

*This month, parenting and family coach **Anisa Lewis** shares her insights on how to help children of all ages navigate big feelings with calm and connection. With over 25 years of experience working with families, Anisa combines warmth, wisdom, and practicality to support parents through the highs and lows of family life. In this article, she explores what emotional regulation looks like from early years right through to the teenage stage, and offers simple, real-world ways to help children build confidence, resilience, and emotional understanding.*

Helping Children Navigate Big Feelings

By Anisa Lewis, Positive Parenting (www.anisalewis.com)

If you have ever found yourself saying, “Just calm down!” to your child and then immediately realising that was not going to work, you’re not alone. Children feel emotions in big, messy, sometimes explosive ways, and learning how to help them navigate these feelings is one of the trickiest and most important parts of parenting.

Whether your child is three or sixteen, emotions are part of the everyday fabric of life. Frustration over lost Lego, friendship drama in the playground, exam stress, social pressure, or just a bad day, it all comes down to learning how to notice, name, and manage feelings.

The Early Years: Feelings Too Big for Words

For our youngest children, emotions are felt in the body before they can be explained in words. Anger might look like stamping, tears, or shouting. Sadness might mean clinging to you or refusing to join in. Their developing brains are still learning how to connect the logical part (that helps them think) with the emotional part (that feels).

When we meet these moments with calm rather than correction, we teach children that emotions are safe and manageable. Try getting down to their level, slowing your own breathing, and naming what you see: “You’re cross because your block tower fell over.” It sounds small, but this kind of connection helps wire their brains for emotional regulation later in life.

Your calm is the anchor they borrow until they can find their own.

The Middle Years: Friendships, Fairness, and Big Feels

As children grow, their world expands beyond the family. Friendships, schoolwork, and playground politics take centre stage. At this age, big feelings often revolve around fairness, belonging, and disappointment, all normal parts of growing up.

Rather than rushing in to fix things, try stepping back and guiding them to reflect. Ask questions such as, “What happened that made you feel that way?” or “What might you do differently next time?” These questions build emotional awareness and problem-solving skills.

Books and stories can also be a powerful bridge for this age group. Reading about characters who face challenges or make mistakes helps children realise that feelings do not make them bad or weak, they make them human.

The Teen Years: Feeling Everything All at Once

Teenagers feel emotions with the volume turned all the way up. Their brains are wired for independence, exploration, and social belonging which can make family life feel like a rollercoaster. One minute they are chatty, the next they have vanished into their room with headphones on and the door firmly shut.

It helps to remember that behind the sighs and eye rolls is a young person still learning to manage the storm inside. Sometimes the best support is quiet presence, a cup of tea left by the door, a lift to school, or a simple “I’m here when you want to talk.”

Avoid jumping straight into problem-solving. Instead, listen. Reflect back what you hear: “That sounds tough,” or “You sound really frustrated.” It shows respect for their emotions and keeps the communication door open.

The Thread That Ties It All Together

Across every stage of childhood, emotional connection is the thread that holds relationships steady. When children feel seen, heard, and understood, their nervous systems settle and they begin to develop their own emotional balance.

Our job as parents and carers is not to stop the waves of emotion, it is to teach our children how to ride them. That takes time, patience, and plenty of self-compassion (for us too).

So next time your child is having a moment, remember: they are not giving you a hard time, they are having a hard time. Step in with curiosity rather than control. Take a breath. Offer calm. It might not fix things instantly, but it plants the seed for lifelong emotional resilience.

Because big feelings are not something to fear, they are the gateway to empathy, understanding, and connection.