

## **Emotion Coaching**

Emotions...we all have them. Everything we do and everything we learn is shaped in some way by the way we feel. Feelings are a natural part of who we are. But how do children and young people learn about emotions? How do they learn to understand their sadness or joy? What is appropriate behaviour when these feelings are strong? What can a parent do when a child or young person explodes in anger or hides in fear? Parents and teachers spend lots of time teaching children and young people important things such as reading or tying shoes. Taking time to help children learn to understand their feelings is important too.

Research shows that children and young people who understand their feelings and learn about their emotions have these advantages:

- They form stronger friendships with other peers.
- They calm themselves down more quickly when they get upset.
- They do better in school.
- They become empowered to problem-solve.
- They become more resilient when things go wrong.

### **Becoming an Emotion Coach**

Emotion Coaching is a practical approach that helps children and young people understand their feelings 'in the moment'. Through Emotion Coaching they learn how emotions work and how to react to feelings in healthy ways. This can take time but can help to strengthen a relationship with a child and prepare them for the challenges life can bring.

### **The Four Steps of Emotion Coaching**

## Step 1: Recognise and empathise with the feelings

- ▶ This takes place before you say anything to the child or young person.
- ▶ Pay attention to emotions, from happiness to sadness to anger.
- ▶ Observe, listen, and watch for changes in facial expressions, body language, posture, and tone of voice.
- ▶ Show your child that you understand what he or she is feeling.

## Step 2: Label and validate the feelings.

- ▶ Identify and help to name the emotions your child is experiencing. For example, “You have gone all quiet. I wonder whether you are worried about something...”
- ▶ Telling him/her that you understand the situation and that the feelings are OK.
- ▶ If possible get in there sooner rather than later i.e. before levels have escalated to a crisis.

## Step 3: Set limits on behaviour (if needed)

- ▶ Carry this out when the child is calmer.
- ▶ Find somewhere else to go if appropriate e.g. let’s sit over there to discuss this.
- ▶ Keep the feelings and behaviour separate. For example, “I know you are feeling angry because you wanted to finish the game you were playing. Throwing the game was not okay because it has to be tidied up and it’s time to go out.”

## Step 4: Explore and agree solutions for the problem

- ▶ What did he/she want at the time things went wrong?
- ▶ Helping children think through possible solutions to this.
- ▶ If they are stuck, be ready to offer them some suggestions
- ▶ Talking ideas through with questions such as “will it work?”, “how will you feel?”, “how will it make others feel?”
- ▶ Help your child to feel positive about the outcome.
- ▶ When appropriate, reviewing alternative ways of handling a similar situation next time.