthy Children

**A**s parents in today's world, raising children can be challenging. We face a multitude of ever-changing needs and pressures, ranging from helping our children develop healthy eating habits to helping them with their school work or teaching them how to be safe. As I reflect on my children's life, compared to my childhood, I realize how important it is to look beyond daily tasks and teaching of skills, and pay attention to our children's emotional health as well. Dealing with our children's emotions can seem stressful at times, but it is important and can be extremely rewarding as we connect with our children on a deeper level. Luckily, it is not that difficult – all that is required is that we love our children unconditionally and pause from the daily stressors of life to ensure that we are there for them by being a

good listener and observer, and being both physically and emotionally present with them as they grow.

Studies show numerous benefits for emotionally healthy children; including better performance at school, the ability to build lasting and mutually respectful relationships, and the ability to cope through difficult times and stressful situations.

## Tip #1: Remember - You are the Role Model

First and foremost, we must remember that our children learn the tools for emotional health by watching us. Every single day they observe how we cope with and manage our daily tribulations and challenges, and how we then relate to them and to the people we come in contact with (such as our neighbors, family, teachers etc.). It is most helpful if

we share our emotions with our children as we tackle daily challenges, and then show them how we manage our emotions (e.g. frustration, sadness, loss, anger) and the relationships embedded within. This will encourage them to share their emotions and struggles with us. Our children are bombarded daily with information and local and international news that can be both confusing and frightening, and doesn't necessarily provide the best examples for them. We need to openly discuss what they see and help them help them interpret the world around them by avoiding unnecessary anxiety, worry, confusion, frustration and possibly anger. None of us will handle every situation perfectly; however, there is also merit in sharing with our children how we handle our own short-comings and failures. Consistency in our behavior brings comfort to our



children as they come to know what to expect and can feel safe in approaching and discussing any concerns with us.

### Tip #2: Know What Behaviours are Expected at a Given Age

We are better able to help our children if we know what the appropriate developmental milestones are, and what behaviors are reasonable to expect. This knowledge enables us to respond better to our children's needs, and can also help us to identify problems. The signs of emotional health vary with age, and what is appropriate at one age (e.g. temper tantrums) may be a sign of a problem when it occurs consistently at another age. If we become concerned about our child's behavior, it's best to talk it over with their physician, and seek professional help as early as possible.

### Tip #3: Spend Quality Time with Your Child

Our lives are very busy and somewhat complicated, but it is important that we find a way, each and every day, to pause,

spend time with and be present with our children to find out how their day was – what went well, what didn't go so well, what their concerns, fears and hopes are, and how we can help. There is nothing that can replace this connection time, and we can be assured that if we don't make the time, there will be certainly be something else that will fill the void. This time and sharing provides an opportunity for us to teach our children how to reflect on the present, building inner peace and a solid foundation for their long-term emotional health.

### Tip #4: Nurture the Attitude of Gratitude

Both expressing and feeling gratitude are important parts of life. Over the past decade, hundreds of studies have documented the social, physical, and psychological benefits of gratitude. Gratitude has two parts – first is the acknowledgement of the good things in the world, the gifts and benefits received. The second is the acknowledgement that the source of goodness lies

outside of one's self and in other people, even higher powers that provide the many gifts, big and small, in our lives. Practicing gratitude has proven to be one of the most reliable methods for increasing happiness and satisfaction, and reducing anxiety and depression. Gratitude strengthens relationships, making us feel closer and more committed to those around us. From the outset, a parent's modeling of gratitude is key. Toddlers can be taught to say thank you when they receive assistance or a gift from someone. By primary school, we can encourage our children to reflect on their day and share one thing they are grateful for daily, for example at dinner time, or by creating a 'gratitude list' or 'gratitude jar'. Gratitude encourages us not only to appreciate our gifts but to repay them or pay them forward. Studies suggest that when 10-19 year olds practice gratitude, they report greater life satisfaction and more positive emotion, and they feel more connected to their community. Let's share this precious gift.

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