

Emotion Coaching for Dads

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Emotion Coaching for Dads- With fathers more involved in parenting, it is truly a great time to be a dad in our nation's history. One of the natural surprises and challenges that comes with more time in the trenches means that dads often have to deal with the complicated terrain of emotions. Here are a few tips to help you work them through.

Feel It (Invite it in)---an important task is to allow and acknowledge that the feeling exists. The most common reaction to an uninvited or unexpected feeling (whether it's your's, your partner or your child's) is to get rid of it by Denying, Dismissing, Downplaying, Distracting or Fixing it. Feelings are a part of being human and everyone feels them differently. Try to pay attention to how the feeling manifests itself. For example: furrowed brow, tantrum, arms flailing, raised voice, adrenaline flowing, heat in neck/face, rapid heart rate. Many have said: *What you feel you can heal. What you resist tends to persist.*

Name It (Join and Validate)---there is great power in naming a feeling. Sometimes in the act of naming it, the feeling dissipates. This helps us feel seen and understood. To help you name it, consider the four Big Feelings: SAD, MAD, GLAD or SCARED. For example, one could say: "I'm just having some big feelings! I am frustrated! I'm mad! I'm disappointed! I'm worried for your safety!" If you see the feeling in another, you can say: "I can see that you are mad/frustrated and I can understand why you would be frustrated- that's so frustrating when we make mistakes." This can be said to yourself or to the person who is having the big feeling. Half the work for men is to name it.

Wait and See (Respond vs. React)---Sometimes action is required and sometimes just letting the feeling inform and move through you is what's called for. Generally, the best decisions are made when emotions are low, especially when the emotion is anger or fear. For example: your 15-month-old is climbing on a piece of furniture and you begin feeling anxious and worried that (s)he might fall and hurt herself. You watch and wait to see how she balances herself. She doesn't do so well so you respond or take action and help her get down. The critical question to consider is: Do I need to act on this emotion or would it be more beneficial to wait until the emotion subsides before I act? *"Between stimulus and response, there is a space."* Victor Frankl

Stop, Breathe and Think (Get to the Pre-frontal Cortex)---This is best used when experiencing or witnessing low to medium intensity emotions. As you start to feel yourself boiling, stop, breathe and shift into thinking mode. This is not easy. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. See if you can ask yourself a variety of questions like: What do I need right now? How important is this? Am I at risk? Is he/she at risk? Does this have more to do with me and my need? Am I in a bad mood, hungry, tired, sad, stressed? Why might I be having such a strong reaction? Like it or not our behavior is often dictated by the emotion we are feeling. Any of these questions can help you respond versus react. In addition to bringing your attention to your breath, you can also bring your attention to your neck, feet, face, shoulders, stomach. By bringing your attention to the body it helps us get to thinking.

Show and Tell Your Feelings (Connects us to Others)—Expressing our feelings is good for us AND it connects us to other human beings. If you are unable to express your feelings to your child (or whomever) in the moment, you can tell them or someone else after some reflection. By telling and showing your children your emotions you are getting it out and teaching them: 1) that it is okay to have feelings, 2) that they have an impact on you, 3) that you are human and feelings are important to express verbally. Kids can learn how to be empathic when they see us having feelings.

These five strategies will enhance your connection and bond to your child, partner and even yourself. Emotional awareness and sensitivity by dads and men in general can change the world for the better.

Resources... more on the topic

- *John Gottman promotes “emotion coaching” and cites research that a father’s ability to help a child manage and soothe their feelings, tend to do better academically, socially*
<http://www.gottman.com/>.
- *Parenting from the Inside Out* by Dan Siegel
- *Between Parent and Child* by Haim Ginott

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