

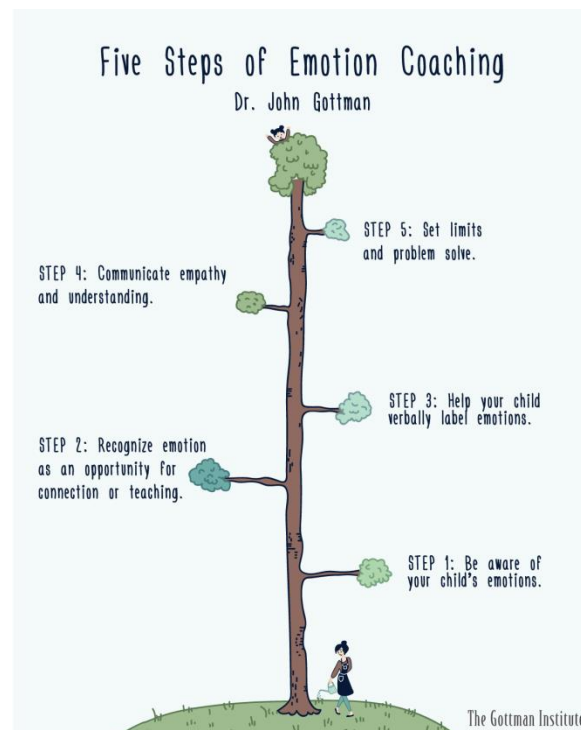
Emotion Coaching – A Guide for Parents

Dr. John Gottman observed how parents respond to their children's emotions. He found that parents respond to children's emotions one of four possible ways.

1. **Dismissing parents** see children's emotions as unimportant and attempt to eliminate them quickly, often through the use of distraction.
2. **Disapproving parents** see negative emotions as something to be squashed, usually through punishment.
3. **Laissez-faire parents** accept all emotions from child, but fail to help the child solve problems or put limits on appropriate behaviours.
4. **Emotion coaching parents** value negative emotions, are not impatient with a child's expression of them, and use emotional experience as an opportunity for bonding by offering guidance through labelling emotions and problem-solving the issue at hand.

Dr. Gottman's research shows children of parents who emotion coach are physically healthier, do better in school, and get along better with friends. Emotion coaching parents followed five basic steps to help their children with emotions. Sometimes this can take a great deal of time.

Dr. Gottman found that emotion coaching parents only followed all five steps 20-25% of the time, suggesting there is no need for guilt as no parent can complete this process all the time.



Practicing the five steps to emotion coaching

Step 1: Be aware of your child's emotions.

Parents who emotion coach are aware of their own feelings and sensitive to the emotions present in their children. They do not require their child to amp up their emotional expression for the feelings to be acknowledged.

Step 2: See emotions as an opportunity for connection and teaching.

Children's emotions are not an inconvenience or a challenge. They are an opportunity to connect with your child and coach them through a challenging feeling.

Step 3: Listen and validate the feelings.

Give your child your full attention while you listen to their emotional expression. Reflect back what you hear, thus telling your child you understand what they're seeing and experiencing.

Step 4: Label their emotions.

After you have fully listened, help your child develop an awareness of and vocabulary for their emotional expression.

Step 5: Help your child problem-solve with limits.

All emotions are acceptable but all behaviours are not. Help your child cope with his or her emotions by developing problem-solving skills. Limit the expression to appropriate behaviours. This involves helping your child set goals and generating solutions to reach those goals.

Sometimes the steps of emotion coaching happen quickly. Other times, these steps may take a great deal of time. Patience is key. If the problem is a big one, all five steps don't have to be completed in one interaction.

For example: Winnie-Sue has a meltdown in response to something like having to wait finish something:

Step 1: Be aware of your child's emotions.

Try and be a bit of a detective. Do you notice any signs that Winnie-Sue is becoming emotionally dysregulated e.g. talking a lot, going red, whining – just notice and be aware

Step 2: See emotions as an opportunity for connection and teaching.

Although Winnie-Sue's behaviour is challenging it will be an indication of feeling over-whelmed and stressed. See these times as not only challenge but a time to connect and problem solve.

Step 3: Listen and validate the feelings.

E.g. Really listen what she is saying (no matter how unreasonable it sounds) or have a guess at what's going on. For example, *'So, have I got this right? You really don't want to go to bed right now and you feel let down by me and dad? I feel like when.../ when I was little I hated it when...'*

Step 4: Label their emotions.

E.g. *'I can tell you're feeling really frustrated and angry.'*

Step 5: Help your child problem-solve with limits.

E.g. *'I know you feel really angry and let down but it is bedtime now. I'm going to give you a few minutes and see if you're ready for me to help you calm down with a story / snuggle / hot drink.'*

Over time try and work out what kind of situations stress Winnie-Sue. For example, does she find transitions (moving from one thing to another difficult? Problem solve with her about how these might be easier e.g. bedtimes might be better if; she is given a warning (30 minutes, 10 minutes), can do a calming activity beforehand, knows that you will come and see her after 10 minutes etc.

Emotion Coaching Phrases For Parents



1. It's okay to be upset -- it's good to let it out.



2. I hear you -- I'm here for you -- I'll stay with you.



3. It's okay to feel how you feel. It is not okay to _____."



4. How you feel right now won't last forever. It's okay to feel how you are feeling. It will pass and you will feel better again soon.



5. Let's take a breath, take a break, sit down, pause for a minute...