

GUIDE TO HELPING KIDS MANAGE EMOTIONS

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Kids are born with emotional reactions such as crying, frustration, hunger, and pain. They learn about other emotions as they grow older. How we react to our kids' emotions has an impact on the development of their emotional intelligence. Emotional invalidation prevents kids from learning how to manage their emotions. When we teach kids to identify their emotions, we give them a framework that helps explain how they feel, which makes it easier for them to deal with those emotions in a socially appropriate way.



INFANTS

Infants are essentially guided by emotions pre-wired into their brains. For instance, cries are usually an attempt to avoid unpleasant stimuli or to move towards pleasant stimuli (food, touch, hugs). One study suggests that listening to play songs have a positive effect on emotions more than speech. It also suggests that play songs (The Wheels on the Bus" for instance) are more effective than lullabies at reducing stress.

TODDLERS

A number of studies suggest that fear is the most difficult emotion for toddlers. Helping toddlers avoid distressing situations or distracting them from those situations is one of the most effective emotion-regulation strategies. Naming emotions also helps toddlers learn that emotions are normal. Every day opportunities provide occasions to talk to kids about emotions: "He sure looks angry." "Why do you think he looks so sad?"

Toddlers also learn about managing their emotions by watching us.



CHILDHOOD

Children are able to understand and differentiate appropriate from inappropriate emotional expressions, but they still find it hard to express their emotions, especially if they haven't learned to identify them. Helping kids manage their emotions begins by validating those emotions and providing an environment in which they feel safe to express them. As several studies have shown, kids who feel safe are more likely to develop and use appropriate emotion regulation skills to deal with difficult feelings.



Source: The Gottman Institute www.gottman.com/blog