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# 9 Everyday Things To Do To Raise Emotionally Intelligent Kids

Experts show how parents can help their children understand their feelings and develop a high EQ

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How to get your kids on an emotional intelligence journey

It's natural for parents to be concerned about their children's academic progress and "IQ," but these days, more are seeing [the importance of developing emotional intelligence](#) or "EQ."

"Being emotionally intelligent helps kids manage their feelings in constructive ways, resolve conflict, and solve problems," said [Doreen Fleeman](#), a clinical psychologist with 30 years of experience in early childhood development. "The ability to manage one's own emotions, and cope with the emotions of others, along with an increased sensitivity to how others feel, leads to developing empathy, compassion, understanding and acceptance of differences between and among us."

Research also suggests that [emotional intelligence is linked](#) to greater success in school, stronger communication skills, better relationships, and increased confidence, [improved mental health](#), and other positive outcomes. The good news is parents can help by the foundation for this success early in their children's lives.

"A parent's role is integral to the development of children's emotional intelligence," Fleeman said. "Given that children develop within the context of relationships, parents' responsiveness, support and involvement is vital to helping children learn to effectively manage and cope with the vast array of emotions they experience on a daily basis."

To that end, HuffPost asked Fleeman and other experts to share some simple, everyday ways to improve our children's emotional intelligence in their lives. Read on for their suggestions.

## Practice Identifying Emotions

"To help build a child's emotional intelligence, parents can and should help their kids identify their emotions daily, and give them permission to have and experience those emotions," advised Fleeman.

The more kids practice identifying and discussing their emotions, the more comfortable they will be managing them. Parents can make this part of their family's everyday ritual.

"A simple tool is to ask the question, 'What emotion or emotion are you feeling today?'" said [David Reiss](#), a pediatric neuropsychologist and author of [The Whole-Brain Child](#). "We've been pre-conditioned to respond to 'How are you?' with an automatic 'fine' even when we're not fine. A more specific question allowing the child to talk about their emotional state builds self-awareness and confidence."

**"Model the skills that you want your child to learn. Kids are paying attention to what we're doing, and we're role models, whether we're being intentional about it or not."**

— [Peggy O'Leary](#), [The Big Book of Parenting Solutions](#), p. 203

## Set Aside Drawing Or Journaling Time

"Activities like journaling together can also help," said [Joan Paul Paulsen](#), creator of an 11-part social-emotional/learning curriculum called [Empowering Confident Kids](#). "At the end of every day, parents should sit down with their children and have them write down what happened in their day, how they felt and how they dealt with their emotions."

He suggested that parents periodically ask their kids to look back over their journal entries, note any behavioral trends and reflect on times when they might have reacted to a situation or conflict in a manner that they want to repeat later. Younger kids can do this with art by drawing pictures of how they're feeling and explaining them to their parents.

## Talk About Your Own Feelings

As with other developmental lessons, kids often learn more from what their parents do when it comes to emotions than how what their parents tell them to do.

"Model the skills that you want your child to learn," said [Kathy Casson](#), senior manager of parenting resources at the infant toddler development consulting firm [The Family](#). "Kids are paying attention to what we're doing, and we're role models, whether we're being intentional about it or not. For example, if we're having trouble playing a video game, you can say aloud, 'I'm so frustrated. It's going to get up and take a break and then start to think.'"



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If parents want their children to feel comfortable talking about their feelings, they should openly discuss their own emotions with their kids as well. On any given day, parents can describe how they're feeling, and that emotion and demonstrate how to express it in a healthy way or use problem-solving to cope with it. For parents who struggle with their feelings, this may take some extra work, but it's worth the effort.

"The more parents authentically and effectively deal with their own emotions and those of others, the more successful their children will be in developing healthier relationships, and exhibiting greater success at school, work, and in their personal relationships," Fleeman explained. "When parents are more aware of their own emotions, emotions and responses to the emotions of others, both children and parents will feel better, relate better, and live better."

## Normalize Negative Emotions

Although it's natural for parents to want to shelter their children from negative experiences or emotions, this actually does a disservice to their emotional development. Instead, parents should help their kids understand that all feelings are natural and normal, and it's how we deal with them that matters most.

"You can make emotional intelligence a priority in your children's development by doing what I call 'Don't Fear Your Kids,'" said clinical psychologist [John Mears](#). "That means don't overprotect your kids from life's stresses. Don't see interferences between kids and life — school, activities, teachers — instead of letting them learn how to handle the emotional stress this brings and the responsibility of it."

Additionally, parents shouldn't avoid talking about negative emotions, sweep them under the rug or let them bubble up, which can lead to unhealthy outcomes. Sometimes the fear of negative emotions is worse than the actual experience of the emotion. "When parents having a tough day, you don't have to go into detail if it's not age-appropriate, but you should still be honest about what you're feeling."

**"The crucial steps to fully developing emotional intelligence include noticing the emotion, labeling it, and asking what to do about it."**

— [Suzanne Goldberg](#), [The Big Book of Parenting Solutions](#), p. 204

"We want to teach our kids how to honor uncomfortable feelings such as anxiety and frustration in a healthy way, so they don't believe have to suppress these powerful feelings," said [Suzanne Goldberg](#), a family therapist and executive coach.

## Discuss Appropriate Ways To Express And Manage Emotions

"One crucial element of emotional intelligence is problem-solving," said [Terry Crews](#), author of [The New Orleans Guide to Emotional Intelligence](#). "Often, when we think about developing a child's EQ, we think only about empathy. It's child is not, we know that we have to do to notice their feelings and emotions. But we can't stop there. The crucial steps to fully developing emotional intelligence include noticing the emotion, labeling it, and asking what to do about it."

Once parents have created a positive feedback loop by helping their kids to recognize, label and discuss their feelings, they can move onto the next step of working them through how to deal with their emotions. The key here is to do a lot of listening and open-ended asking to guide them toward personal, constructively expressing and managing the intensity of their feelings.

"If they're angry, ask what are you going to do," [Guyton](#) suggested. "Is there something you can change? Many parents stop to ask what the child's problem themselves, but that signals to the child that they aren't capable of doing it themselves. Instead, by coaching, they might ask pointed questions, and they might not figure it out until they're alone at bed, but it helps them develop their sense of self-efficacy."

Parents can include kids in the healthy things they do to process intense emotions, like taking a walk or playing games in the backyard to blow off steam at the end of a stressful day.

## Own Up To Your Mistakes

As important lessons, so all inevitably make mistakes, even if it's not trying our best. When it comes to emotions, parents should own up to the moments when they unintentionally blow up to one of their kids or otherwise fall in-cop with their own healthy ways.

"We want to consistently practice admitting our mistakes and taking actions to correct behavior that may inadvertently hurt others feelings," [Goldberg](#) noted. "For example, when our spouse brings up a topic that triggers us in front of our kids, we may want to defuse the situation as quickly as possible and find good ways to cope when possible. Remember, you are always modeling relational skills in front of your kids, and you must focus on how rather than how to deal with conflict that fortify their personal integrity rather than destroying it."

Admitting when you messed up and taking action to correct it shows kids that emotional intelligence is a lifelong skill that everyone can continue to cultivate over time. This also encourages kids to own up when they make mistakes as well, though sometimes you have to wait until the heat of the moment has passed.

"Devise other ways to behave once everybody has had a chance to calm down," advised Fleeman. "Say, 'You were upset because you wanted to play with the truck, but taking is not OK. What could you do next time?' You can ask them to help. You can ask for a hug. You can find something else to play with."

On the flip side, parents should also offer positive reinforcement when their kids do display emotional intelligence by recognizing their good behavior and maybe even offering a reward in some instances.



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How to get your kid on an emotional intelligence journey

## Expose Them To New Experiences And People

"Parents should seek to involve their children in new activities and experiences whenever possible, including daily opportunities for new learning experiences," said [Paulsen](#).

"This can include something as simple as reading a book or watching documentary together or trying a new hobby," he added. "The idea is to expose the child to new experiences that will expand their horizons." He continued, "Participating in the community, such as at a local library or a senior living center, will also help to build empathy and compassion, which is a critical aspect of emotional intelligence."

As life experiences vary from place to place and activities, their kids broaden to understand other experiences and perspectives.

"Encourage your kids to be able to get themselves to someone else's shoes," advised psychologist [David Reiss](#). "Encourage conversations that allow each other to express feelings in a judgemental way."

While the COVID-19 pandemic may limit certain kinds of opportunities right now, parents can also make plans for future activities, such as digital options, and get creative at home. It's important to show kids that persistence makes difference in effort. Just through their own efforts and display of support.

"While empathy is work in your family," advised [Craig A. Koppelman](#), a therapist and author of [Blind and Connected: Brain-Based Solutions To Ease Your Child's Social and Emotional Struggles](#).

"What's the point of having emotional intelligence without putting it to use to help others?" he asked. "When parents demonstrate kindness to those in their world, that kindness becomes contagious to their children. Teach empathy."

## Have Fun With Emotions

Empowering also recommended making emotional learning experiences fun for kids throughout their development.

"Doing rhymes is a great idea for our preschool child," he said. "What a [Teddy](#) wrote in the course of our analysis what is occurring includes a study of your child's competencies and the many ways outside themselves that emotional and social intelligence."

**"Reading stories together and talking about the emotions the characters are experiencing not only normalizes emotion by acknowledging others have the same kinds of feelings as us, but also helps children better understand cause and effect, and helps build empathy."**

— [Peggy O'Leary](#), [The Big Book of Parenting Solutions](#), p. 204

"For middle and elementary school students, both [The Princess Diaries](#) by me have been main character develops her emotional intelligence," he added. "So young teens, when the moment, by figuring out what other there are feeling or talking about."

He noted that improvisation, role-play also gives kids the chance to practice emotional and social skills. He also suggested that in creative writing explores conflict, or their own writing when possible.

## Read Books About Feelings

There are many excellent children's books that specifically deal with feelings and emotional intelligence, but parents can use pretty much any story to teach these lessons as well.

"Reading stories together and talking about the emotions the characters are experiencing not only normalizes emotion by acknowledging others have the same kinds of feelings as us, but also helps children better understand cause and effect, and helps build empathy," [Fleeman](#) explained.

[Scott](#) best, who created an emotional-learning focused podcast called [The Emotion Neighborhood](#), recommended that parents ask kids to discuss the

"When reading a book, or listening to a podcast, asking questions like, 'Why do you think she is crying right now?' or 'Why do you think he felt that way?', are ways to show children that you're interested in and concerned with the emotions of other people," he said.

Parents should also consider sharing personal stories that illustrate lessons about emotional intelligence, said author [Suzanne Goldberg](#), whose children's book, [The Mountain and The Boat](#), focuses on cultivating a successful student.

"Share stories of how the little things matter," he suggested. "Talk or write out about EQ build, but about how they, separately, used examples of that kids can learn from. Whether it's how they dealt with a tough situation they faced, or how they helped someone else's problem by putting themselves in their shoes, or why they chose a certain color for a design to help improve a product, anything that shows kids how the little things matter. Stories that show reading about others are fundamental."

Our kids have had an exceptionally hard time since the start of the month. They've been separated from their entire social structure, their classrooms and all sense of normalcy. And parents have certainly struggled to put it back to sleep. So how can parents use this time as both — a chance to build their — a chance to show their children otherwise neglected life skills and their emotional intelligence? Enter [EQ 101](#), a podcast from [HuffPost Parents](#).



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