

Strong Feelings: Emotion Coaching

Emotion coaching helps children understand and manage their feelings. Learning to talk about emotions is an important lifelong skill. It adds to “emotional intelligence,” which can lead to better relationships, fewer behavior problems, and more success in school. Emotion Coaching is easy with some practice. Remember: LEAPS.



LEAPS—Label, Empathize And Problem-Solve

1. Label: Notice and Name Feelings

Children don’t always know the words they need to talk about emotions. Research shows that when kids can name their feelings, they can handle them better. You can help children identify emotions they are feeling, instead of telling them how they *should* feel. Children feel reassured when they know their feelings are normal and they have the words to talk about them.



- “Sounds like you feel_____.” or “That must have felt_____.”
- “The frown on your face makes me wonder if you are feeling mad.”
- “You look really proud today.”
- “You sound disappointed that Dad’s not here to watch you play soccer.”

2. Empathize: Validate Feelings

Empathizing with your child’s feelings shows that you understand. If children don’t think you understand what they are experiencing, they may try to show you (loudly) just how upset they are. This can sometimes lead to negative behaviors. Children need to know you understand before they can move on to problem-solving.

- “I would feel_____if that happened to me.” Or “It’s normal to feel_____when_____.”
- “It’s hard to sleep when you are missing your mom.”
- “When I was young, I didn’t see my dad for a long time. I remember feeling really sad. It’s sad when you can’t see your dad.”
- “I’d be mad too, if I couldn’t visit with my mom.”

Emotion Coaching with LEAPS (continued)

3. Problem-Solve: Help Your Child Think of Ideas

If there's a problem that needs addressing, encourage your child to think of suggestions. This sends the message that your child is capable of solving problems, which builds confidence! When your child comes up with a solution, it is more likely to work for them—and you. If your child can't think of a good solution, you can suggest an option or two (one at a time) and let them choose. Emotion coaching doesn't mean all behaviors are acceptable. We still need to guide children toward positive actions.

- “What do you think would help you feel better right now?”
- “It's ok to feel _____. It's not ok to _____. Can you think of something to do or say next time you feel this way?”
- “I wonder if it would help to _____ or to _____.”
- “Do you want to draw a picture to send to your mom? Or I can help you write her a letter.”

Books can help us to talk with kids about feelings!

Here are some books to read and share. (These are available at most libraries.)

The Boy with Big, Big Feelings by Britney Winn Lee—*Big feelings matter!*

How Do You Feel? by Lizzy Rockwell—*All sorts of feelings. They all look different.*

Mad, Mad Bear by Kimberly Gee—*It's normal to feel mad sometimes.*

Jabari Jumps by Gaia Cornwall—*Doing scary things takes courage. Talking helps.*

B is for Breathe by Dr. Melissa Boyd—*ABC's of Coping with Feelings*

You Weren't with Me by Chandra Ghosh Ippen—*When a loved one is (or was) away.*

*If you have access to the Web and you'd like information, videos, and books on this topic, visit **[Strong Feelings](https://parenting.extension.wisc.edu/strong-feelings/)** at <https://parenting.extension.wisc.edu/strong-feelings/>. Feel free to share this with another parent or caregiver.*

