



# EAP Educates: Developing your child’s emotional intelligence

## What is emotional intelligence?

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize and regulate emotions in ourselves and in others.

For Parents	It means being aware of your child’s feelings, having empathy and providing comfort and guidance.
For Children	It means controlling impulses, delaying gratification, self-motivation, leading social lives correctly and coping with life’s ups and downs.

There are 4 domains for emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management.

## Emotionally intelligent children are able to

• Score higher academically.	• Have better familial and social relationships
• Have fewer behavioural problems	• Be less prone to violence.
• Become more resilient and adaptable	• Manage a parent’s divorce better.
• Resist risky behaviours like alcohol and drug use.	• Respond better to parent’s requests.
• Understand and accept themselves as unique and valuable people.	• Have a good self-worth, establish positive relationships, make better decisions and have better survival and coping skills.
• Use positive attitudes, behaviour and skills.	• Communicate well and are assertive.
• Cope positively with change.	

## 5 Steps to nurture emotional intelligence in your child

### 1. Acknowledge your child’s perspective and empathise

It is important to empathize with your child even if there is nothing you can do about his or her upsets. Being understood is a way to help us let go of troubling emotions. Remember that we store up emotions and let ourselves experience them when we find a safe place to let them go, so sometimes, your child’s response may appear to be out of proportion to the reason for the upset. Empathizing doesn’t mean you necessarily agree with your child, but his or her point of view has been acknowledged which is important.

### 2. Allow expression

Differentiating between emotions and “self” can be very difficult for children. If you don’t accept your child’s emotions, they may get the message that their feelings are in some way shameful or unacceptable.

Disapproving of the feelings doesn’t make them go away, it just encourages your child to repress the feelings which will come out eventually when the child is in a situation that makes them unable to control those pent



up emotions. It is important for your child to realize that a full range of feelings is understandable, but he or she needs to carefully consider the actions that come about as a result of those feelings.

### ***3. Listen to your child's feelings***

It is important that your child has a safe space to show you how he or she feels. As a parent, it is important that you are present and actually listening to your child as he expresses his feelings. Children have an amazing ability to express their feelings and let them go if the environment is conducive to doing so. Your job is to stay present, breathe through it and resist the urge to make those troublesome feelings go away.

### ***4. Teach problem solving***

Emotions are messages that give our children insight into how to handle the challenges that come their way in life. You need to teach your children, before they instinctively react to an emotion, to breathe through the emotion, feel the emotion and tolerate the emotion without reacting immediately. Once people feel their emotions are understood, the instinctive urge to react dissipates and opens the way forward to find a solution to the problem that caused the emotion in the first place. Sometimes children can manage this process on their own; sometimes they need help from a parent. Do not rush in and handle the problem for them though as this gives them the message that you don't think they can do it themselves. If they ask for your help, then problem solve together the best way forward.

### ***5. Play it out***

If you find a negative pattern emerging in your child's behaviour, you need to recognise that she may be experiencing feelings that she just doesn't know how to handle. If you can turn the situation into a game and get your child to laugh about it, you may be able to dispel the concerns your child has that are driving the negative behaviour. Children experience big feelings every day and often feel pushed around, angry, sad and even powerless when it comes to those feelings. Through play, you can help your child to work out what the emotion is that they are feeling and get it out there in a safe way. Sometimes, play is enough to help dissipate the emotion without trying to get a child to verbally express themselves. Laughter releases stress hormones just as well as tears and it is much more fun.

## **In Summary**

The family is crucial to your child acquiring emotional intelligence skills and information. If you do not understand and deal with your emotions appropriately, you cannot pass these skills onto your children.

### **Here are some tips to improve the emotional intelligence of your family:**

- Know yourself – what are your goals, dreams, likes and dislikes etc.
- Never ignore intense feelings. Accept and validate them.
- React appropriately to feelings you experience.
- Encourage caring about others; emphasize empathy, respect and good people skills.

**CONTACT THE EAP FOR MORE INFORMATION OR CONFIDENTIAL ASSISTANCE.**

Part sourced through Dr. Laura Markham's 5 steps to nurture emotional intelligence in your child