UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
MISSISSAUGA
Centre for Child Development, Mental Health, and Policy

HOW TO BE AN EMOTION COACH

We can support ourselves and children through big emotions by being an emotion coach. The 4 steps to being an emotion coach spell out L.O.V.E. See page 2 for examples of phrases you can try to practice these steps!

L

Label Emotions

Sometimes simply recognizing and labeling how we are feeling can help us start to feel better. Labeling children's emotions helps them feel heard and builds their undertstanding of emotions.

O

Opportunity for Growing Closer

All emotions (even big emotions!) can serve as an opportunity to grow closer together. We can bond over shared joyful moments and emotions, and we can also problem solve and comfort each other through big or challenging emotions.

V

Validate Emotions

We are all human and are all going to experience big emotions sometimes. And that's okay! It's actually good and healthy for us to feel a wide range of emotions. Acknowledging and validating emotions is often an important first step to moving forward.

E

Elaborate about Emotions

Elaborating about emotions, including discussing the signs, causes, and consequences of emotions can help children learn to manage their emotions in a constructive manner.

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TRY IT OUT!

Label Emotions

- "You are feeling ____."
- "Your face is red, and your fists are clenched. It seems like you might be feeling angry. Is that right?"
- “How are you feeling?”
- “Do you want to tell me how you’re feeling?”
- "When I am angry, I ____. What do you do/feel when you're angry?"

Opportunity for Growing Closer

- "It's okay to feel angry. We all do. Let's take a few deep breaths together because that can help us feel calmer. Then we will be more ready to decide what to do next."
- “What is something we could do to help you feel better?”
- “What did you do last time you were feeling ____?”
- “Let’s problem solve this as a team.”

Validate Emotions

- “Yeah, that is sad/scary.”
- “Yeah, that would make me feel ____ too.”
- "It's okay to feel ____. Sometimes I feel ____ too."
- “You’re right. That’s not fair.”

We can also validate while holding boundaries:

- “It’s okay to feel angry, but it’s not okay to hit.”
- “Playtime is over for now and it’s okay to feel sad about that.”

Elaborate About Emotions

Identify signs of emotions:

- “I could tell you were feeling sad because your body was droopy and your lips were quivering a bit.”

Identify causes of emotions:

- “The dog chasing you made you feel scared.”
- “Me asking you to put your toys away makes you feel angry.”

Let your child lead. Ask open-ended questions:

- “Why did that make you feel ____?”
- "How does it feel in your body to feel _____?"
- “What did we do to make you feel better?”
- “What could you do next time?”

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