



## An introduction to emotion coaching

Emotion Coaching is an evidence based technique based upon the work of John Gottman (1996). This Information taken from emotion coaching training provided by City of York Council Educational Psychology Service

Step 1- Recognising the child's feelings and empathising with them

Step 2 - Labelling the feelings and validating them

Step 3 - Setting limits on behaviour (if needed)

Step 4- Problem-solve with the child

Step 1 - Recognising the child's feelings and empathising with them

- Genuinely empathising with the child from their point of view. This doesn't mean agreeing with them, just viewing things from their perspective.
- Recognising all emotions as being natural and normal and not always a matter of choice.
- Recognising behaviour as communication.
- Looking for physical and verbal signs of the emotion being felt.
- Taking on the child's perspective.

Step 2 - Labelling the feelings and validating them

- Use words to reflect back child's emotion and help child to label emotion.
- Simply observe – saying what you see rather than asking probing questions to which young people might not know answer.
- Checking out that you understand what they are saying to you and that you don't blame them helps sooth their emotional brain.

### Emotion Coaching Scripts

- 'I can see that you get angry when that happens. I would feel angry if that happened to me. It's natural to feel like that'.
- 'I can see you're frowning and you're kicking the wall and you're expressing a lot of energy. I would be feeling like that too if I didn't want to do something'

Step 1 & step 2 hints and tips

- Acknowledge low levels of emotion before they escalate to full-blown crisis.
- Acknowledge all emotions as being natural and normal and not always a matter of choice.
- Recognise behaviour as communicative.

- Demonstrating empathy when stakes are low creates a good foundation.
- You become the child's ally.

### Step 3 - Setting limits on behaviour (if needed)

- State the boundary limits of acceptable behaviour (positive limit setting)
- Make it clear certain behaviours cannot be accepted.
- Retain child's self-dignity

**Example:** 'You are angry that I've taken away your phone but these are the rules everyone has to follow. I will keep it safe for you' *Rose, 2014.*

#### Emotion Coaching Scripts

- 'Be sure to ask first before you borrow something from your friend'
- 'Take the ball outside if you want to play with it.'
- 'Something might get broken if you play with it inside'
- 'Stay in the playground, the field is far away and I can't see if you are ok'
- 'We can't behave like that even though you are feeling annoyed because it is not safe'.

### Step 4- Problem-solve with the child

When the child is calm and in a relaxed, rational state:

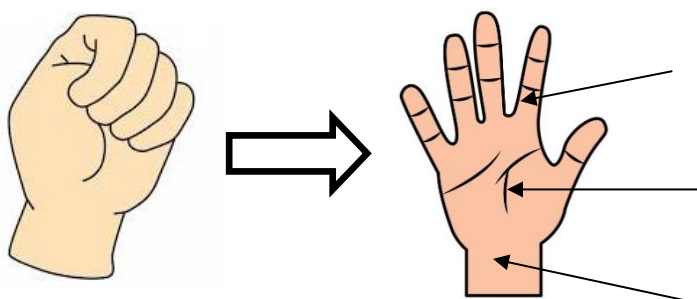
- Explore the feelings that give rise to the behaviour/problem/incident.
- Support alternative ideas and actions that could lead to more appropriate and productive outcomes.
- Empower the child to believe they can overcome difficulties and manage feelings/behaviour.

#### Finding solutions – problem solving with the child

- "What does your body feel like now?"
- "What feelings are you having?"
- "Let's think of what we could have done instead"
- "Can you think of a different way to manage those feelings"
- "I can help you to think of a different way to cope"
- "Can you remember what we said before"
- "Let's sort this out"
- "Try and do this next time you feel like this"
- "What might your friend do or suggest you do?"

## Emotional regulation – ‘flipping your lid’

Professor Dan Siegal came up with a really impressive way of explaining how we **flip our lids**; he uses his hand to demonstrate this.



This is the **upstairs brain** which is also known as our **thinking brain**.

Our **midbrain**; this is where our **emotions and memories** are stored.

This is the **downstairs** brain which is also known as our **emotional brain**.

Our **emotional brain** triggers our **Fight-Flight-Freeze** response which reacts instantly without thinking things through to **keep us safe**. For example: Our FFF response will stop up from picking up a hot cup.

Our **thinking brain** allows us to **think logically**; act with **kindness**; and think about how **others might be feeling**. It helps us to come up with **possible solutions** to our **problems** and decide which **is the best**.

When we flip our lids, our **thinking brain** and **emotional brain** find it **really difficult** to communicate with each other; this is when we **lose control of our emotions**.

When we are **calm** the **thinking brain** and **emotional brain** communicate with each other; this helps us to **control our emotions**.

It is important to feel **calm** before trying to **solve a problem**. We can do this by using **breathing and relaxation techniques** or taking some **time out**.

When our **lids have flipped** it is really helpful for supporters to allow us **time and space** to calm down, or to support us to calm down, before we can **talk about the situation** and start to **problem solve**.

## Things we can do to co-regulate a child who has ‘flipped their lid’

It is important to start from the bottom of the brain and work your way up. Calming the downstairs brain so we can access the thinking brain.

Way to do this is through rhythm: Patterned, repetitive, rhythmic activities or somatosensory activities:

- **Fight impulse** - pushing, deep touch pressure activities
- **Flight impulse** - running, jumping, proprioceptive activities

These might include:

Walking, running, dancing, singing, deep breathing, colouring, trampolining, swinging, drumming, tug of war, bouncing on a fitness ball, walking along balance beam, balance board, measuring heart rate.

## Grounding and calming strategies

Grounding helps keep someone in the present. It works by focusing outward on the external world. You can think of it as distraction, centering, a safe place or looking outward.

### Strategies include:

Counting breaths in and out, watching clouds, counting backwards from 20, counting how many steps he can walk with a beanbag on his head, placing a cool cloth to their face, playing 54321 game.

Let child know they are safe and secure "I can see you and I'm going to stay near you to make sure you stay safe".

### Establish and maintain attunement by:

- Recognising the emotion
- Empathising
- Validating
- (letting them know the emotion is okay)
- Labelling

"I can see you're really angry because you've had to stop doing your favourite activity. I can see you have screwed up your face really tight, your face is red and you're breathing really fast. I'd be frustrated and annoyed too if I had to interrupt doing something I really enjoyed and was in the middle of doing".