

A parent's guide to promoting Emotional Literacy Skills through everyday discussion

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What is Emotional Literacy?

Emotional Literacy is the ability to recognise, understand and appropriately express emotions. People who are emotionally literate are often more successful in education and their careers and more resilient to the ups and downs of life.

People who are emotionally literate name their feelings when they are upset rather than just describing what has happened. They know that feelings affect our bodies, thoughts and behaviour. In encouraging children to develop their emotional literacy, adults should aim to show their children how to positively manage their feelings. This can be done through parents commenting on emotions as part of everyday life, for example when they see something happening in the street, when reading books and comics or when watching soaps on television.

How can I help my child?

Photographs of people in books, posters, comics or magazines can be useful tools in helping children to gain and rehearse emotional literacy skills before transferring the skills to the real world. Any book with characters, can be used to help develop emotional literacy. There are some specially designed books available, but equally reading scheme books, novels or biography can be used. The supporting adult will need to share their thoughts and knowledge at an appropriate level for the child.

Below are the type of questions that could be used to explore the various areas of emotional literacy. They can easily be incorporated into discussion whilst a child is reading to you, or sharing a magazine. You may only use one or two of the questions during a conversation. If you are aware that that a child struggles with a particular area of emotional literacy, you may like to focus on that area. If they are struggling with a particular emotion try to find situations where this emotion is shown.

Let's think about a couple of basis themes in Emotional literacy...

Understanding the situation

Question 1: What's happening here? (direct their attention to what you are looking at

- Some children struggle to appropriately interpret the situation. If your child struggles, talk about what you see, what you think is happening and how you know that.

Emotional Vocabulary (having the words to label feelings)

Question 2: Choose an individual character in the picture or book and ask; How are they feeling?

- If the child does not know, tell them what you think, and what this feel like in our

- o bodies and when it happens. Discuss other words that describe the same feeling.
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Empathy (recognising how other people are feeling)

Question 3: How do you know they are feeling ... (name emotion)?

- o Key factors that give us clues about how people are feeling include;
 - *facial features* (particularly the eye brows and mouth)
 - *body language and posture* (eg the position of arms, hands, head)
 - *context* (the situation as a whole)
 - *experience* (the use of ones own experience, ie using knowledge that is not gathered from the picture)
- o If the child has not chosen an appropriate emotion, say how you think the person is feeling and how you know that.
- o Try to include as many of the above clues as you can.

Self-Awareness and Self-Regulation (the child recognising how they are feeling, and what to do so that the feelings don't get too big)

Question 4: For the chosen emotion ask the child...

- o *When do you feel....?* (aiming to find situation)
- o *When you feel... how do you know you are feeling ...?* (aiming to discuss body language and posture. You may also talk about how they feel inside)
- o *When you feel... what do you do?* (aiming to discuss positive and negative ways of managing the emotion. Praise the positives)
- o *When you feel... what do you think?* (aiming to discuss helpful and unhelpful thoughts associated with the emotion.)
- o Again share with the child your experiences of this feeling, and your positive ways of managing them.

Question 5: What should they do next?

- o If the child does not talk about these things, talk about your thoughts.

Question 6: Can you think of anything else they could do?

- o If the child does not talk about these things, talk about your thoughts on the above.

Question 7: Which do you think the best way of managing the situation is? Why?

- o Discuss which way of dealing with the situation is the best. What are the positive or negative consequences each options?