



Wandsworth Schools & Community
Psychology Service



Emotion Coaching

What is Emotion Coaching?

- A method to help children understand and manage their emotions.
- Supports the development of emotional intelligence.
- The concept of emotion coaching was developed by Dr John Gottman. His work emphasizes the importance of parents and caregivers in helping children understand and manage their emotions, effectively.

Benefits:

- It helps create nurturing relationships, develop capacities to promote emotional and behavioural self-regulation and support pro-social behaviours.
- It can harness wellbeing through improved communication, relationships, self-regulation, attainment, health, and resilience.

Emotion coaching involves several key steps to help children understand and manage their emotions effectively:

1. Become Aware of the Child's Emotions

Notice the child's emotional signals, such as facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice.

Be present and attentive to their emotional state.

2. Recognise the Emotion as an Opportunity for Connection

View emotional moments as chances to connect with the child, rather than as problems to be solved quickly.

Show that you understand and care about what the child is feeling.

3. Listen to the Child with Empathy

Give the child your full attention and reflect back what you hear to show understanding.

Let them express their feelings without criticism or interruption.

4. Label the Emotion

Encourage the child to put a name to their emotions (e.g. *I notice that... I was wondering if you are feeling...*).

Teach them various words to describe their feelings.

5. Set Limits While Supporting Problem Solving

All emotions are acceptable, but not all behaviours are. Help the child find constructive ways to cope with their emotions and the situation.

Encourage them to brainstorm solutions and make choices about how to handle their feelings.

The science behind emotion coaching

- **The importance of relationships** - Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory highlights the importance of human relationships in children's development, emphasizing that interactions with adults are co-constructed and vital for their wellbeing. These relationships involve both conscious and unconscious processes that influence a child's brain development.
- **Attachment theory** - For emotional and psychological wellbeing, children need secure attachments with significant adults and consistent, nurturing environments. Attachment is enhanced through attunement, which helps children develop a sense of security and internal working models guiding their thoughts and coping strategies. Positive relationships with adults, especially in schools, are crucial for children's happiness and functioning.
- **Interpersonal neurobiology** - Our understanding of the physiological, psychological, sociological, and neurobiological aspects of childhood has grown, highlighting the complex interplay between a child's environment and brain development. The interaction of genes and experiences shapes the brain, and quality relationships significantly influence this process.

How it works in action-case study

In maths lesson, Zoe frequently does not complete her work. On one occasion she throws her book across the room and runs from the classroom. You go and find her but she sits on the floor and refuses to come back and she looks frustrated.

How would you approach and initiate a conversation with Zoe?

*Firstly, notice Zoe's emotional signals e.g. looking frustrated. Recognize and empathize with the emotions Zoe might be experiencing. She may be **frustrated** that she could not complete the task; **embarrassed** that everyone seems to understand the task but her, **ashamed** for throwing her book and running out of the classroom; **worried** about possible consequences for her behaviours.*



Case study-Zoe continued

Listen to Zoe with empathy and label and validate feelings. –

*Approach Zoe with a calm voice, name and validate her feelings. Use “**I wonder statements**”*

“Hey Zoe, just want to check in how you are”...wait for a response...Even though you witnessed what happened, asking ‘What happened?’ might be helpful as it will indicate to Zoe that you are interested in understanding her perspective...wait for a response...

If there’s no response, you can use **‘I wonder...’** statements to see if her understanding of the situation matches yours. For instance, you might say:

“I can see you are ... (name the potential emotion being expressed). I wondered what happened. I wonder if you are frustrated because the maths question was too difficult...”

Wait for a response...validate with hmm or non-verbal cues such as nodding...communicate understanding if you understand what is happening. If not, ask Zoe to tell you more... *“Zoe, tell me why you felt that upset so I can understand”* –be genuine.

It is important to spend adequate time on this step to ensure that you fully understand why Zoe left the classroom

Case Study-Zoe continued

#SettingLimits

TIP 1 OF 5

THE PURPOSE OF
LIMITS IS TO TEACH,
NOT TO PUNISH.



crisisprevention.com/settinglimits

Limit setting & problem solving

- Remember that it is not a good idea to move to this step if you have not understood and validated Zoe's feelings.
- Once you have understood and validated the emotions, you can start limit setting and problem solving, you might say:

"Now, I understand how you feel. Let's think together. It's okay to feel frustrated, but it's not okay to throw a book when you feel that way. Pause.

Check how Zoe is responding when you give this feedback. Is she open to listening? If not, you may need to revisit the previous step. If it is okay to continue, you can begin with asking Zoe what she thinks the next step should be.

You might suggest:

"Let's go back to the class because I don't want you to miss out on learning. I will then speak with your teacher to see if they can go over what you did not understand in a different way that makes sense to you."

"We should also think about how you could express your frustration in a different way...and I will help you with that."

Additional scripts

- *I can see that you're really upset about losing the game. It's completely okay to feel that way. Losing can be hard, and it's normal to feel disappointed. Would you like to talk about what you're feeling?*
- *I noticed that you seem... . Can you tell me what's going on? Sometimes when we feel... , it helps to talk about it. What are you feeling right now?*
- *It's okay to feel angry about what happened with your friend. Anger is a natural feeling. How do you want to express what you are feeling? Would it help to draw or talk about it?*

References

- <https://www.gottman.com/blog/strengthen-childs-emotional-intelligence/>
- Gus, L., Rose, J., & Gilbert, L. (2015). Emotion coaching: A universal strategy for supporting and promoting sustainable emotional and behavioural well-being. *Educational & Child Psychology, 32*(1), 31-41.
- Gottman, J (1997). Raising an emotionally intelligent child
- Sunderland, Margot (2015). Conversations that matter: Talking with Children and Teenagers in Ways That Help

Other resources for schools and parents:

- You can find more information on emotion coaching on, Emotion Coaching UK. Please see: [Emotion Coaching - United Kingdom](#)
- You can also access free training for your staff through Wandsworth Virtual School's Attachment and Trauma Informed Schools Project. If interested, please get in touch with Dr Aysun La Fontaine on Aysun.lafontaine@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk

EMOTION COACHING



emotion coaching helps children learn feelings are normal, and they need to be experienced, not suppressed or avoided.