

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

“To be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right reason, and in the right way” *that is Emotional Intelligence*

Neurological data suggests a ‘window of opportunity’ for shaping our children’s emotional habits. Emotional lessons we learn as children in the home and at school shape emotional circuits in the brain – making us more adept – or inept – at the basics of *emotional intelligence*.

- Anger – blood flows to the hands, making it easier to grasp a weapon or strike at a foe; heart rate increases, and a rush of hormones such as adrenaline generates a pulse of energy strong enough for a vigorous action
- Fear – blood goes to the large skeletal muscles, such as in the legs, making it easier to flee – and making the face blanch as blood is shunted away from it (creating the feeling that blood ‘runs cold’). At the same time, the body freezes, if only for a moment, perhaps allowing time to gauge whether hiding might be a better reaction. Circuits in the brain’s emotional centers trigger a flood of hormones that put the body on general alert, making it edgy and ready for action, and attention fixates on the threat at hand, the better to evaluate what response to make.
- Happiness – increased activity in a brain center that inhibits negative feelings, and fosters an increase in available energy, and a quieting of those that generate worrisome thought.
- Love – tender feelings entail parasympathetic arousal – the physiological opposite of the “fight or flight” mobilization shared by fear or anger. The parasympathetic pattern, dubbed the ‘relaxation response’ – is a bodywide set of reactions that generates a general state of calm and contentment, facilitating cooperation.
- Surprise – the eyebrows are lifted – which allows for a larger visual sweep and also permits more light to strike the retina. This offers more information about the unexpected event, making it easier to figure out exactly what is going on and explore a best plan of action.
- Disgust – something is offensive in taste, smell, or metaphorically so. The facial expression disgust – the upper lip curled to the side as the nose wrinkles slightly – suggests a primordial attempt, as Darwin observed, to close the nostrils against a noxious odor or the spit out a poisonous food.
- Sadness – a drop in energy and enthusiasm for life’s activities, particularly diversions and pleasures, and, as it deepens and approaches depression, slows the body’s metabolism. This introspective withdrawal creates the opportunity to mourn a loss or frustrated hope, grasp its consequence for one’s life, and, as energy returns, plan new beginnings. This loss of energy may well have kept sad and vulnerable early humans close to home, where they were safe.

Increasing Your Child's Emotional Intelligence

- Parents are always modeling their Emotional Intelligence (positively or negatively) – It is our *Affect* that the child Mirrors. Practice good self care; refuel and replenish
- Assist the Child with Self-Awareness (help them learn about their 'triggers' and ways to manage stress better)
- Assist the child in noticing Signals in their body, getting in touch with physiology – teach them the tools of relaxation and Self-Soothing (practice)
- Teach the child, via play, about their Feelings, use Feelings Cards, Feelings Books, Feelings Games, tell stories about feelings, draw pictures about Feelings
- Teach the Child how to Short-Circuit the Hi-jack (post a Calm Down Plan – list 5 steps to calming down)
- Create Intimate Dialogue with your child. Each night at bedtime talk about the different issues, events and issues that happened. Listen for their feelings
- Assist your child in understanding their BIG Feelings. Create a 'Feelings Chair' where they can go when they are feeling BIG emotions that can be overwhelming. The parent can help them identify and label the feeling ("looks like you're feeling sad, hurt, angry") "Can you tell me what happened? I'm ready to listen". Big feelings need to be expressed/validated